

**The Rev. Bob Honeychurch**  
**Proper 5 Year A**  
**June 8, 2008**

It's been a part of the human experience for as long as there has been a human experience. It is the need to move, the need to roam, the need to migrate. From the earliest humans who stepped forth from the mists of the great Rift Valley in Africa to eventually populate the entire globe; to those first people who came thousands of years ago to the Americas across a land bridge which once connected present-day Alaska to Asia; to the great explorers of Europe and Asia who sailed the seas; to the men and women in the 1840's and 50's who came to California in search of gold; to the great waves of migrations which brought people from distant shores right here to the United States... a migration of which many of you sitting here this morning have been a part; in every epoch of human history and in every generation of each of our own families, there have been the wanderers... those compelled by fear, or adventure, or desperation, or wanderlust, or the promise of new possibilities to strike out and find a new homeland.

And just as it has been a part of our human history, so too has it been a part of our faith history as well... dating back to the very beginning, to the foundation of the community of believers upon whose faith and witness we stand today, to the patriarchs and matriarchs of our tradition. And it all began today... in the reading from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis which we heard Bruce and Maggie read just a few minutes ago, when God spoke to a man named Abram, and said, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." And, of course, that man, Abram, and his wife, Sarai, would hear that voice and they would follow that voice, and their names would soon be changed to Abraham and to Sarah; and they would become the parents of Isaac; who, along with Rachel, would become the parents of Jacob, whose name would become Israel.

Today is the day for celebrating "Recognition Sunday", as we honor those who are marking time with the completion of one phase of their lives, be it kindergarten or graduate school, or even (as is the case with John Maloney) being the recipient of an honorary 8<sup>th</sup> grade diploma for the fabulous work he does with the kids in San Jose. It is that time of year when we celebrate graduations – the completion of some major academic accomplishment. And I can tell you for a fact that for some of our graduates this year it is a significant accomplishment that they are able to walk across that stage and receive their diplomas, a day which many of them – and many of their parents – thought... for good reason... might never come.

There is, however, as you know, another word for that same event which we call "graduation"... a name which connotes an entirely different meaning. And that other word is "commencement." If "graduation" is the culmination of one of life's chapters, "commencement" is the beginning of the next. And so, "graduation" and "commencement" are really opposite sides of the same coin. They are the yin and the yang, the key and the lock, the omega and the alpha, the end and the beginning.

And it is in those turning-point moments of life, that we feel both the joy and the apprehension of God's call in our lives. God said to Abram, "Go from your country to the land

that I will show you,” without any more instruction than that. And in the gospel today, Jesus said to Matthew, his potential disciple, “Follow me,” and Matthew got up from his tax collector’s table, and did as he was invited. And as God has done with those who have come before us, God offers us that same word of summons, and always without the first clue as to where that following will lead us. We are presented with no road map. We are provided with no G.P.S. system to give us turn-by-turn directions for the path which lies ahead. We’re not even given a pocket full of bread crumbs to leave a trail behind us so that we can find our way back. We are simply given the invitation to “go” or to “follow”,

However despite the uncertainty in the road which lies ahead, there is one certainty... and that is the certainty that we will not be alone on the journey. I am reminded of the wonderful words of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Trappist monk and writer, Thomas Merton, who penned these words: *My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end... But I believe that the desire to please You in fact pleases You. I hope that I have this desire in all that I am doing. I hope never to do anything apart from this desire. And I know that if I do this, You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. I will not fear, for You are ever with me.*

I think most of you know that the voice of God has come to me in the last few weeks just as it came to Abram and to Matthew before me. The invitation has been extended for me to “go from your country,” and “follow me,” and go “to the land that I will show you.” In my case, that new land is the wide open country of Nebraska, where I’m going to be taking a new position working with the national church. And while I grieve the loss of home and hearth, of a faith community here at St. James’ that I have grown to know and love; while I worry deeply about being separated from Sylvia for a time; and while I can barely consider moving 1500 miles away from our daughter... despite all that, I am absolutely giddy with delight at the prospects which lie before me. And so, as I did in the letter that most of you should have received this week, I’m here to tell you this morning that my final Sunday here at St. James’ will be just shy of two months away, on August 3.

One thing that I’ve learned in my life is that, while God might say “Go from your country,” or “Follow me,” God only says “Stay” when it’s meant to be temporary. Even in the first chapter of John’s gospel, when we hear those wonderful words on Christmas Eve every year that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” a more accurate translation of that text would be to say that “the Word became flesh and pitched its tent in our midst,” that even the experience of the incarnation – of “God with us” – was meant to be a fleeting, temporal experience.

And so, in a real and visceral way, I am experiencing what I think all of us experience every day of our lives... that our walk with God is a walk which doesn’t conclude with us getting to go back home at the end of the day... that our truest home is in the journey itself. There’s an old saying that goes: *There’s no use walking anywhere to preach, unless your walking is your preaching.* I think that is so true. And it’s just as true that there’s no use walking anywhere with God, unless your walking takes you to some place new.

That's the hope and the promise of the gospel... that at the end of the day we will be at a new and different place on the journey than where we began; that in Christ, all things – including us – are being made new. So go for a walk today... a walk with God... with the assurance that where you end your day's journey will be different than where you began it. The promise of God to Abram... the promise of God to Matthew... is the promise of God to you: "Go from your country." "Follow me." "And I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing."

Amen.