

## **Journey to the Heart — August 7, 2016**

### **Scripture readings**

- Genesis 15:1-6 — “Do not be afraid, Abram ... Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”
- Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 — ... faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen ... and he set out, not knowing where he was going.
- Luke 12:32-40 — “Do not be afraid ... make purses for yourselves ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also ... you also must be ready.”

### **Summary**

While it is true in the Bible all the stories of God’s blessings begin in fear, it is also true the places that scare us most are the opportunity for our deepest transformation. We go forth in faith on the journey to the heart, where we find the real treasure of compassion and the desire to understand and love one another, which is God’s blessing for us and for the world.

### **Sermon Notes**

All the stories in the Bible that include God’s blessing appear to begin in fear. It seems that the places that scare us to death are the places where God moves us so that real transformation can occur.

In Genesis, Abram has been told by God that he will be blessed, and he will be a blessing to the whole world. This scares him, but he sets out in faith toward a land he has never seen and in fact will never see. Those who follow him will finish his journey home. Such is our life here, together. We begin the work, the journey home to unity and peace, not knowing when it may come about.

This past week, St. Paul’s hosted National Night Out, an event that brought many people here to celebrate and to be nourished and to share fellowship with one another. This was a blessing to a community of people we may not know directly, strangers whom we invited and welcomed and set a place for. There are many whom we serve in this way, people we will never see, organizations we barely know about, who receive from our outreach ministries, our loose plate offering, our volunteers. Like Abram, we have been blessed and we in turn share our blessing with the world beyond our parish doors, moving us all toward a homeland of peace and acceptance, of love.

I found a YouTube video\* that speaks dramatically to what is going on in our world today. As a social experiment, two men dressed in the traditional clothing of their respective faiths — one an Hasidic Jew, all in black except for his white shirt and prayer shawl, the other a Muslim, dressed in a long gown and headdress — and walked through two neighborhoods, one Jewish, the other Muslim. The two men walked as brothers, greeting others in the words of their faith, which in both cases meant, “Peace be with you.” Seeing this was a blessing for all they encountered, a blessing shared among all the people, the beginning of something for the world. However, one guy spit on the Muslim and called him a terrorist; the Jewish man defended his

friend, saying, "The ultimate ignorance is the rejection of something you know nothing about and refuse to investigate." Like the man who spit, out of our fears we sometimes project onto others and judge what we do not know. Our ignorance keeps us in our small scared places, keeps us from living into God's blessings.

Hebrews reminds us that we all begin in a place of mystery and not knowing. But we are called to go forth in faith, to step beyond our fears just as Abram traveled to a land he did not know. Our Gospel, too, reminds us to let go of our fears and to allow God to bless us. Further, we need to be ready so that when God shows up we can receive the blessing that is offered. Luke tells us that the things we store up, what we treasure, reflects our true heart. Whether it is things we possess or attitudes and feelings, it is what we hold in our heart. And it is possible for us to store up things like compassion, the desire to understand others, and love for our brothers and sisters all over the world.

For some, the Gospel story reinforces the fear about an end time in which we could be consumed by evil forces. But as much as the story is about the end, it also calls us back to the beginning. In John's Gospel, we read: *He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.* Thus, we end up just as we begin, with the blessing of life for all people no matter what we look like, where we're from, or what language we speak. To receive that blessing, we have to manage our fears and build the capacity within ourselves to store up compassion and love and peace so that we can all go on that journey to the heart of life, the beginning of love, to God's blessing for the world.

### **Take-away**

In order for us to begin to receive the blessings of God, we will have to begin to manage our fears so that when the knock comes, as best we can, we are able to open the door and receive. Our hearts are there.

\*Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYpwzUrF80M>