

Sermon – Relentless Journey

Pastor Ed Blonski | March 5, 2023

Sermon:

Re-Lent-Less Journey

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 12:7

In this message series called “Relentless” we’re going to look at several different Bible texts that Christians have been meditating on at this time of year for centuries. This is all part of our move from Ash Wednesday – the beginning of the six week season of Lent in the Church year – to Holy Week and the observance of Maundy Thursday and the historic founding of the Lord’s Supper, Good Friday – the day Jesus died on the cross to forgive all the sins of all people of all time, Holy Saturday and the meditations on how God saves all people, to – finally – Easter Sunday and the glorious celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

This is, in a way, a journey.

A journey from the end-of-winter ice and snow to the flowers and birdsong of Easter’s spring.

Journeys are a part of life, as many of you well know.

In a way, journeys are relentless, just as we saw temptation is relentless.

And, as we’ll see in the weeks ahead, there are relentless cries, thirst, help and spirit!

But today, it is a relentless journey that we embark on.

Most of you know about journeys.

My family certainly knows about journeys.

The Journey From California to Illinois

Almost thirteen years ago, my family and I embarked on a journey from California to Illinois.

We were kind of at a crossroads

I was a pastor in a church similar to St. Matthew. Nancy was a teacher in the school there and our boys were students.

But after four years there, we had reached a crossroads of sorts.

1. Eddie was graduating,

Eddie was confirmed and would be graduating 8th grade. We had to make decisions about what high school he would attend.

2. The Economy was hitting the church HARD

But you may remember, the economy had taking a huge hit. The church had provided us with a parsonage, but because of the hard downturn in California, they could no longer provide us with a home.

They also had to cut all the church workers salaries.

We had some hard decisions to make.

3. My dad was diagnosed with multiple myeloma and moving back to Chicago

We decided to step out in faith and leave California and head back “home”.

That summer of 2010 we prayed and prayed and finally decided to step out in faith and leave California and head back “home” to Illinois – where my mom and brother were already living and my dad had just moved to.

It was a hard journey.

It was a hard journey. We moved ourselves. Rented a large truck, towed my car behind. The boys and our beagle loaded up with Nancy in the mini-van and I drove the truck.

1. It was 2000 miles.

It was four days and 2000 miles from Los Angeles to Chicago. Over the southern Rocky Mountains, through New Mexico and Texas and up through Oklahoma and Missouri.

2. We didn't have any job prospects back in Illinois.

What made it harder, though, was that neither Nancy nor I had any job prospects here in Illinois.

I would become a candidate eligible for a call in the NID but there were no guarantees.

3. But we did have faith in God and I felt He was leading us back to Illinois.

But one thing we did have as we embarked on this journey was our faith in God.

I felt that God was leading me back to Illinois where I had grown up. I would find a church to serve – eventually – and we had each other and our extended family here in Illinois.

That was an epic, relentless journey.

That was 12 years ago – and I think God has incredibly blessed us as He led us here.

And that was 12 years ago.

I think you might agree with me that God had incredibly blessed us – you included – as He led me and my family here!

I know first hand that, as a follower of Jesus, God will bring you the place He wants you in.

The Journey is not always instantaneous, nor easy.

But it will always be good in the end.

There is another example of this we explore today – Abraham in the first book of the Bible.

Abraham was minding his own business when God called him.

Abraham was living a good life with his wife Sarah in what today is known as the area south of Baghdad, Iraq.

About the time that his brother Haran died, God called Abraham.

God gave him faith.

Named “Abram” at the time – which means “Great Father” – God gave him faith to trust in Him and prepare him for a relentless journey.

God calls him to a journey with no goal in sight.

But the journey didn’t have a goal in sight. This was part of the faith and trust part.

God would test Abraham’s faith so as to strengthen it.

His Journey was

1. Geographical (from Ur to Haran to Canaan)

This journey would be geographical. Abraham would follow his father Terah away from Ur to a new place that Terah would name after his deceased son Haran.

It was here that God called Abraham to continue the journey south and west to the land of Canaan.

Abraham would take Sarah and his brother Haran’s orphaned son Lot.

2. Physical (he was 75 years old, promised children but had a barren wife)

This journey was also physically challenging.

Abraham was 75 years old and part of the call of God would be not only a new land but also children.

You probably know how challenging this was going to be for Abraham – his age was against him. Sarah’s age and physical condition – she was known as “barren” – meant that they would have to take God completely on faith.

3. Emotional (he left his father and family, took his brother’s orphaned son with him)

This relentless journey would also be emotional.

Abraham would be leaving his father and the only life he had ever known.

He was taking his brother’s son with him.

They were setting out with no maps, no GPS, and no rest stops along the way.

4. Spiritual

- a) It took faith in God to commence, continue, and complete his journey to Canaan.

This journey was geographical, physical, and emotional. Like many of our journeys tend to be.

But above all that, Abraham's journey was spiritual.

It would take a relentless faith in God to commence, continue, and complete his journey to what would forever after be known as the "Promised Land."

Journeys Sound Exciting

When I hear the word "journey" I usually think of something exciting. Maybe you do, too.

And they usually are. At least, in part. An exotic destination, spent with family and friends.

But often times they can be arduous.

But often times, the journey itself can be arduous.

1. Road trip!

Who hasn't been excited at the prospects of a "Road trip!" Especially kids!

A. But 1 hour into a 10 hour road trip –

But after an hour into the 10 hour road trip you usually hear from the kids...

- I. "are we there yet?"
- II. "I've got to go to the bathroom!"

Hopefully the destination makes up for that kind of journey!

2. A "Starting Over" Journey

Then there are the "starting over" journeys like my family's thirteen years ago.

A. It doesn't always start – or end when we would like

And what you find is that kind of journey doesn't always start – or end – when we would like it to.

- I. Abraham was 75 years old when his started.

Think about Abraham. He was 75 years old when God called him to start his journey!

- II. Moses was 80 years old when his final journey started.

How about Moses? He was 80 years old!

It isn't outside the realm of possibility for God to call you on a journey about the time you think you're ready to retire!

- III. The Journey to a New Nation that begin in 1775

In another sense, our journey to a new become a new nations that began in 1775 last longer than expected.

- No one really thought it would mean war until 1783

Many thought the War of Independence – if it ever came – would certainly be on the short end.

It lasted nearly 8 years!

- And then take another 6 years to get to what we recognized today as the United States of America.

And it would be another 6 years after that until we became what we would recognize as the United States of America.

No, journey's usually don't start, don't last, and don't end when we think they should or when we want them to.

But when it comes to God's journeys for us, we can pretty much expect as much.

Yes, Journeys Can Be Exciting

1. But for a Follower of Jesus They are Something More

And while journeys can also be exciting, for a follower of Jesus, journeys can be something more.

When God Calls You on a Journey There Are Promises Attached

Because when God calls a follower of Jesus on a journey, there are several promises that are attached to that journey!

Jesus will always be with us.

I am with you always, to the end of the age. – Matthew 28:20

Even the painful and bad parts will turn out good.

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28

Every journey in this world is temporary.

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison – 2 Corinthians 4:17

The Ultimate Journey is Eternal Life

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. – Philippians 3:20-23

Your Relentless Journey as a Follower of Jesus

So, as a follower of Jesus on a relentless journey of any kind, be sure you know your part!

Know Your Part

A man became a Christian at an older age and loved to tell others about his Lord. One day at a meeting, he gave a beautiful witness to his Savior. One who had heard his words, though, was quite disturbed. “The man told us about God’s part,” he said, “but he forgot to tell us his part, the part before he was converted. Tell us more.”

The aged man stood up again. With confidence he responded, “Friends, I forgot to tell you about my part. I sure did my part all right. I was running away from the Lord as fast as I could for 30 years, and the Lord just took after me until he ran me down. I did the sinning. The Lord did the saving. And that was all the part I had.”

All We Bring to this Journey is Our Sin

All we bring to God’s relentless journey is our sin.

There is nothing in us that catches God’s attention. No special talent or gift or possession.

The relentless part of God’s journey for us is actually Him being relentless in tracking us down in love!

Another way to put this is that doesn't call the equipped to the journey, he equips the called!

1. Jesus Cleanses Us From Sin – Gospel

First, Jesus cleanses us from sin. Remember, sin is all we bring to the journey.

And we don't need sin on this journey, so Jesus takes it all away through His own relentless journey of His birth, life, death on the cross, resurrection from the grave and ascension in heaven.

Jesus Prepares Us For the Journey

And then Jesus prepares us for the journey.

This can mean He brings people into our lives, companions for the journey.

He gives us talents, gifts, and passions to also equip us for the journey.

Then Jesus Makes the Journey With Us

Finally, after doing all this, Jesus actually makes the journey with us!

He walks with us every step of the way.

My favorite illustration of this promise is "Footprints in the Sand."

One night I dreamed a dream. I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord.

When the last scene of my life shot before me I looked back at the footprints in the sand. There was only one set of footprints. I realized that this was at the lowest and saddest times of my life. This always bothered me and I questioned the Lord about my dilemma.

"Lord, You told me when I began to follow You, You would walk and talk with me all the way. But I'm aware that during the most troublesome times of my life there is only one set of footprints. I just don't understand why, when I need You most, You leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you, never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

I have a short addition to this message that I'll save for our Wednesday midweek service, so I'll conclude today with this.

Keep on the Journey

Keep on the journey. Wherever you are – just starting, in the “are we there yet?” Phase, or in the darkest part of the travels – stay on the journey.

Know this: you will end up in a good place! The journey is worth it! The destination makes it all worth it!

You Will End Up in a Good Place

1. With Jesus

Stay on this relentless journey because Jesus is with you, bringing you to an incredible place that He, Himself, is preparing for you!

2. In Heaven

I encourage you who are a follower of Jesus to keep on the journey – for you will end up in the Promised Land of heaven, with Jesus.

If you are not a follower of Jesus ... yet ... reach out to your family or friends who are or even to us here at St. Matthew to find out more about this relentless journey that God blesses us with!