



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

The Calling of God

Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 9:9-13

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Are you living far from your birthplace? If so, I wonder how you came to be here in Whangaparaoa? For some it was the place of our upbringing, for others a personal preference, maybe work brought you here, for some it was a calling.

We have heard the account of the calling of Abram. He moved because God told him to go elsewhere.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

What was going on for Abram? We are told in Acts 7 that Abram was actually called when he was still back in Ur. Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrin said,

"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. ³ 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' ⁴ "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living."

When the call first came and they moved about halfway and stopped. The whole family went, Abram's father Terah and his descendents. It was only when Terah had died that Abram set out on the next leg of the journey.

It is not easy leaving your land. Ur was a developed city – excavations reveal it even had a piped sewerage system. But a life of faith was not going to flourish there among the moon worshippers and other pagans. God was calling Abram on to another land.

In those times, people thought that gods were local. If you moved to another place you had to worship the gods of that place. To leave his country would uproot him, not just from his familiar setting but from his worship too. He was going to learn that this God who called him was everywhere and was to be worshipped everywhere. This was not a mere pagan deity -- this was the Almighty God!

He was to leave his people – the familiar culture, the friends and even his extended family. But the promise was that as he went where God led him, he would be given a land and many descendants.

Did he regard it as a good covenant? I am sure life would have been more comfortable back in Ur. But he chose not to go back, when he could easily have done so. You see he had the call of God and that changes everything. He walked with God and nothing compares with that.

God's call on our lives is most often challenging. It requires change and we are not in control – both of those factors are unsettling.

How do you feel about obeying if the Lord asks something challenging of you? Would you upsticks if he made it clear? What if he asked you simply to take on a new responsibility in the church or the school – would you do it?

Blessing

Back to God's call of Abram. God then tells him some more:

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Isn't that wonderful? God promises to bless him – to care, protect and favour him. And to make him a blessing to others. You see the blessing is given to Abram out of grace but still to enable him to give it away to others. Do we see our blessings like that? Do you realise that God gives to us, and he expects us to show the family likeness to be like our father in heaven and pass good things, good attitudes on to other people. Blessed to be a blessing – it's a good slogan!

But God goes further and says, that through Abram all peoples on earth will be blessed. How is that?

God will use Abram and his descendants, this people who are learning about who the true God is, who are in covenant with Him, to show the world who God is. And that will allow people to relate to God.

The Canaanites gods were not characters you'd want to relate to. But when Abram reached that land he built an altar and worshiped God even among the Canaanite people. He was starting to declare the name and character of his God.

Ultimately, through Abram's descendants would come the Saviour of the world – so all nations are blessed.

Call of Matthew

It is likely that Matthew had seen Jesus around for some time. Jesus had been ministering around Capernaum which was his ministry base. He had healed sick, cast our demons and done miracles done right there in that town and in the surrounding region. News of these things would have been gossiped widely.

Capernaum was on the Via Mare – the Sea Road which ran from Syria in the North down to the Sea of Galilee and then across to the Mediterranean Sea coast heading south towards Egypt. He would levy a toll on goods being transported along the road as well as on local trade.

Although, this was a lucrative toll post, life for Matthew would not have been all that pleasant. He was seen as a traitor by his people. His job was to get more tax out of the people than the Romans demanded and the difference was his livelihood. He would have received a lot of hostility and cursing.

Then Jesus came by and saw him in the tax office. Jesus saw him. This is not an idle glance. He noticed him and considered. Then he simply commanded Matthew, "Follow me!"

What would that be like? What did it entail? Ridiculous! My job! My wealth! My responsibilities! If Simon and Andrew had changed their minds, they could have gone back to fishing. But if Matthew left his job, he would not be welcome back again and he was no manual labourer. It was a big decision to walk away from the tax booth.

Nonetheless, Matthew arose and followed him. Bear in mind that this gospel account is ascribed to Matthew's pen. The word he uses to describe his own action is "arose". The word is also used for rising from the dead – and maybe that is deliberate: he had a new life – the old tax collector life was dead and he was free!

That evening in his house, Matthew threw a dinner party for Jesus and his disciples with his friends. He introduced them to Jesus who has just changed his life. Already he was being an evangelist.

Sometimes, God's calling is not to change everything but to be faithful where we are.

Dr Steve Brown, a distinguished professor of Orlando's Reformed Theological Seminary wrote: ¹

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery. "Your Majesty," said Prior Richard, "do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king."

"I understand," said Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Prior Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you." When King Henry died, a statement was written: "The King learned to rule by being obedient." When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us.

The call of God may be to salvation or to a role. It may be disturbing but it will always be good for us ultimately since God is love. We may be frightened because of the uncertainty it raises. But that is really only a struggle of trust and faith.

Some of you will remember, the Revd Colin Urquhart – he wrote a number of books on faith and life in the Holy Spirit. I remember him telling of a time his community was buying a manor house in England. They had clear guidance to go ahead and buy it although they had no money. There were months still to raise the money. They prayed and trusted and prayed. The settlement date grew close and still they did not have the money. Colin was travelling overseas and daily calling home for news, but day after day the situation was unchanged. On the settlement day, an hour before the deadline, a stranger donated a million pounds and they were able to purchase the property. Colin was praying afterwards and asked God why he left is so late. The innocent answer was revealing, "You didn't need it before then, did you?"

Ouch! No, he didn't need it, but it was hard to trust even though God had told them he would provide.

I wonder how God is calling to you at present. Is it to trust him with your eternal soul – do you know him as your saviour?

Is it to a new venture, a new risk, a new role? Every so often one of you will tell me about how God has challenged you and it is good to see the growth and confidence that follows as steps are taken in trust.

Is it to maintain a steady course although you'd like to do something different?

Maybe we need to have a little silence in which ask the question, "What would you say to me, Lord? Are you calling me afresh?" We will take a real two minutes. Relax with the question and pay attention the thoughts in your mind. His voice often sounds like ours since he speaks to our spirit, which then passes it to our minds.

Remember, his love for you is far more profound than you imagine.

- What would you say to me, Lord?
- Are you calling me afresh?

¹ Quoted from <https://kraigpullam.com/2014/05/18/ruling-by-obedience/>

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