

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.(Genesis 12:1-4)

When I became fifty years old, a while back now, dear Margaret Stanschus, of blessed memory in our congregation, told me that she loved turning fifty. In fact, she said, life became better when she turned fifty. Life entered its best stage for her when she reached the half-century mark, if I am remembering the conversation right.

At any rate, so it was with Abram: the best was still ahead of him when he became seventy-five. When he reached the three-quarter century mark, well, he was just hitting his stride. The big event in his elderly life was that the Lord spoke to him, and he listened and obeyed. And in the obeying, Abram became a great man and ultimately a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

And for you, dear ones of this congregation, the best is still ahead of you, whether you are elderly, say, ninety, or some young whippersnapper, say, forty. The best is ahead of you because this day, the Lord enters the room and speaks to you. Do not imagine that you are too old for an adventure in the name of the Lord. Think no such discouraging thought. Consider the story of Abram, and be encouraged to think that no matter what your age, the Lord is ready to walk with you into an adventure of faith. There is some great cause to which you can throw your weight. There might be a great cause here at Immanuel for you to work at. Or maybe your great cause is more personal, like the rebuilding of your good name or of the ties of mutual love that have slipped away over the years. Do not think that the increase of your years brings a decrease in our Lord's love for you nor his desire

to call to you, "Brother, Sister, come, walk with me for a while and let's see what we can do."

So, let's linger with Abram for a while. The story of our salvation begins, of all places, in northwest Iraq, in an ancient caravan town called Haran. There Abram and his wife Sarai lived in the house of Abram's father, Terah.

Our appointed reading for today tells the story of the Lord's command to Abram that he should leave his father's house and go to a land the Lord would show him. And Abram obeys. It is a short reading, and strangely, the lectionary would make it even shorter. The assigned reading is Genesis 12:1-4*a*, which means that the reading is supposed to end with the first clause of the fourth verse. But sometimes I cannot agree to that – to just a fragment of the verse. In my pigheaded way, I sometimes ignore those "a" designations and go ahead and complete the verse.

And this time, I am especially glad that I did complete the verse, for the remainder of the verse contains this little detail now before us: "Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." Seventy-five years old! I know a man who will be seventy years old next month. He can hardly believe it. He can hardly believe that he has reached seventy years old. Where did all the years go? Did not the time fly by? He still feels youngish, but here he is approaching seventy.

Well, Abram was even older. He was seventy-five years old when the Lord came and spoke to him. Seventy-five years old is a good old age, and herein is a little sermon for us, I do believe. For you see, Abram had quite a life

behind him before ever the Lord came along and spoke to him in a way that changed his life.

Long ago, in the Garden of Eden, the Lord had spoken with Adam in the cool of the day. Likewise, the Lord had spoken to Cain, to warn the man against the sin of murder. And the Lord had spoken with Noah, instructing him to build the ark. But from that point on, I cannot recall the Lord speaking with any one. In fact, the point of the story of Babel seems to be that one of the consequences of human sin is that it becomes hard for us humans to talk amongst ourselves. The unity of language becomes disrupted in the story of Babel. From that point, the Bible traces the descendents of Noah, all the way down to Terah and Abram, but does not speak of the Lord addressing any of them.

But now, as if out of the blue, the Lord comes into the life of this citizen of the Euphrates valley and speaks to him in a way that changes his life. Why does Abram obey the Lord? Why does he hearken to the voice of the Lord? We do not know. Perhaps it is because the Lord is always speaking to the human heart, and when the voice of this Lord becomes audible, a good man will listen and heed. Abram did. He left his father's house and all his settled ways and headed off to a land he did not know. He went knowing only that the Lord had promised to go with him, and that was good enough for Abram. That is why we call Abram the "father of faith." That is why both Israel and the Church have long admired this man. When the good Lord spoke to Abram, he listened and obeyed, even if the obeying was mysterious and went beyond his understanding.

But what fascinates me this go-round with the story is simply that little detail about Abram being seventy-five years old: Abram was seventy-five years old when the Lord suddenly spoke to him in a way that changed his life.

What had Abram been doing before that? Well, naturally enough, he had been building his life. He had been living, same as you and me. He was boy running in the field, skipping stones in the river. He was a teenager, learning about

flocks and herds, distracted by surging hormones as many a teenager is. He was a young man, very much taken with this girl Sarai. He was an obedient son to his father Terah. In the course of time, Terah grew very old, and Abram grew old too. Seventy five years old. Already the Bible says of Sarai that she is "barren." By age seventy-five, that can be sorted out. In the ordinary course of things, Abram and Sarai will have no children. They are both getting on in years.

All together, what happened in those years before the Lord suddenly came along and commanded Abram to go... what happened was LIFE. The man lived, and so did his wife, same as you and me. But when the Lord suddenly spoke to him, Abram permitted the speaking to transform his life and off he went. That is why Abram is praised for his faith.

Notice that the Bible is silent about why the Lord chose Abram. There is no praise of Abram for his virtue -- no praise of him for his strength, nor his wisdom. It is fair, I believe, to think that Abram was a human being like you and me -- a mixture of good and bad, of success and failure, a man who has known happy times and bad times. The one thing in all the world that distinguishes Abram is simply that the Lord came along, spoke to him, and Abram listened. And the listening made all the difference in the world.

Some of you brothers and sisters before me have reached the good old age of seventy-five. Ere long others of us will join you, if the Lord tarries and if we are granted fullness of years. We have been living our lives, each of us. We have had our mixture of good and bad, success and failure, good times and bad times. And now, life is suddenly going to get better, for the Lord has entered the house and desires a word with you.

In broad outline, I can tell you some things about this Word of the Lord meant for you. In detail, you will have to search your own heart and offer up your own estimate of an adventure you can live in the name of the Lord. But I can tell you some things in advance about the Word of the Lord. I can share with you some of the contours of that Word, for the contours are

settled. Why, they are the very stuff of the Gospel.

The chief rule is this: The Lord does not come into your world to condemn you, but that you might be saved through him. This is the precious teaching of John 3:16-17:

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

And so, when I recently entered the sickroom of our member Kathryn Weidmann, bringing the Lord with me in the form of the Blessed Sacrament, he said to Kathryn, “I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” Then Kathryn as much as answered, “I believe that. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” And with a peaceful heart she readied herself for her heart valve surgery. It has turned out well, but in a sense, it could not have turned out otherwise

for Kathryn, no matter what the medical report, because she heard the Word of the Lord and meant to go with the Lord wheresoever He led her. Neither she nor you nor I are ever too old for that: to go willingly with the Lord.

Again, the Lord enters a disorderly apartment. Papers and bills are piling up. But the Lord says, “I do not come to condemn, but to walk alongside you as you do the best you can.”

Again, the Lord enters a troubled apartment, where someone is feeling like an awful sinner because he has let someone down – she has let someone down. But Jesus has a word for that one: “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more.”

And now, the Lord is in this house and has a word for you, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord: “This is my body. This is my blood. This is my life, for you, for the forgiveness of sin. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

And we do well to answer, “Thanks be to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to whom belongs the glory, now and forever. Amen.”