

***That all the tribes of the earth might come to  
bless themselves in Abraham's name*** LENT 2A 2020

As beautiful as the gospel of the Transfiguration is I want to speak today about our first reading.

A reading that tells of how Abraham or as he was then called, Abram, *responded* to God's call, and *trusted* in God's promises. These were far from easy things to do.

First **the call**: "*Leave your country, your family, and your father's house, for the land I will show you.*"

This was a very big ask. To leave the familiar terrain of the only place he knew, where he had grown up, made a living and met his wife. And to *leave his father's house* was to separate himself not only from the emotional support network of family as we understand it. It meant reimagining his identity and setting aside his established means of security.

For Abram lived in a society in which identity rests in membership of a tribe. This is very different from our contemporary sense of a fulfilling life being achieved through asserting our autonomy and individuality. Abram was being called to let go of his identity as well as his home. All on the promise of going somewhere he didn't know.

The fact that Abram took up God's call demonstrates the kind of man he is.

But, let me correct myself here; because we are not really speaking about one man we are speaking about the beginning of a *new tribe* in a *new place* with a *new purpose*. A new tribe requires more than one man, so we can conclude that Sarah, his wife was a key player as were those other relatives who would have shared the vision and journeyed with them. And they won't have travelled light; this was a *no turning back call* so the tent skins and every domestic item needed packing and loading onto beasts of burden.

Sheep and goats would surely be taken as well. This will have been a small caravan equipped for a long and arduous journey.

They had to set out with hope and trust more than any degree of certainty and at risk of rejection and even conflict.

For the land, that new place they were destined for was, as we know, already occupied. Think if you will of the many thousands of refugees and economic migrants in our own times. Few of them would be on the move at all if their own homes were at peace and prosperous, they certainly don't come here for the weather.

So this new tribe, Abram's people, were willing to trust in ***these promises***:

*"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing. I will bless those who bless you: I will slight those who curse you. All tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you."*

That they trusted in these promises which over time, a very long time, past many obstacles, set-backs and disappointments, came true resulted in the name of Abraham becoming synonymous with faith. In this context it is also important to acknowledge the significance of Abraham as a shared ancestor in faith for Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

All trace their roots to this tribe, all honour Abraham and Sarah, drawing inspiration from their faithfulness.

Here perhaps lies the common ground, the shared territory, the prospect for harmony and mutual respect for which all sincere believers of good will yearn.

Such harmony could be the new purpose by which all sincere people of faith discover new ways of working and living together. At which point ***all the tribes of the earth might come to bless themselves in Abraham's name.***