

*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. 2I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I 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." 4So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5Abram 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, 6Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7Then 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. 8From 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.*

Many years ago Sue and I and our friends Galen and Suzanne set off to hike to Chasm Lake.

Have there been moments in your life that have been imprinted - a day that you can remember more than a thousand others - a sight from years ago captured like a photograph in your mind's eye? That is the way our hike up to Chasm Lake was for me.

This was my first serious hike in the Colorado Rockies; we would travel a distance of nine miles up and back, and go from about 9500 feet above sea level to more than 12,000. I remember a log cabin, the ranger's office near the base of the trail. I remember the rocky path through the pine forest, up, up, always up. I remember the moving one direction and then another, back and forth as we inched higher and higher on the mountain.

I did not know if I could make it, I was a heavy smoker in those days. The air was thin, I was huffing and puffing. Amidst the trees, I wondered where the trail was leading, how far we had come, how long it would take.

After an hour and a half of forest climbing, everything suddenly changed. The trees were fewer, and then were no more. The trail became a path through an alpine meadow. I remember the flowers, the mountains all around us in the distance, the sky. I remember the weariness, the wondering where we were going for I had never been there before, and how long it would take.

As we climbed, and climbed, more and more the way became clear, as we climbed higher than the surrounding peaks. I looked back beyond the mountains to see the foothills and the prairie, now suddenly visible. Still we climbed.

I remember the moment when we arrived at Chasm Lake, shimmering, clear, blue, surrounded by walls of bare granite - worth all the effort. We had reached our goal: uncertainty, fear, weariness, forgotten.

As I remember that climb I always see it all from the top. As I remember that climb I see it backwards, my viewpoint is always from this side of the ending. I can see it from no other place. Even as I told you the story and you did not know where it would lead, I knew.

This morning as we look at Abraham, whom we know to be the father of all of Israel, what I would like to do is walk back beyond the beginning to his journey to see the future as it must have looked to him. For he could not see a vast people descending from him, and the Savior of the world born from his lineage. He could only see the next step, the next few feet of path -everything else was a great emptiness.

"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."

Seventy five years old - leave everything behind - believe the promise of a God you have never seen.

How do you know it is really God speaking? How do you know where the path will lead when you can see no more at first than the heavy forest?

I will make of you a great nation? By seventy-five most are surrounded by grandchildren, maybe even a great grandchild or two. Abraham and Sarah had neither daughter nor son.

So Abraham went as the Lord had told him. He took the first step, and then the second. He journeyed toward a future that existed only in the mind of God. Day by day he journeyed.

Paul tells us that he trusted the God who brings into existence things that do not exist.

If Abraham doesn't set out on that trail, this story never happens. If he is not ready to let the simple word of God be his path up that mountain, he will never climb above the trees to see the world to which God is leading him. His Son Isaac is never born, nor Israel, nor Jesus.

But Abraham went as the Lord had told him.

And through Abraham's faith, God was able to bring into existence a history and blessings and a people until finally God himself walked Abraham's path.

I am almost afraid to think about this.

What if I had stopped on my hike to the top of the mountain? Given up? My story of the journey would have been vastly different.

What if Abraham had not done as the Lord told him? Would we be talking about a different man altogether this day, a different history? Would we even be here?

What happens when God calls and we listen to fear instead? Or habit or weariness or security? Is a possibility lost, forever lost?

We read the bible from the top of the mountain, from the end of the journey. And knowing how the journey ended we think it had to end that way.

But Paul does not praise Abraham's faith because Abraham was a puppet on a string, but because he was a man who might have doubted but instead believed. Abraham heard God's word, God's promise, God's directing and he believed. He did the unthinkable, he left everything that was familiar and sure and secure and he took a chance on God.

Like Jesus, who pleaded that he would not have to drink the cup of suffering that was the cross. He trusted God's word. He walked toward a future that had never been, and God blessed the world in him.

I don't know that God is calling you to leave everything behind today. Then again, I don't know that God is not calling you to do that.

I do know God can make blessings and surprises beyond our imaginings come into existence when we receive his word in faith. In you and through you God wants to call into existence what has never been - love and caring and sharing and forgiving and serving. In faith they are all possible as you hear God's call to you and venture forth.

But if we stay with the safe and familiar then the dreams of God will never be born. Like a child aborted, never known, never missed.

I wonder how many Abraham's God has called who never set out, who never knew the blessings, who never brought the blessings to the world.

I hope every dream that God has for you will come true. Amen.

