

*Come, holy Spirit!*

Our readings this week have a common theme: people called to leave behind the comfortable and familiar and go into the unknown.

Abram’s call to do that is very dramatic. He heard the voice of God –

a God unknown to his kinfolk, who worshipped a variety of local gods.

God told him to pick up everything he had –

and he had a lot of family, flocks, herds, possessions –

take it all and leave the place where his family had been for generations

and go to a land he did not know.

And God would show him where to settle.

He did not get a reason, just a command, with a promise:

*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

It was a risky move for Abram to go into the unknown at the sound of a voice –

But Abram went, with his wife and his nephew and all their possessions.

They not only left their homeland and people behind;

they left settledness behind. As we read the Book of Genesis,

they journey on from one place to the next, having adventures,

often building altars to God’s faithfulness, and then on to the next place.

God unfolded his promises to Abram – but Abram needed to move to see it.

In the story we just heard from the Gospel, Jesus invites a tax-collector –

despised by his fellow Jews as a collaborator with Roman oppression

and extortion – to leave his collection booth and become a disciple.

It’s a risky move for Matthew to say “yes” – he will lose a lucrative income,

his professional identity, the structure of his life to become an itinerant

follower of a controversial figure. But Matthew goes.

This was a risky move on Jesus’ part – as we see in the very next sentence,

people were already questioning why this holy man was so willing to

hang out with the unholy, of which tax collectors were Exhibit A.

But Jesus is clear about his mission – to connect people with God’s fiercely

accepting love. “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners,” he says.

The righteous, “I am a good person” folks think they can make it on their own.  
The sinners know they need the grace of God.

Matthew was going to know a love and acceptance he could never have imagined  
– but he had to move to see what God was inviting him into next.

We have in our history as a church a fabulous example of moving when God says  
move – when the town of Port Tobacco began to decline as the river silted up  
and commerce moved to La Plata, a couple of the women of Christ Church  
convinced the all-male Vestry that the church would have to follow businesses  
and the Courthouse to La Plata if it was to have a future.

It was a risky move - I’m sure there were plenty of people who thought it was  
inconceivable, or couldn’t imagine life in a new place – their building was less  
than twenty years old for heaven’s sake – but the future was beckoning,  
and eventually they took this building apart, loaded it on ox carts...

how many cartloads were there? – and here we are, living into our future.

We had to move to see what God is inviting us into next.

It can take as much courage to leave unhappy circumstances as it does to leave  
good ones – often we’ve come to terms with our misfortunes and infirmities;  
We fear the next thing could be worse; we know how to live with this.

But God desires freedom and wholeness for us, not “getting by.”

That woman who reached out to touch Jesus’ cloak made a move.

She had lived with her incessant bleeding for twelve long years, been to doctors,  
learned to live with the isolation that condition caused her in that culture.

But that day her spirit said, “No more. This man can help me. If I touch him,  
I will make him ritually unclean, but there’s enough power in him,  
I bet if I just touch the hem of his cloak, I can be healed.”

It was a risky move to do that – but she received not only the physical healing she  
craved – she also received salvation. When Jesus said,

“Your faith has made you well,” that word for “well” also means “saved.”

This morning we shine a light on people who have left their homes and families  
to take a treacherous journey north to this land, with uncertain hopes and  
ever-present dangers. They come not to “take our jobs,” or “use our welfare.”  
They come because they endure unrelenting poverty with little hope of change;  
because their towns and villages have been overrun with violent narco-gangs;  
because they want to see their children survive and thrive.

No one makes that journey because they think it's easy;  
no one leaves their homeland unless it has become uninhabitable.  
They will continue to ache for home, as perhaps did Abram and Sarai.  
But they come because they must, and we welcome them because we must.  
We are part of how they receive God's blessing on the risk they've taken.

It would be nice if we could always stay put, enjoy the familiar comforts,  
and never go – but the life of God is always forward, never back.  
We don't find a lot of staying put in our scriptures.  
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Ruth, David –  
they all left the familiar to find God's blessings.  
Jesus and the Twelve, Paul, Timothy, Silas, John – always on the move.  
Some of those moves were prompted by God's promise, some by persecution,  
but they all yielded blessing eventually.

A few years ago in prayer, I sensed Jesus saying, "Follow me."  
I said, "Where are we going?" And he said, "Oh, you don't get to know the route.  
I'm not giving you an itinerary. I want you to follow me.  
Keep your focus on me. The road will become clear as we go."  
That's walking in faith, my friends – not getting a guarantee of what's going to  
happen, just drawing closer and closer to Jesus in relationship, following him.  
Can we follow God like Abram and Sarai, Matthew and this unnamed woman?  
Have you felt a nudge of moving out into something new – in your job, or into a  
new ministry, going deeper into a relationship, or even a new place?

What nudges do we feel as a church for where God is calling us out of comfort?  
What risks does God want Christ Church to take? What is the Spirit saying to us?  
I believe Jesus is standing here saying, "Follow me. I have work for you to do –  
and don't worry. I will show you how to do it. I will equip you. But you need to move."

Every day Jesus invites us to drop our sources of security and follow him.  
Every day he invites us into a relationship in which, first, we are known; second,  
we are formed; and third we become agents of transformation for others.  
Today Jesus says, "Come, follow me. Leave the familiar and follow me."  
Today we can open ourselves up – for the first time, or the hundredth –  
And say, "Yes, Lord. Here I come."  
Then get up and go.  
Amen.

**Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me."

And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

**Genesis 12:1-9**

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 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. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.