

“MOST LIKELY TO . . . I – FOLLOW THE LEADER”

Karen F. Bunnell

Elkton United Methodist Church

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Genesis 12:1-8

Matthew 4:18-22

A few months ago, as I was walking through the hospitality area, I came upon a few people who were looking at an old Elkton High School yearbook which is in our library. We talked for a few moments and laughed about some of the pictures in it, and then I moved on. But it prompted me to do something when I went home, and that was, to dig out my Elkton High School, Class of 1973 yearbook and take a look at it.

Not too far into it, there is a two-page spread entitled “Senior Superlatives.” And there, in living color, were all the people we voted the best, and “most likely to” do all sorts of things. There were the best athletes, the best looking, the most school spirit (that was Donna Horgan, by the way), and, of course, the obligatory, “most likely to succeed.”

As it happens, these are the things I was thinking about when I planned this sermon series way back last summer. I was designing sermon series post-Easter and realized that it would be around graduation/recognition time, and wouldn't it be interesting to look at Biblical characters “most likely to” do any number of things. And I decided to start with Biblical characters most likely to “follow the leader,” which brings us to today, and today's main characters – Abraham, Sarah and the disciples.

We know their stories pretty well, but let me remind you of a few things. At the time of today's passage, Abraham and Sarah are living in a place called Haran, and from all that we can tell, have a pretty settled life. Abraham is 75 years old. He and Sarah have been together forever it seems, and by this time, they have gotten used to the fact that they are a childless couple, having put those horrible, heart-breaking, seemingly child-bearing years behind them. In those early years, there pain was sharp with every passing month of no pregnancy, but now years and years later, the pain was put away deep inside of them. They had learned to live with the sadness, and had settled into their way of life in Haran. Life was good, it was comfortable, it was well, predictable.

So too, presumably, was the life of the disciples we heard about in today's Gospel lesson. We don't know a lot about them prior to their encounters with Jesus, but we do know that they are working men, they fish for a living. And while I don't

know tons about fisherman, I know that their life is pretty routine. They go fishing at certain times of the day, they have routines, they have customers, it's pretty predictable. So I think it's safe to say that they, too, were at a comfortable place in life.

And then, into all of these lives – Abraham, Sarah and the disciples – comes the Lord – and not just for a visit, but with an invitation to try something new, to dare to do something different, to walk in a new direction. Now, just think about that, that's a huge deal! Turning away from everything that is comfortable and predictable, going into an uncertain, unknown future – that takes guts! How could they do it?

Well, let me take you on a somewhat surprising path to discover the answer. I'm sure most of you have heard of Steve Harvey, right? He's a comedian, has his own talk show, and hosts "Family Feud." He's also, by the way, a committed man of God.

In one of those "God moments," I came upon a You Tube video of Steve Harvey giving a talk called "Jump." (If you have never seen it, I commend it to you – just google Steve Harvey's Jump Speech.) It is pretty amazing.

Anyway, in this speech, Steve Harvey says that every successful person in this world has jumped. What does that mean? Harvey says that "God has given every last one of us a gift at birth." All of our gifts are different – some can draw, some can sew, some are great cooks, some cut hair or cut grass, some teach, some can sing – but everyone has been given a gift by God.

Harvey says that each of us needs to identify our gift or gifts, and then use it or them. And that's what he means by jump. He said, "You've got to jump, use that gift, jump off the cliff, pull the cord."

He acknowledges it might not be easy. "At first, your parachute might not open. It will be rough getting started, you might struggle. BUT, eventually the parachute will open – that is a promise of God."

"Oh," he said, "you can play it safe, but if you don't jump, the parachute will never open, and you will never know what God can do. Jumping is the only way to get abundant life."

Finally, Harvey says, "You cannot just exist in this life. To get more in life, you need to jump. Go see what God can really do!" (On-line, Steve Harvey, "Jump!")

You know what, friends? I think that's what Abraham, Sarah and those disciples did – they jumped! Somehow, God lit a spark within them that gave them the courage to trust him, and follow him.

Oh, like Steve Harvey said, they could have stayed where they were, they could have played it safe, going for the sure thing, the known thing. But somehow they knew that God had put something more into them, something he was drawing out of them now for a new adventure.

So they jumped! Abraham and Sarah literally picked up stakes in Haran and moved off in the direction God sent them. And over the years ahead, they did have some hard times, but oh, did abundant life come their way. For God made Abraham the father of his people, and he literally made Abraham and Sarah mother and father to baby Isaac as they were both nearing the century mark.

Oh, thank goodness they didn't look away from God, crawl back into their tent and just carry on in the life they had come to have. Thank goodness they trusted that God had something wonderful in store for them, and that he wanted them to use the gifts he had given them. Thank goodness they let that spark take hold of them, thank goodness they dreamed God's dream with him, thank goodness they jumped!

And thank goodness too, that the disciples jumped. They left behind everything they knew, their well-known daily routines and practices, and walked into an unknown future, with this man Jesus who had called them to a new life. Thank goodness they let that spark take hold of them, thank goodness they were willing to dream with Jesus, thank goodness they jumped!

For look at the adventure they had. Sure, like Steve Harvey said, there were hard times – some really, really hard times. But oh, there was so much more. They got to be partners with Jesus in bringing about new life, new hope, new ways. They got to watch miracles, they got to be by his side constantly, they were in on the ground floor of a whole new way of life. Thank goodness they jumped!

The question, of course, that begs to be asked now is – have you? Have I? I'm not necessarily suggesting that we should all have turned away from old lives and gone in new directions. No, what I'm asking is: have you identified the gifts God has given you, and are you using them? Have you jumped?

Have you found a way to use those gifts that makes your spirit soar, that lights a spark in your soul, that lights a spark in the lives of others? Have you taken a risk and tried something new for God? Have you tried to do more than just play it safe with your life?

Steve Harvey is right. Everyone of us has been gifted by God in some unique way. We don't have to change the world with those gifts, but God does call us to change ourselves by using them, for the sake of others and for the sake of the kingdom.