

Genesis 12:1-9

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

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. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

John 3:1-17

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

GOING ON A GREAT ADVENTURE

I love camping. In June I'm going on vacation, and though I haven't decided where I'm going yet, I'm sure that I will spend some time camping. Perhaps what I like the most about camping is that I see new things when I go camping. I don't always go to the same place and I don't

always hike the same trails; I like to explore new places, see new things, go where I haven't gone before. Even if I go to the same place I've been before and hike the same trails, I still have a great time because I still see things that I didn't see the last time I hiked.

Of course there's always some danger in camping. I don't think that there's anywhere a person can go where there are not wild animals that can be dangerous. The nights can get very cold. There's a chance that you can get lost. You're sometimes far away from doctors and hospitals. There are no supermarkets nearby in case you run out of food. These are some reasons that some people *hate* camping and why some people are *afraid* of camping. But for me, the thrill and the joy of camping outweighs the dangers and inconveniences of camping.

Everyone arranges their lives based on what thrills them and what chills them, what brings the greatest joy and what evokes the greatest fear. The thrills and chills are different for everybody – someone like me who likes camping may be afraid of the water, of swimming, and someone who loves swimming may be afraid to ride a roller coaster. Some people are afraid of almost nothing while some people are afraid of just about everything.

Usually our fears grow out of bad experiences. I knew a woman who was afraid of cats because she got scratched by a cat really bad when she was a little girl, and all her life she stayed away from cats. I know people who are afraid to drive because they've had bad accidents, people who are afraid of water because they've almost drown, and people who are afraid to fly in airplanes because they've on very scary airplane rides.

Perhaps the worst fear in the world is the fear of God. Granted there's a Proverb that says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," (Proverbs 1:7). It's normal to have some fear of God because he's so powerful it can be scary. But our fear is usually related to our own guilt – see how Adam and Eve dealt with it in Genesis 3; they *hid* from God. Because God is so good and we have all done bad things, we may be afraid that God is going to punish us for something, and so we get scared – I have a dog named Archie, and Archie knows he's not supposed to go in the kitchen, but when Archie thinks we're not looking, he'll go into the kitchen. If we catch Archie in the kitchen and ask him what he's doing in the kitchen, his ears kind of bend down and his head drops down, and he goes back by our washing machine and hides under the sink. We sometimes hide from God under the sink, especially when we do something we shouldn't do. But we don't want to hide under the sink forever. People who are always afraid of God live under the sink, and that's a very dark and cold place to live. If we're too afraid of God will make us never want to hear him, never want to talk to him. Too much fear will make us never want to come anywhere near him. And if we don't listen to God and we don't talk to God and we don't get near God, our lives can be really bad. We have to trust that God loves us and cares for us. If we don't, if we think that God is just angry with us, we'll never want to listen to him.

Today's Old Testament lesson is about a man named Abraham who really trusted God, and who was not afraid to listen to God. One day God told him to leave his father's house, which was in a pretty nice place, and to go to a new land that he had never seen before. Furthermore God

made a promise to Abraham that he would make a great nation out of his family, and through him everyone in the world would be blessed. And Abraham took a chance and trusted that God was telling the truth, which God always does. Abraham left his father's house and went where God told him to go, and although it took him awhile to get there, and though it was a long time before Abraham and Sarah had a child, and even though Abraham didn't *always* do exactly what God told him to do, God kept his promises to Abraham. Abraham had what I call a full life, which is a life of adventure, the kind of adventure we can have when we trust God and we go where God tells us to go.

But if we're afraid to take a chance with God, our lives will not be everything that they can be. In our New Testament reading we meet a fellow named Nicodemus who knows that there's something special about Jesus – and Jesus, as you know, does everything that God wants him to do. Nicodemus thinks that he's doing what God wants him to do because he's really carefully to follow all the rules that God gave to his ancestors, but he's so stuck in following those rules that he doesn't even recognize God when he sees him. Imagine that you went to school, and all you did all day long was follow the rules *and nothing else* – no lessons, no projects or activities; just sitting down and following the rules. Following the rules became more important to Nicodemus than following God. We need to follow rules *while* we follow God. Many Christians make the same mistake that Nicodemus makes – they obey God's rules, like not stealing and not lying and not hurting others, and all of that is good. But if all you do in your life is *not lie and not cheat and not hurt*, you might miss out on doing something God wants you to do. There's more to life than following rules.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that when we listen to God and do what he tells us to do, our life will be full of surprises. Jesus describes it as like being blown by the wind; sometimes we're sent this way, and sometimes we're sent another way. God leads us all over the place. I believe God led Juliette Gordon Low to start something brand new in this country, an organization called the Girl Scouts. And if Juliette Gordon Low had been only interested in following rules and if she had been afraid to take any risks, she would not be honored today for having started the Girl Scouts. And if your troop leaders had been afraid to work with girls and other parents, you wouldn't be here today celebrating Girl Scout Sunday. When we trust in God, we take risks, and when we take risks, God takes us to places we can't even imagine.

And so my message to you today is to be courageous. That's part of your Girl Scout Law is to be courageous, and that means that you take some risks. Being courageous means that you are willing to go places that you have never been before, to do things you've never done before. And when you trust in God you find the courage to do new things and go new places. God wants us to have adventures, and he has a special adventure planned for each one of you. Don't be afraid to go wherever he may take you.