

Our Destination Is Life—Second Sunday in Lent

Click [here](#) to watch on Facebook!

[Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#)

[Luke 13:31-35](#)

Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT

Long, long ago, in a different decade, before God called me into the ministry, before I had a wife, and a daughter, and a house, in a faraway land called New York City, long before COVID... I used to exercise!

I used to go running in Brooklyn. I was never very fast, I never ran in races, I never even went for particularly long runs, but I liked it! And I found that when I would go out for longer runs, there was a predictable formula for success. It didn't matter whether I had stretched. It didn't even matter whether I had eaten dinner or not (because I would go running in the evenings after work and after my ride home on the subway). What mattered most was that I would set for myself a firm goal. What mattered was that I had a destination.

You know, "this run," I would say, "I'll get to Parkside Ave and turn around." And the next run, I would go farther, and I'll get all the way around Prospect Park... Running, at a certain point, I found was an entirely mental exercise. "I'm tired," I would say to myself. "My legs hurt. I have a stitch; I need some water." "I want to stop." And you can always stop. There's nothing in your way. But if you have your mind set on a goal—"just a little bit farther to Parkside Ave"—it makes each step a little easier, it makes each painful step endurable.

This dynamic, about setting your sights on something as a way of getting there, is what our readings are about today. That nagging voice in my head that would say, "Stop, just stop. This is close enough; I can't go on any more..." That is what Abram is giving voice to today in his conversation with God in Genesis. This story dovetails so perfectly with what we are studying in our Cross-Generation Class as well, as we are looking at the Abraham and Sarah stories.

The very first detail of this long saga in Genesis is that Sarai and Abram (whose names later gets changed by God) cannot conceive. And the next thing that happens, is that God tells Abram to leave his family,

to become a wanderer, and that he will become the father of a multitude. He has no children, of course, so this promise of God's seems completely impossible, given that very first detail. But

Abram is a good runner, so-to-speak. He sets his sight on God's very far away promise, God's promise of bringing life where there is no life, and he journeys on faithfully.

Before we get to our passage today, Abram and Sarai have already been on some adventures. Sarai is kidnapped by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Abram lies and tells them all she is his sister to protect himself.

Plagues come upon Egypt, and Abe's company are sent away laden with goods and livestock. Lots of other interesting adventures happen too.

But then, while Abram is camped out with the crew that he acquired in Egypt, God comes to him again in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, keep running." And Abram says, "God, I'm jogging on faithfully,

But I'm tired. I don't see how I can get to where you have promised me to go. Can't Eliezer of Damascus, my best servant, (but not my own flesh and blood) be my heir? I want to just stop here."

And I think we can all relate to the image of Eliezer of Damascus. The image for good enough. The image for I'm too tired to keep trying. The image for I need a break, Lord. God says to Abram, "No, keep running." God says to Abram expect the impossible: "No one but your very own issue shall be your heir."

And Abram jogs along again on his dusty faith journey. Scripture tells us: "And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness." Abram is our ancestor too, through Christ. He is also our role model in the faith. God is not promising you all children in your old age. God is not promising me that I can run a double marathon. God is promising us, however—God has promised us—life. Life in a place that we do not think life can be.

We look at the world, just as Abram looked at his situation, and we only see death and separation. Just as the mania and horror of COVID seems to abate another conflict breaks out in Europe. Another in an endless score of movie clips of death and suffering.

How can we keep running, God? How can there be life here? Should we even expect life!? Maybe we should just settle for Eliezer... settle for our jobs, maybe a retirement and some fun with grandkids, hope for an easy death, and that's it. **But God says, no. Expect more.**

Jesus' plight in the Gospel is much the same as Abram. Jesus' sights are set on life, of course. But between Jesus and resurrection life, lies Jerusalem. Jerusalem, in the Gospel of Luke, is Jesus' bittersweet destiny. Jerusalem is the city of David, the city at the heart of God's promises to Abraham. The city of the people who came from the impossible life found in Sarah.

But it is also a city of people, who—like all people—want to settle. A city that, when Jesus finds it, is crushed under the weight of a Roman occupation. If Russia looks bad today, you can only imagine the horror of the Roman Empire. Judea of Jesus' day would be like a Ukraine now if it collapsed and fell to Russian forces. This city is run by a puppet king named Herod who is trying to hold all the ends together. Herod, and all the people, have settled for the image of Eliezer of Damascus. They cannot see the possibility of life in their destroyed and desolated present.

We, of course, believe that in the tomb of Jesus new life—impossible life—came. Just as Abram believed that in the womb of Sarah new life would come. But the run is long, and hard. We never, maybe, thought the run would be this hard—that war, and pestilence, and despair could be so near to us. But this is our way, and we run the same path as Abram, our ancestor. And we run the same road as Jesus our lord.

But God keeps us on our feet, just as God kept Jesus and Sarai and Abram on their feet... **God keeps us on our feet by gathering us together in places like this.** Gathering us and filling us with stories and reminders of the goal. Our siblings in Christ here, and our siblings in Christ across the world, we all continue to tell stories of life coming from death, of hope coming from despair.

In those stories, in those glimmers of hope, God's Holy Spirit is truly dwelling. So, we run, we jog, we walk with a stitch in our side—sometimes maybe only half-believing—but we crawl on. Because God, we know, has promised us and all people life where no life is possible.

Amen.