Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Lent 2A
Peace, Seattle
March 20, 2011 epk
Genesis 12:1-4a

CROSSROADS

It's that place where choice determines destiny.
The point where the rays of the compass converge.
The intersection, where alternate paths toward the future are laid out in the starkest terms.
The CROSSROADS.

Robert Frost celebrated that place where paths diverged in his poem "The Road Not Taken," and he lingered in its shadow in another poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

According to legend, blues guitarist **Robert Johnson** is said to have taken his guitar to a crossroads at midnight where he made a deal with the devil that gave him mastery of the instrument, enabling him to create the seminal blues style that made him famous only after his death.[1]

Images from the 9.0 earthquake, the subsequent tsunami, and the humanitarian and nuclear crises that have unfolded in their wake, all point toward a major crossroads for Japan as it faces its greatest challenge since WW2. There's no doubt that the nation has already been changed by the calamity. The question is, will these events signal a new period of resurgence from a resilient people, or an irreversible decline?[2]

The ongoing headlines about nuclear meltdowns has sent tsunamis of a different sort coursingaround the globe, bringing to front and center the question of whether nuclear power is the carbon neutral energy alternative we really ought to be pursuing—or not.

Crossroads. We've been there before—nationally, communally, personally—and we'll be there again.

And this morning, that's exactly where we find Abram and Sarai in our First Testament text…in fact HARAN, the name given to the place where Abram's family settled prior to hearing God's call for the first time, MEANS "CROSSROAD."[3]

NOT ONLY ARE ABRAM AND SARAI AT A CROSSROADS…GOD IS ALSO AT A CROSSROADS.

God's earlier ventures with the human creature were not the unqualified successes we might have expected. After creation, the ancient stories of Genesis chapters 3-11 tell the tragic tale of human disobedience, mistrust, hubris, and violence.

By the 11th chapter, God's mistake-prone creature seems to have reached the end of the story. For there, [11:30] as we meet Abram and his wife Sarai for the very first time, and we read in black and white the text's pronouncement that she has no child, that her womb is in fact, incapable of bearing children. With this announcement everything seems destined to come to a halt. For no way exists, within human capacity, to move this story forward.

---

[1] See more on the legend at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Johnson_%28musician%29
2 See article by Norimitsu Onishi, *Reeling From Crises, Japan Approaches Familiar Crossroads* in *The New York Times*, 3/20/2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/world/asia/20future.html?_r=1
[3] Donald Olsen, *Feasting*, p 52

Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

But then, into this bleak landscape, God breathes a word of new beginning.
That word begins Chapter 12:

> The LORD said to Abram, GO FROM YOUR COUNTRY & KINDRED & FATHER'S HOUSE AND I WILL MAKE YOU A NATION, AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING. And Abram went.

Thomas Cahill, author of The Gifts of the Jews, calls these words **"two of the boldest words in all literature."**[4] ABRAM WENT. But Abram's actions are only bold because God gives him something worth responding to. God calls into existence at that crossroad a future which did not, which could not exist.

God says, in effect, "this story isn't over yet."
God initiates. God commands. God promises. God blesses. God speaks of possibilities and new life where there seems to be only impossibility and barrenness.

And Abram chooses. He believes God. And he goes.

Now, truth be told, we know there's more—much more—to the story than that one line.
When we read the ensuing chapters we discover the story is not as simple as it might appear here.

In the decades between this first call and the fulfillment of the promise, we discover that Abraham and Sarah's "going" was more complicated than what St. Paul lets on when he lifts Abraham up, centuries later, as the archetype of righteousness of faith. [Romans 4]

We know there were several times in the Genesis saga that Abraham and Sarah were at the brink of despair over the appearing and disappearing act that God seemed to put them through at regular intervals, as their gray hairs turned grayer and their dimming eyesight paralleled their waning hopes.

And we can imagine that there must have been other incidents as well, unrecorded…because many of us, too, have experienced God's absence at times more acutely than God's presence.

This is a very human story, and that's what continues to make it accessible to each new generation which finds itself at a crossroads with choices to make about the future.

So, what did Abram found? What Abram found, is that this God, whose voice was new, this God who was more interested in looking forward than reworking patterns of the past, this God offered a new place, a new name, a new destiny, a new future. AND, this God promised to travel with them all along the way.

Is there a crossroads at which you find yourself standing at today?

Is it a geographical crossroads? A spiritual or emotional crossroads?

Nicodemus discovered in his encounter with Jesus that God's call at the crossroads doesn't always lead to geographical relocation. At the end of this episode we wonder if he's grasped the idea that Jesus has called him to a new place. And yet, by the end of the gospel, as Nicodemus joins with

[4] Gifts of the Jews, p. 63

Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Joseph of Arimathea in caring for the crucified body of Jesus, we sense that the call which prompted him to seek Jesus out at that first night, has been answered.[5]

This Thursday is an important one in the history of our congregation. Does any one know why?
It marks the occasion of the first meeting of our congregation's Re/Vision Task Force.
The questions we will consider, the strategies we discuss, the priorities we define in our work together will all be shaped, I suspect—I hope—by the fact that we as a congregation, stand at a crossroads.

What direction is God calling us to pursue? Toward what future is God leading us? What gifts, principles, values, commitments, joys, and sacrifices will animate and propel us along the way?

How ever we may answer these and other questions over the course of the coming months, we can enter into the conversation with the firm conviction that the One who has called us will also equip us with every thing we need to complete the journey.

Yes, if we get nothing else from this story of Abram and Sarai, let us hold on to this: that the One who calls us to a hopeful future will also equip us with what we need to complete that journey.

PRAYER:
Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not always knowing where we go, but knowing deeply that your hand is leading us, your love is supporting us, and your Spirit is guiding us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[5] John 19:38-42