

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Gen. 12:1-9 Ps. 146 Rom.4:13-25 Matt. 9:9-26

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church June 7, 2026

Whenever the lupine start blooming in our neck of the woods once again, I think of one of my favorite “call stories;” the story told by children’s book author and illustrator Barbara Cooney in her book “Miss Rumphius.” Although it’s not even a “real” story in the sense of being “factual,” it still resonates for me as being deeply “true,” as it tells the story of an elderly woman named Miss Rumphius, who, after a life-time of adventure in far-flung places all over the world, decides she feels a **call** to do one more thing... which is to make the world more beautiful... which she does, by settling on the coast of Maine, ordering five bushels of lupine seeds, and scattering them everywhere...

Seeds which, thanks to Miss Rumphius, as well as to the wind and the birds, take root and grow and fill the fields and headlands, the highways and by-ways of Maine with the beautiful blossoms we see everywhere we look in these early days of June...

It is a “call story” with a clarion call (“do something to make the world more beautiful”), heard by a resourceful and determined elderly woman... and yielding an extremely successful ending... which, as you might imagine, is why I like it so much... (clarion call, resourceful elderly woman, successful and beautiful ending...)

Which, truth be told, is very different from the quintessential call-story of my life, which I won't go into with too much detail, except to say that in 1987, when my children were ages 4, 6 and 7, I thought God was calling me to go with an organization called Witness for Peace to Nicaragua, where "thanks" to Oliver North and other members of our government, the Contra were waging war against Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas (the Sandinistas at the time being committed to addressing and overturning the injustices done over decades by the dictator Anastasio Somoza...)

And so, hearing that call, I went, with about 12 other clergy and lay people from Maine, all of us from faith communities, for three weeks, smack-dab into the middle of the Contra War for the purpose of "standing between" the people of Nicaragua and the Contra with our very bodies... as well as for the purpose of coming back to the US to tell others what we had seen and heard in our time there, in hopes that we might change our government's policies in that impoverished and war-torn country...

And while I'm sure I could come up with some benefits of the experience, by and large it's still quite a muddle of doubts for this upper middle class white woman who came to realize in time that the call she thought she heard from God to make a "sacrifice" for the sake of the people of Nicaragua, was not only not helpful to them, but also detrimental to her husband and children, who never quite understood how she, their mother and wife, could leave them and go to a war zone...

Far from being a clarion call from God, heard by a resourceful and determined woman, yielding an extremely successful ending... It was

rather a mess... A “call” that seemed so clear to me at the time, but which over time, raised serious questions for me about how it is we can know for sure that a call we think we hear is actually from God... and, if after discerning as best we can that it is, how we can answer the call in a way that’s not all tangled up with our own needs and egos... and, after we have responded to the call, how we can determine whether or not our response has been “successful” when often times it’s just not all that clear...

The confusion and complexity and uncertainty of it all making me so grateful for the call story we heard from Genesis 12 this morning... the story of God’s call to Abram to go from his home in Haran, leaving behind everything he knew to go to a land yet unknown.... and along with the call “to go,” two other things... a promise that the 75-year-old Abram and his barren wife Sarai would have a child, and the gift of a “blessing” that would be passed from Abram to his descendants, which through them would bless the whole world...

Now, it is true, according to the story, that there was a clarion call from God to Abram “to go”... and an immediate response from Abram, as the text tells us that “Abram went”... (both of which make a very good start for a “call story”...)

But truth be told, despite what Paul says in our text from Romans this morning suggesting that Abraham never wavered in his faith concerning the promises God made to him of offspring, land and blessing, if you read the Abram saga (which makes up the rest of the book of Genesis from chapter 12 all the way through chapter 50), you will see that Abram questioned God’s promises on numerous occasions, and that the story of Abram and his descendants is full of trickery,

deceit, jealousy, unfaithfulness, violence and lies... some of that trickery and deceit coming from Abraham himself...

If you read the entire saga, you will see that this call story and its promises look like they're going to go off the rails with some regularity, most seriously so when God calls Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah, and later, when Isaac's son Jacob steals the birthright blessing that was supposed to go to the elder son Esau, thereby threatening the integrity of the blessing, in Abraham's mind, that God intended...

All in all it's a very messy call story, filled with flawed people (including Abraham)... not at all a straight shot to the promised land where a morally upright and an ever-faithful Abraham, along with his descendants, lived happily ever after, sharing the blessing of God with everyone they encountered...

The mess of it all inviting us I think, to let go of our image of Abraham as a perfect, faith filled, flawless candidate for receiving what was probably the most important and foundational call from God chronicled in the Hebrew Scriptures, and to ask ourselves instead what it was about him, in the deeper telling of the story, that shone through the flaws, the tragedies and the failures of his response to God's promises and God's call... because clearly something did shine through...

Something that inspired the storytellers of the Hebrew Scriptures and later, the storytellers of our New Testament to lift Abraham up not only as the father of our faith, but as an example of faithful living for us all to emulate...

That "something," I think, being spoken of in William Stafford's poem "The Way It Is," which begins this way....

*There's a thread you follow. It goes
Among things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread...*

William Stafford goes on to say that the thread is hard for others to see, and that while you hold it you can't get lost... And he ends his poem with these lines...

*Tragedies happen; people get hurt
Or die, and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

So... I think Abraham never let go of the thread... the thread that God gave him at the time of his calling, and that connected the two of them from that time forward... the thread of relationship, further sealed in another encounter between Abraham and God out under a sky ablaze with stars and by a covenant in which God said those most beautiful words of belonging, "You will be my people, and I will be your God"...

I think that Abraham, while he might have doubted the promise of offspring and land at a few points in the story... and while he might have wondered now and then (given the disfunction in his family) if there would be a blessing left to share with the world after all was said and

done... and while he might have looked in the mirror some mornings and seen a scoundrel instead of the saint he wanted to see...

I think, despite all this, he never let go of the thread connecting him to God, no matter how thin and worn that thread may have felt...(The same thread of relationship and connection Paul assures the early Christians in Rome is theirs to have and to hold in our second lesson for this morning... not as a result of a certain ancestral lineage or an ability to follow the letter of the law... But just because...)

Just because if there is one identifying marker by which the God of the Hebrew Scriptures is known... and by extension, known incarnationally and viscerally through the person of Jesus (rooted as he was in the Hebrew Scriptures), it is the gift of relationship, offered to all of us, without condition... the thread that connects us to the God of creation, liberation, and saving grace...

And it is the reminder of this thread that (in my mind) is the most important gift we are given in the story of Abram's call and the events that follow after... The thread of connection God offers to each and every one of us no matter how weak our faith or flawed our lives may be...

The thread we can carry with us as we respond the best we can to the times and places into which God calls us on behalf of God's kingdom...

- Even if we're not sure we hear the call as clearly as we might like...
- Even if we're not sure we've left our own egos and needs at the door....
- Even if there's no assurance of success...

- Even if, when look into the mirror in the morning, we think we see more of a scoundrel than a saint...

The truth is, as our faith tells us, beginning with the story of Abraham, God does call us to work on behalf of God's purposes in the world... purposes that have to do with justice, inclusion, peace, care for the orphans, the widows, the sick and the imprisoned... As Jesus said in this morning's Gospel text to those who thought their highest calling was to follow the letter of the law and stay clear of sinners... "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

The truth is, none of this is easy work, and in the midst of the violence, the suffering, the injustices, the war and the lies that surround us in this moment both nationally and globally, as well as the many needs of those closer to home, we can feel overwhelmed by the calls we may hear to respond in a hundred different ways...

But the truth is, we can't respond to everything...to every call we think we hear... It would be arrogant and foolish to think otherwise... Which is why I'm so grateful to a colleague friend of mine who says that as followers of Jesus, we are called to the present moment and to a life that has a certain shape to it... a shape that is lived deep down in the ordinary, complex, messy circumstances of our everyday lives with our sleeves rolled up, our hearts and minds engaged, and our arms wide open... which of course, is this shape +....

This shape +... lived in the ordinary moments of our days and nights... Which means our call is to respond to the persons, the

circumstances and the needs that come to our door or to our attention in such a way that we just can't ignore them...

For some of us the call may be to tend to the needs of a neighbor...

For some of us, like Miss Rumphius, it may be to try to make the world more beautiful...

For some of us it may be to write our elected officials or to attend rallies and demonstrations....

For some of us the call may be to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience...

For some of us it may be to chop vegetables for Simmering Pot, or to deliver the soup after it's made...

Each of our calls will be different... But what the story of Abraham's call suggests to us this morning is that the important thing is the "going" when (after some time in prayer and in discernment with those we trust) we think we hear God say "go." No matter if the call is clarion, the way ahead is mapped out, the reflection in the mirror is saintly, or success is assured... No matter...

The important thing is that we go... holding the thread that Abraham held onto through thick and thin... the thread God has put into our hands most deeply and profoundly in the person of Jesus, connecting us always to the One who says, even when we can't sense the thread, or fear we have dropped it altogether... The One who says in the words of Jane Kenyon...

I am the one whose love overcomes you,

Already with you when you think

To call my name...

Hold onto this thread, dear ones, as you go out in response to God's call, whatever that call may sound like for you... Hold onto the thread, trusting that it is always there, even when you can't feel it or fear you have lost it... Because that is the promise God gave to Abraham...as it is the promise God gives to us...

I am the one whose love overcomes you,

Already with you when you think

To call my name...