

COURAGE FOR THE CALL

Sermon by Veeda Javaid

Scripture readings: Genesis 12:1-5
Mathew 28:16-20

Greetings from Pakistan!

from 256 Presbyterian Churches, 12 Presbyterian Schools (9 Girls school and 3 boys schools) 8 Village Primary Schools, Women's Empowerment Project in 20 communities in Pakistan, 5000 students studying in Presbyterian Schools

and from our granddaughter, daughters-in-law, 4 sons, and my husband to whom I was engaged when I was three months old. For a love marriage, my mother always said, "Love is blind, and the marriage is an eye-opener!"

Let me share the story of a gardener.

During World War II a beautiful and lush green garden was destroyed in Great Britain. For many months and years, people talked and remembered the beautiful garden but the garden remained totally neglected and rejected by the people. One day a homeless gardener decided to work in the garden. He pulled out all the weeds, added manure, plowed the grounds, added fresh seeds, and watered them daily. Some community people joined in. The gardener worked day and night to restore the beauty of the garden. Soon there were beds of beautiful flowers like roses, jasmine, carnations, sweet peas, and petunias. The birds were chirping and singing in the branches of the trees. Passersby looked at the garden and appreciated its beauty.

One day Mr. Smith, a renowned person of the community, came to the gardener and told him how hard he had worked day and night. The garden looked beautiful. The gardener said humbly, "It is all God's work." Mr. Smith said, "I have seen God working alone on this garden for a long time. The biggest difference is made because now you were working alongside with God."

The greatest and highest call anyone can receive is to Partner with God where He is already working.

(Say prayer in Urdu here)

I would like to read the first verse of Genesis, chapter 12.

Then the LORD told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you.”

When we read Abraham’s story, God had called Abram to travel with God.

Just think for a moment if we all belonged to that era: here I had to travel to Shandon Presbyterian Church in SC and we exchanged nearly 100 emails!

God invites Abraham on a journey -- one that will be long and difficult.

This will be an uncomfortable journey -- one that requires everything that Abram must overcome the remainder of his life.

But I’d like you to notice a few things:

- Abram doesn’t speak in the story.
- No questions. No excuses. No tests. No complaints.
- He accepted it with Courage.

Sometimes we think actually what Courage is:

Courage is grace under Pressure.

Courage is doing what we are afraid to do.

There can be no courage unless we are afraid.

God is always willing to encourage us whenever we are afraid, uncertain or overwhelmed by opposition. When we look in the Bible, we see many examples of Courage stories.

- Abraham, when he left his comfort Zone, moving to an unknown country at the age of 75
- Moses before the Pharaoh (Moses was afraid)
- David as he faced Goliath; no one trusted David
- Abigail as she saved the entire house hold of Nabal (Slave Girl); courage to talk about God
- Esther, the queen, when she went before the king to save the Jews (she was afraid of her identity yet she spoke with courage)
- Peter and John as they stood before the Sanhedrin
- The Holy courage and determination of our Lord Jesus to go to Jerusalem and die for the sins of the World is unparalleled.

The reality about courage is that it starts on the inside of human being,

When GOD CALLS US TO BE HIS PEOPLE, it requires that we stand for Him 100%. We are never alone in doing what God wants us to do. **He stands with us.** The Lord understands that we need courage. His ways are often surprising and challenging but they are always the best and most successful.

Courage moves your limitations beyond your limits.
Courage calls us to Trust God

This is a call to Trust in God. American Presbyterian Missionaries, YOUR great-grandparents, heard this call. They left their comfort zone, came to Indo-Pakistan, and started schools in 1850.

Courage allows us to realize there can be no growth without courage.

Courage helps us seize the opportunities that God places in our path.

The missionaries discovered God was calling them. They were not afraid to step out in faith. They were ready to take risks. They were ready for change.

Like Abram, they never questioned God. They had been faithful to God. Many times I asked the missionaries, "How can we understand it is God's call?"

They said, "If your hearts and minds are synchronized or aligned with the cause, that is when we say God is calling."

In the early 1900s, the missionaries would move from one village to another, spreading the message of God's love and converting people to Christianity. A lot of conversion took place at that time. The missionaries were able to establish schools and boarding houses. They would bring young bright girls into the boarding houses, clothe them, feed them, and educate them for the future leadership of the church.

That was the time when a bright young girl called Mohanda Bibi from a very, very poor family was brought into the boarding house. As a widow, Mohanda's mother was unable to feed her daughter. The missionaries provided Mohanda with clothes, books, and shelter. Mohanda got a good quality education from the missionaries, and she graduated with high scores. She was admitted to a teacher training school and became a school teacher. Then she was able to build a house for her younger siblings and was able to help them with their education.

Then Mohanda got married and had two daughters. I always say, **“The youngest, the brightest one is in front of you (pause) --- and I have the permission of my older sister to say so!”**

Dear friends, had Mohanda not been educated, had my mother not being provided with the scholarship. I would not have been what I am today. It is the love and commitment of the missionaries which transformed many lives like Mohanda in Pakistan.

Good work of the Presbyterians was going on and Pakistan was a peaceful Country -- until 1972 when the government of Pakistan took control of our schools.

We got these schools back in 1998 due to the efforts of PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA (as all the properties are still on the name of PCUSA) and also the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan.

It was a new day for the church and PEB when the schools were returned.

The church was rejoicing as once again:

- we will have an opportunity to talk about peace, love, and tolerance in society through our schools.
- we had an opportunity to build bridges between different communities in Pakistan.
- we had an opportunity to bring new life to the dry bones of educational system in Pakistan.
- we had an opportunity to built bridges between East and West, and between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan.

That was the time I joined in with the Presbyterian work with a commitment to serve for 2 years. Prior to this work, I was teaching Physics and Mathematics to high school students.

My mother asked me to repay back her debt by serving for 2 years with the Presbyterians.

I still remember: it was 2nd of February 1998. I was getting ready for the new job. I asked God to give me a passage. I was thinking God would give me a word of wisdom. After all, it is God's work. I opened the Bible and the passage came from John when the dancing girl is asking for the head of John the Baptist. I read the passage and I said to myself, “Of course, this is not the message for me.” I closed the Bible and opened it one more time with the hope for a different message. It was the same message. Then I said, “OK, God, it seems you are not listening and you must be busy. I have to go. Give me a message some other time.”

Dear Friends, down the road in my journey with the Presbyterian work, dealing with many people, going through many threats, the passage made sense to me: If John the Baptist can suffer, if Jesus suffered, who am I to complain?

Many times I wonder what was so special about Abraham, so special about the people who are called.

BUT the truth is:

- It does not matter who we are.
- It does not matter what we are.
- It does not matter where we are.

There is not enough goodness in us to merit God's Call. It is God's grace when we show courage and accept the call. We have to learn to trust in God's power, not our own.

When we look at Abraham's story, we notice how much of God's promise was still undone. Yet this is the beginning of a call for Abram to trust in God; not himself, not his talents, not his ideas, not his work, not his friends.

TRUST IN GOD.

Our problem is we tend to trust more in ourselves than we do in God to fulfill his promises:

- We trust our skills and talents
- We trust our hard work and long hours
- We trust our wisdom and intelligence
- We trust in our technology and medicine
- We trust our religion, and our practices
- We trust our feelings and instincts

Abram immediately discovers that, if he is going to answer God's call, he will have to find some courage to believe in someone greater than himself. The same is true for you and me. We have to trust in God's power, not our own. Instead of believing in yourself, start putting your trust in God.

'We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.' Proverbs 16:9

'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the LORD. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.' Jeremiah 29:11

This is a call to be **Transformed by God.**

Abram will spend the rest of his life learning to let go:

- to let go of his doubts and fears,
- to let go of all kinds of passions,
- to let go of his way of doing things
- to let his worries go

LET GO AND TRUST IN GOD

Abram was called to surrender everything. He was called to obey God and follow His command.

God is calling Abram to trust in God and NOT himself.

In return God made a four-fold Covenant with Abram -- a Covenant of Hope and Trust

- God said, "I will make you a Great Nation."
- God said, "I will bless you and make you a great Name."
- God said, "I will bless those who will bless you and I will curse those who will curse you."
- God said, "I will bless all the families of the earth through you."

He knew that, by leaving his people, his language of communication, his reputation, his net worth, his knowledge of the place, it would be difficult for him to survive, His life could be difficult, but he was willing to take the risk. He was called to LET GO. He had faith. He had a tough journey. He did not even have his son for 25 years, but still he did not give up faith. He was 100 years of age when Isaac was born. He never questioned God.

We need to trust in God's Power

Dear Friends, you and I did nothing to inherit God's favor. It is all God's promise to Abram. You and I did nothing to deserve a Savior in Jesus. It is all keeping His words with Abraham that Jesus is a descendent of Abraham's tribe.

God is calling all of us today.

God is calling us to serve

God is calling us to have a right relationship with him.

GOD IS CALLING US TO LET GO:

- let go of our Doubts,
- let go of our fears,
- let go of our passions and follow where God is leading us,

Trust in the power of God. Trust that you are called to be transformed by God

As written in Acts Chapter 1, verse 8, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world."

The Holy Spirit brings power and courage and helps us overcome our fears.

Friends,

- there is power in His blood
- There is power in His church
- There is power in His Gospel
- There is power in having an intimate relationship with Him, knowing His will
- There is power in YOU AND ME

May the power of the Holy Spirit make us bold. May we all have power to be His witness and to be His disciples in our communities. Then:

- Are **YOU** ready for a Change?
- Are **WE** ready for a change?
- Am **I** ready for a change?

MAY WE ALL BE READY FOR THE GREATEST AND THE HIGHEST CALL.

Then we can lift up our hands and say, "Prince of Peace, come. We have obeyed your command. We have heard your call."