

**Pitching Our Tents**  
**By Rev Todd Farnsworth**

**Genesis 12: 1-9**



*The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. 2 “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.” 4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. 6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. 9 Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.*

During the summer we put together a list of things to bring with us when we go on vacation. Those who were here may recall the list (courtesy, cell phone, patience, hat, sunglasses, smiles, curiosity...and a ukelele!). Now that we’re back, and recovering from the Flood story with Noah’s ark, it is time to gather ourselves for CHURCHING! So I took the liberty of

gathering a few items that I thought we would need to *start* the year. These are staples of doing church here at BCC! Could I have a couple of volunteers to help me?

(Get two volunteers. Start piling one's hands with Bible, cross, candles, lectern, microphone, speaker, led projector, purple laptop, stained glass, etc. Get extra volunteers as needed.)

It's a LOT of stuff! A bit cumbersome but we make it work from our perch here on South State and Elm. I wanted to show you this, because as much as we loveeee all of this stuff for churching, the early faith community traveled a bit more lightly. They were a group on the GO! They lived nomadic lives, searching for land. Searching for water. Searching for safety. Because resources got used up, they moved around a bit. The sheep got hungry. The wells ran dry. They anticipated moving around a bit. And so they carried most of what they needed in the form of a *tent*. (Second person is given a small tent.)

Abram was one of those nomads, and in his story, he moves for a different reason than those I stated above. Today's text shows that Abram is on the move because he's following God's directive. *The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.* God tells Abram it's time to move on from the country he has been a part of, the community he has been a part of, and the security of his father's household. This last bit would have been particularly difficult to swallow because his "father's household" included Abram's inheritance. His money. His property. His possessions. Everything that he would someday pass on to his family. Abram is told by God to give up his legacy, his future. and head...somewhere. The path is unclear. It's kind of like he

was given a map that said, **YOU ARE HERE**...and that's it. Not very reassuring except that the directive comes from God and in that, Abram trusts that a promise awaits.

God says, 2 *"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."*

The promise, is a mission.

Abram is to be an ambassador for God, wherever Abram goes...and the farther he goes, the more people will be blessed by him! The greater his legacy will become. Abram is done with sitting still til the water runs out. He isn't going to be prompted to relocate because of a lack of something. He has been filled by and with someONE. YHWH.

Abram is now a man with a sort of a plan!

How many of you ever had a plan to move? Have you headed off for something...more...even though you didn't know exactly what it was? Have you calculated all of the costs, all of the benefits, all of the ramifications of the move? Have you noticed that you take less and less each time?

Mmhmm.

Abram's mission from God isn't about sitting in one place forever and waiting for people to come by, learn about God, and get blessed! Abram is, the early faith community is, supposed to go out of their cozy corner of the world and spread some God News!

Sounds familiar.

Of course, the easiest way to travel back in the ancient near east was to use a tent for shelter. God liked tenting. Not a fan of big buildings...you can

read about it in 1 Chronicles 17, where God says to the prophet Nathan, **4** *“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. 5 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day. I have moved from one tent site to another, from one dwelling place to another. 6 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd my people, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?””* Or bricks? Or stone? God too, seems to enjoy the freedom of being able to travel where needed when needed. God seems to enjoy the opportunity to be out with the people and explore new worlds with them. But here we are in this very beautiful stone church...and hearing Abram’s story on the second Sunday of a new church year, with a newly minted Interim Music Director in place and the community in flux, I feel like we’re looking at some change. We’re looking at some movement. We’re looking at a map that says, YOU ARE HERE...but where are we headed?

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Wherever he went, Abram pitched his tent and made an altar, and thanked God for bringing him to that place.

Wherever he went, Abram blessed those he found in those places and welcomed them to know who his God was.

Wherever he went, Abram pulled up stakes after a while, and went on to a new place.

I would like to suggest that we can go forth from this place, much as we did over the summer at the Concerts in Law Park. We traveled light with a 10 by 10 tent and a few craft supplies, and we met the community that gathered there, and blessed them with joy, and an opportunity to get to know some of the missions we support. We shared our faith despite the lack of all of this (point to church pile)! Perhaps now that we have brought those blessings, we can find other places to pitch our tent.

I read that Star of Bethlehem Church in Ossining had an *All Out Church Day* recently, where members went beyond the trappings of their beautiful sanctuary, to nursing homes, and food pantries and visiting those who were confined to their homes. They shared their blessing and then returned to their sanctuary to celebrate God on the move.

I wonder what it would be like if some of us skipped church on a Sunday morning and went to one of our young people's soccer or football games? Maybe attend a recital for one of the kids in the church? Or a karate match or go to a play that they are in? And when we found ourselves there (that's what the map says, YOU ARE HERE) we could pitch our tent and make ourselves known and bring a blessing to the people we encounter. We could let the children and their family know that we are bringing greetings

from the church. We could let them know we are praying for them. We could pray with them! And afterward, we could share in their joy or sorrow or whatever was happening, and take down our tent, and move along to the next place that God sent us. We could reconvene here and the next week tell one another about where we pitched our tent and shared God's love. For those of you who are more comfortable on Zoom, you can do the same thing from your home. Many events are virtual this year. Concerts, lectures, fundraisers. Let's find out what they are and share them with each other in the Friday blast so that we can become great by going out and being a blessing, being a witness, being faithful and tangible testimonies to a loving God on the Go! Let's start thinking about where we can pitch our tents so that our land might expand and the blessings we experience at BCC might be known beyond these walls.

The early faith community did not sit in one place forever and wait for people to come by and learn about their God. Abram and his community were filled with the promise of God's blessing, and that was enough to sustain them as they traveled from place to place. Had Abraham stayed put, his God/our God would not have been as well known. Let's be in the community and travel light. God is enough to bring the blessing to the world.

**YOU ARE HERE.** Let's go pitch a tent! Amen.