

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh  
March 8, 2020— Lent 2A  
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater

**Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 ; John 3:1-17**

**“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's  
house to the land that I will show you.” †**

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We are reminded on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, that we are a pilgrim people. And the Scriptures remind us that we all make mistakes. During Lent, we reflect on this and how we are called to change and be more willing to follow God's will. I can certainly identify with the fact that I fall short of the glory of God, that I struggle to follow God's will, that I 'miss the mark' with regard to God's plan. That is, after all, what the Greek word for sin (*hamartano*) means, it comes from an archery term, 'to miss the target... to miss the mark.' We all misunderstand God's ways, we 'miss the mark.' And we certainly have not yet arrived at 'the destination,' if you will. We are pilgrims on a journey... Remember at Christmastide, when I mentioned that line at the beginning of John's Gospel— 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'? Recall the word in Greek for to 'live among' or 'to dwell' literally means '*to pitch a tent.*' The clear message is that we are nomads. We are a people on a journey, and our God has come and pitched a tent, to be our companion on that journey.

In today's story from that same Gospel, we are given the example of Nichodemus— a very learned and holy man, a leader in the religious community—who 'doesn't get it,' who doesn't understand Jesus' words. No one can enter or be part of the Kingdom of God unless they are born from above... unless they are re-born in water and spirit... unless they are willing to change. We are reassured, "God sent the Son into the world ... in order that the world might be saved through him." Jesus is our guide; we are led by the Son toward this new spiritual birth and toward change and entrance into the Kingdom.

Indeed, we are people on a pilgrimage, in search of the Kingdom of God. We strive to follow God's ways. The Church is not the ultimate destination. Being a member of the Church does not mean we have made it! Because even as members of the Church, we get obstacles placed in our way (illnesses like corona virus or cancer, financial hardships, death of loved ones). Christianity is not the destination, it is one

way of dealing with the questions of life, the means by which we gain sustenance for the journey. Through each other and God's sacraments, we are nourished along the way.

I believe our first reading from Genesis reinforces this. Abram is a powerful and respected leader, a success, and he has plenty of land and flocks. Then, God comes along and tells Abram: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Faithfully, he does as God says. That's the way it happens, just when we are settled... just when we think we've got the answers and understand... just when we find ourselves at peace and comfortable... God comes along and says to us what he said to Abram: "Go from your country and your kindred... to the land that I will show you." Go forth from your home, from the place you feel most comfortable. Just when we think we get it, God asks us to change, to try something new. And that's hard. No question about it... it can be unnerving, especially for someone like me, who doesn't like change. And yet God continually asks us to grow, to change, to move forward to a different place.

We know and often regret our past, and we often lament and struggle over the present, but because we are a pilgrim people, we are directed to move forward toward a greater goal. So how do we keep from becoming discouraged? I often find comfort in the words of the Psalmist- "I lift my eyes to the hills... from whence my help is to come... it comes from the Lord" (Psalm 121). Also remember that we journey together. We nourish one another, we are strengthened through our worship together and by sharing the Sacraments. We have never been asked to make this pilgrimage alone; we have each other and the One who 'pitched a tent among us' as our guide. Still, we are asked to move on, to a different place. And during our journey, we grow in faith, knowledge and understanding... we mature and are changed, born again!

May this season of Lent remind us that we are a people on pilgrimage, that we haven't yet made it to the 'place' God has planned for us. Just as for Abram and Sarah, following God's will is a life-long journey and will be hard at times... and none of us are alone.

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