

The desert waits,
ready for those who come,
who come obedient to the Spirit's leading;
or who are driven,
because they will not come any other way.

The desert always waits,
ready to let us know who we are -
the place of self-discovery.

And whilst we fear, and rightly,
the loneliness and the emptiness and the harshness,
we forget the angels
whom we cannot see for our blindness,
but who come when God decides
that we need their help;
when we are ready
for what they can give us.

The desert waits, Lent ,of course, begins with images of the desert not just for Jesus but for Abram as well. This morning's Old Testament reading is our introduction to the man Abram who we will be following across the desert this Lenten season.

Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

Genesis chapter 12 which we heard part of this morning is our introduction to Abram. We probably know him better by the the name Abraham which he will adopt later along his journey. This first part of his story is most likely the best known bit. How Abram had such extraordinary trust, such faith in God's promise, that he left his home and travelled to a land he had never been to - all at God's request. But did you realise that this first verse of Chapter 12 is also Abram's first encounter with this God? Now that is trust indeed some would say or foolhardy faith in the unknown!

Abram had in fact already left on this journey. If you read back into Chapter 11, a kind of genealogy. We see that Abram's father Terah had already set out with his family from Ur (modern Iraq) to Canaan but had inexplicably stopped about half way, settling in Haran. So Haran is where we first encounter Abram and where he first encounters God. I find this small incident, right here at the beginning reassuring. It helps me to understand that God's call can take place in the middle of our oh, so human plans. God's intervention in Abram's plans turn it from a journey which his father started but failed to finish to one which is driven by God. Canaan becomes a destination filled with significance instead of just another place to move onto.

This is really helpful when we are looking at not just our own Lenten journeys but our whole life's journey. Those who get clear *bolt from the blue* calls to a particular life's work for God are few and far between. Abram's story helps us to understand that for most of us, for you and me, God's call is seen and understood as part of the mixture, or even mess, of our own plans and God's plans for us. It takes thinking and praying to begin to see the light and the way ahead. Some of us put stones into the water pool, last week, to mark the beginning of our Lenten journey; to symbolise where we felt we are with God right now. The good news that Abram's story brings us is that we may already, like his call at Haran, we may already be on the way to a new place, a new relationship with God. Whatever brought us to this point is part of *our story* as Abram journeying to Haran with his father was part of his wider story with God. We don't start from nowhere, we don't set out without the things which have already happened making us who we are today.

As we follow Abram and Sarai, his wife, there will be a clear direction of travel to land promise by God, at some points. Their extraordinary faith will shine through and we may well step back in awe of such willingness to follow God into the unknown. But like the little side trip to Egypt in this morning's reading there will also be misdirection, times when we miss the signs, times when faith doesn't seem to be enough - human times. This is why for me Abram is such a good Lenten guide. His story, the foundation story of our faith, is both powerful in faith but so often human in execution.

As we journey with Abram we will see much of both the deep faith in God which led him to follow God the length and breadth of the land promised to him which is the journey described in Chapter 12. He stopped at places along the way to mark the territory, to mark the journey, as blessed by God. But then there is a loss of faith, a failure by Abram to fully trust in God, in the new land of promise. There is a very human change of plan and a rather unedifying interlude in Egypt which shows Abram not just to be all too human but to sometimes be not very nice or caring for his wife Sarai. But things get back on track and we will as we journey on see more of this tension between human plans or failings and the steady faith in God which keeps us on the right track.

So where are you this Lent:

Do you feel that you have already set out on a journey? Did you set out on purpose, with a sense of faith in God? Or have life's circumstances set you on a journey not of your own choosing? Maybe you feel a bit lost or like you may have taken a wrong turn? How do you feeling about the traveling, excited or apprehensive? Are you someone who prefers the journey much more once you have safely arrived at your destination?

Wherever you are there is something in Abram and Sarai's story for each of us this Lent.