

Are You Willing to Move with God?

Genesis 46-47

My parents both come from generations of farmers, both in the US and in Germany and Scotland many centuries ago. My ancestors built homes and barns, planted trees, cultivated crops, and cared for animals. They grew deep roots in the land, and the land gave them a deep sense of stability and assurance despite the uncertainties of farm life.

When I became a United Methodist fresh out of college, the biggest shock I had is called the Itineracy. I knew I was called to be a pastor, but I was desperately looking for a loophole that would exempt me from having to move if the Bishop called me to. I decided to be an active layperson to avoid any unwanted moves. Despite this, there were other factors that led to moving 10 times in 7 states within 15 years. My efforts at stability were clearly not working, and I began to realize I needed to be willing to move with God if I wanted to be truly grounded.

Joseph's Great-Grandfather, Abraham, was 75 years old when God came to him and said, *"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* (Genesis 12:1-2) Abram and Sarai left family and the familiar behind to begin their journey before they even knew where God would bring them. That takes faith! God led them to Canaan, where they raised their son Isaac, who then raised his sons Esau and Jacob. That same Jacob is 130 years old in the passage we read today when he heard these words: *"I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes."* (Genesis 46:3-4)

Jacob is understandably concerned about moving from Canaan to Egypt. At his age, he would unlikely be able to see his homeland and friends again. This 250-mile trip in a slow and bumpy cart going the equivalent of the distance from Wausau to Chicago would sound overwhelming to anyone. But God gives promises to Jacob that echo the promises he gave to Abraham: "I will make you a great nation...I myself will go down with you...I will also bring you up again." Let's look closer at these three promises to find the assurance we need when God asks us to move, whether literally or in a more metaphorical direction.

"I will make you a great nation". This is not a geopolitical nation, but a promise to establish a widely extended family of faith that does great things to bless those around them. This is not "Make Canaan Great Again". This is "Help Us Love Our Neighbors Again", which is a call and challenge for every generation and culture.

“I myself will go down with you”. Our confirmation students recently learned about the “omnipresence” of God – how God is present everywhere all the time. But that theological truth hadn’t been understood fully in Jacob’s day. In a world filled with regional gods who tended to stay as stationary as the people who worshiped them, the promise of God’s presence moving with them was revolutionary and reassuring. May it be both for us as well.

“I will also bring you up again”. It’s not unusual to misinterpret God’s promises. Did Jacob assume God was promising to bring him back to Canaan before he died? Jacob ended up dying 17 years after arriving in Egypt, but his bones were carried back to be buried in Canaan. However, a much greater fulfillment of that promise happened about 400 years later. The generations of Jacob’s 12 sons would grow to number in the millions in the 12 tribes in Egypt.

The Angel of God had given Jacob a new name, Israel, back in Genesis 32:28. *“You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”* It was not only Jacob’s new name but it became the name of God’s people, the Israelites. The promise to bring “you” up again is not singular to Jacob. It includes all the Israelites led out of Egypt by Moses back into Canaan, the Promised Land. It includes all of us grafted in and led by the Holy Spirit into the promises of Christ in this life and the next. Are you willing and ready to move however and wherever God calls you? It may not be a literal uprooting, but God has an amazing journey of faith for all of us. Let’s move forward with God!

Statement of Faith

by Joel Del Conte

I had a lot of trouble writing this. I’ve heard many Statements of Faith from others where they talk about times their lives were personally affected by God. I have certainly seen God's creation and his miracles but, he's never spoken to me directly.

Throughout my daily life I do what's good not because God has told me, but because it is what’s right. God calls us all to do what is right. He calls us to love your neighbour as yourself and he gave his only son to forgive us when we fall short. God encourages me to improve myself so I may improve the lives of others.

Finally, I’d like to thank my family, friends, and church community who helped me throughout this journey especially my mentor Mike who has enriched my understanding of Christ and his word. Thank you.

Statement of Faith

by Evie Del Conte

“Love is patient, is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs, it does not delight in evil, it rejoices with truth, it always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres. Love never fails.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

I can say with confidence that is one of the longest run-on sentences I've ever read, and with how much of a writing nerd I am, it's surprising that this is my favorite verse. When I first read this it instantly stuck with me and it only took me a few days to realize that this is what I wanted to be the backbone of my statement of faith. It's a bit of a funny story actually. It took place back in my first year of confirmation when I was looking at some art online when I found a particular piece. The art itself was nice but what struck me was the quote that was with it. I didn't realize until after reading that it was a Bible verse, 1 Corinthians, but that's not where this lovely tale end. Three days later, that was the very verse we were discussing in our church service and that occurrence hit me like a truck. It was a sign to me about how much this message was the foundation of our faith.

To be blunt, that description of love in its best form is what we are trying to live by and embody. So many look at the Bible and find one little line of text to validate their point, but this is the base of everything we hold dear and are trying to teach. Loving ourselves, others, everything around us, and God is the overarching message of the entire bible and something that I want to carry in the forefront of my faith and my life. I want to bring preserving love into everything I do and every step I take. When I do that, I'm upholding our beliefs Jesus tells us that loving God and our neighbor are the most important commandments, and 1 Corinthians tells us how to do that. It states clearly that we need to forgive and be patient with others and stay hopeful in the face of opposition. It preaches how we must support the success of everyone and help even if we don't think someone deserves it because this pure love doesn't make expectations. No person is exempt from this caring meaning that our compassion should be applied the same. We're all human and deserve acceptance no matter what.

It can be hard. We all have those people that we find difficult to forgive and we must always remember that we're not perfect. As human beings, we mess up and make mistakes. That's simply a part of life, but what we should do is try to accept those mistakes and then improve. We may never reach that perfect goal, but we can try our best. We have the opportunity to make the choice to move forward in bring unending love into our lives and sharing that no matter the circumstance. I want to make that choice and stick with it because the world is a better place when I do. I have a piece of my 3 and a half years and still counting journey with me when I do and I never want to lose it. Why? Because love never fails.