



**Kevin Wright, Minister of Missions**  
**Genesis 12:1-9**  
**June 9, 2008**

Well for my parents, their relationship was saved not by going to counseling but by a G.P.S or a global positioning system. You see, every time my parents go to a new city, every time they travel and they get in the rental car, they never seem to have a map with them, and my dad likes to think that he knows where he's going. My mom likes to think that he doesn't know where he's going, and whoever has the extreme misfortune of riding in the back seat wishes that they would have taken a taxi instead. So about a year ago, my sister and I decided for our parents' anniversary we would get something that would hopefully insure that they had more anniversaries to come, and that was the G.P.S. Now if you've never seen one of these things before, they're basically a little black box with a screen, and you can type in the address, the location of where you want to go. And believe it or not, this device knows how to get there. In fact, it'll start telling you, turn right here, turn left there, make a U-turn. They're very, very helpful when you're trying to find places that are really, really hard to get to. Like the Youth Building, for example. Well, I think that G.P.S.s appeal to us as a people because we're a society that's always on the go. We are a people on the move. I mean, the Queen City is a place that rarely stops unless you're on 485 around Pineville at rush hour. We're a place that doesn't like to sit still, and a great deal of the time you can see this in the way we try to move up the corporate ladder. We try to move into the better neighborhood. We try to get into the more prestigious schools and while this movement is not necessarily dictated and directed by bad things, nor is this movement necessarily directed by the best thing. While ambition and portfolios and jobs might tell us to go, those are not necessarily the best things to tell us where to go. In fact, our story today is from the Old Testament, the story of Abraham. It is a scandalous story. It is a story that should shake us because it asks us this morning for a few moments to pause and consider this question. What if it wasn't your ambitions, your talents, your comfort, your drive for success that instigated your movements. What if it was the very voice of God? The story of Abraham in Genesis 12 marks the significant development in the story of God's great salvation. We meet Abraham, we don't know very much about him. We know who his father was but besides that, he's just an insignificant nomad. A wanderer. A tent dweller. Someone who's living near modern-day Iraq.

And all of a sudden we see in the story that the Lord appears to Abraham and says, "Abraham, I want you to go and leave your father's house, your country and your kin and I want you to take everything. Pack it all up and move over to the land that I am going to show you." Talk about a tough assignment. This is not a suggestion that the Lord is giving. This is a command. Go, take everything, leave everything that is familiar and go to a land that's going to be inhospitable. That's going to be strange. That's going to be foreign to you. A land that I will show to you. God calls Abraham to be a pilgrim. To soldier into a place that he does not know. And why does God ask him to do this? It is so that Abraham will be a blessing. Look and see here from the text what it says. The Lord says, "I will make you into a great nation and you will be a blessing to others. Such that whoever blesses you will be blessed and whoever curses you will be cursed. And nations and people that you can't even imagine right now, Abraham, they will be blessed through you, through your going. Abraham will be a blessing to others indeed, but it hinges upon his willingness to first

go. His obedience to God hinges upon his willingness to follow after the beckoning voice of the Holy One. To go at the Lord's command. For him and his kindred in this new land were to be a light for the nations. They were to be a people known for their willingness to respond to the call of God to go. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, understood a little bit of what it meant to go at God's command. Wesley was relentless in his ministry. In fact, during his lifespan over the 18th century, he crisscrossed many times over the British Isles proclaiming the good news of God. In fact, Wesley at one point had the audacity to remark, "The world is my parish, it is not that this location here is my parish. It is not that even the neighborhood next over, no! Whereever you go, whether it be the mountains or the seashore. Whether it be the beach, whether it be the bogs, that will be the place that I preach." And preach he did, so he spent the majority of his life enduring inclement weather. Facing ferocious and often hostile and violent crowds. And even traveling over a quarter million miles on horseback, preaching the good news of the gospel, imagine that! A quarter million miles on horseback. If I have to drive 6 hours in my Ford Taurus, I think I'd deserve a medal. Imagine on horseback for that many times! And yet Wesley did so because his heart was moved, and he was convinced that the voice of the Lord had come to him and told him to go to the places that the Lord would show him.

To say that the world is my parish is an outrageous, even arrogant claim. That is unless you are willing to back it up with your life, and Wesley did so. And he, like Abraham, soon learned that in order to be a blessing to others, you must first go to those others. This is why I think it is that God calls us to be a people who go. People to be on the move. You see, God understands that we're a people in motion. That we are a people who do go places. In fact, I believe that God has created us that way. God has created us to journey though this life to gather and go with God. But God also understands that the direction and the impotence behind our movement is not always a good thing. That sometimes people can be solely concerned with accumulating large quantities of wealth or sealing the big deal or making a name for themselves. And the problem with these things is that when they become the sole focus of our lives, they begin to block out the needs of other people. We have become incapable of even knowing what moves the heart of God. But when we are at our very worst, God is at his very best. And so he walks among us. He sends Jesus Christ into this rat race that we call human existence and Jesus begins to move among us. And as he does, he shows us how we are to move. He shows us the way that we are to go. God tells Jesus Christ to go and like Abraham, to be a pilgrim among a strange and foreign place. And as Jesus begins to move, he shows us the way that our actions should be. The direction of our lives. To those who are concerned and driven and moved by hatred, Jesus says, "No, tis far a better thing to be moved by love." To those who are driven by hate, Jesus says, "A far better driving force is forgiveness and mercy and compassion." And to those who are fired up by the accumulation of more and more stuff. Jesus says, "Let generosity be the driving force in your life." You see it's not that when become Christians, we become sedated. It's not that when we become Christians, we're only called to come here and sit here on Sundays and sit still and sing Kumbya and hold hands and hope that everything gets better. It is not that we as a people of God are any more or any less on the move than others, but rather that the movements of us are directed to a different destiny. A different direction. St. Augustine understood this when he wrote in his confessions. "But lo, here you are, God; you rescue us from our retched meanderings and establish us on your way. You console us and you bid us. Go, I will carry you! I will lead you and I will bring you home!" St. Augustine saw that the power of God was not displayed best when it brings people to Heaven to strum on

golden harps. But rather the power of God finds its true purpose when it redirects our lives here on earth away from self and toward God and goodness.

When I was approaching my graduation from college, I felt the call of the Lord to pursue training at seminary, and so I consulted with a few trusted people. I did my research and came to three different schools. And there was one school that was at the top of my list, and I decided that I would go out there and visit. I was really looking forward to this visit. I was looking forward to going to this place and checking it out because I had a huge expectation for this. In fact, Ben Robinson, our liturgist this morning, accompanied me on this trip. And when I got there, my very first step onto the premises told me that this was not the place that I should go. It was quite clear that God was not leading me to this place. This place that I had built up into my mind that I knew that I would be comfortable at. That I knew that I would be happy at. But lo and behold, I get to the place and it's raining, cold and the people are rude and it just didn't seem like a good deal. I won't tell you what school this was. So I went back to Indiana where it was cold and I was dejected and I began praying and I said, "God, where, where would you have me go?" And the Lord simply said, "Go." And so there was another school on the list and I went there and it was a little bit actually closer to where I'm from in Chicago. It was a good school, it had a good reputation and I knew that I would actually have friends going to that school. And I was thinking that this might be a good place, but once again the minute that I stepped foot onto the campus of this school, I knew that was not where God wanted me to go. It was too rural, the people were friendly but it didn't feel like the right place. Once again, I won't tell you where this school was. And so I went back to Indiana and sat in my college room and prayed again. "God where would you have me go, what would you have me do?" And God simply said, "Go." Now at this point, I was getting a little worried because there was only one more school on the list and it was a school farther away from than I was expecting. It was a school that had a reputation in the South for being a place of good academics and having a decent basketball team. But there were a few problems with this school. You see, the first one was that it was in the South. Now I have nothing against the South, but being born and raised in Chicago, there are parts of the South that are still a little bit confusing to me. I had never heard of this place you called Bojangles and I had no idea that when you ordered tea it only comes in one variety and that is sweet. In fact, the first time I ordered tea in a restaurant, it came to me and not knowing what exactly what this concoction you called sweet tea was, I actually dumped in three packets of sugar. I had to be rushed to a hospital because of a diabetic coma that I had slipped into.

And to make it worse, I couldn't even pronounce the name of the basketball coach of this school in the South. But I went there and I found myself on the steps of Duke Divinity School and the minute I stepped foot into the building, I heard the voice of God saying, "This is the place, this is the place that I'm showing you." It sounds crazy, doesn't it? Following a God who asks us to reconsider the things that would normally lead us to make our decisions that would normally tell us where to go. That would normally tell us how to go. But yet like Abraham we have been told to go to places that God will call us. We are called to recognize that as a pilgrim people, we have the joy of going forth and helping the people we encounter. Sink their movements to the rhythm of God's heart rather than the rattle of Wall Street or the safe siren call of suburbia. So the question that we are all faced with is, Where is God telling us to go, where is God calling Myers Park United Methodist Church to go? Because the good news of the Gospel is that God still calls people. That God still thinks it's worthwhile. That God still loves us and cares for us and has grace on us. To

use us in this world. To go to places that are in desperate need for the hands and feet of Christ. I cannot think of anything better, as a minister of missions of this church, than for one of you to come into my office or to send me an e-mail or to call me up on the phone and say, "Kevin, I've got to talk to you. Because the Lord has laid this need on my heart, the need in the community or this need somewhere in the world...I believe that God has laid it on my heart that...and laid it on this church to respond to this need and I try to get this need out of my mind. When I go to sleep or when I'm awake or when I'm at work or when I'm sitting driving in my car. I can't get it out of my head and so I think we need to do something about it."

Do you know how much joy that would bring me if one of you would do that? Or to go to any of the pastoral staff here and tell them that God has told you, has told our church, to go somewhere and serve and be the hands and feet of Christ. And to be a blessing to others. We would be so excited; that'd thrill us. For you see, God calls all of us to open up our hearts to his all-consuming love and to be so moved by that love that our hands and our feet and our hearts move not according to what will make us fantastically wealthy or famous, but rather what would make us faithful and obedient to the God who himself opened up his life to us. This going and moving can be a scary thing. I'm not going to try to paint a good color on this because sometimes it is scary. Imagine; put yourself in the shoes of Abraham.

All of a sudden God says, "Leave your very home, leave your relatives, leave the land that's familiar to you, leave your very identity and go to a place that I will show you." And maybe one night, Abraham went outside of his tent and looked up at the stars and said "God, I just don't know about this. I don't speak the language of the people that you're sending me to. I don't know their customs. I'm unfamiliar with the terrain." And like Abraham, maybe you look in your bulletins and you see that there's an opportunity to serve at South Tryon Community Church and you say, "God, I don't know about that, that's on a different side of town than I live. I don't know if I'd park my car in the parking lot over there. Will it be safe?" Or maybe you hear about an upcoming trip, one of our world outreach trips and you say, "God, I don't know about going there, I don't know about that because they might serve me food that I've never tasted before and there are diseases there. God, there's still yellow fever in parts of the world. I don't know about that." Or maybe there's something else that the Lord has laid on your heart, another ministry that you see in our church and while you're excited about it, there's hesitancy because you say, "God, I'm not sure about this. Are you sure you're not calling the person sitting in the pew next to me?" And maybe you try to scootch over to try to let the Lord's anointing fall on them. But the hope that we have today is that the God who called Abraham, who blessed Abraham, who went with Abraham, who protected Abraham is the same God that goes with us because the God who calls is the God who goes. And the God who tells us to move is the God who moves with us. And just as Abraham found himself in the steady embrace of God, as he was the blessing to others, so we have reason to trust and we have assurance that if we go, the Lord almighty, the God of Abraham will be with us. Poet and musician Derek Webb put it like this; he said, "Take to the world, this love, this hope, this faith. Take to the world this rare relentless grace and like the three in one, know you must become what you want to save. Because that's still the way that he takes to the world." This world is on the move but by the grace of God so will we.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen!