



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
June 11 2023 - Second Sunday after Pentecost
Canon Paul Walker

Abram and Sarai are on the move. It is like so many people in the scriptures; and so many people around the world. Migration is a push and pull phenomena. Certain factors *push* you away from your home: you are evacuated because of fires, oppression, war, violence or other natural disasters; or because of political, social and economic forces. You don't *want* to leave your home, but you must leave to survive. Other factors *pull you* to a new place because of opportunities, education, jobs, family connections, or ideals of freedom and justice. You want to and need to start again.

Being on the move is exhausting and takes effort.

Abram and Sarai took Abram's nephew, Lot, and all their possessions and all the persons from Haran that belonged to them, and they set out. Originally coming from Ur, they now set out from Haran to Shechem in Canaan settled under the oak of Moreh; then to the hill country with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, just north of Jerusalem; and then they continued on to the Negeb. In each place he pitched his tent, and built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of

the Lord. All of this began when Abram was 75 years old. All of this covered over 1200 km of changing terrain and different cultures, languages and peoples. All of this was the pull factor of migration: to seek a blessing.

It's amazing what we do and how far we go to know that we are secure; that we are blessed.

The synagogue leader who's daughter is dead; the woman who had been suffering bleeding for most of her life; Matthew, the tax collector, who was an agent of a distant foreign empire and generally despised: all of them, like Abram and Sarai, are seeking a sign of blessing. For physical and social reasons, all of them are cast out and on the outside of the mainstream culture. All of them know what it is like not to belong.

God says to Abram and Sarai, "Follow me." And they do.

Jesus says to Matthew, "Follow me." And he does.

Jesus says to the woman, "Take heart." And she leaves healed.

Jesus says to the crowds, "Go away." And they leave.

It's interesting the physical movement in these texts. The crowds disperse and curiously it compels Jesus to become one of the mocked, despised, and rejected. He moves into the same space that all the others have occupied for years. He becomes "one of them." And even in that position he is able to bring new life to a household where previously there was death; bring healing to a woman where previously there was suffering; and offer community to a tax collector, where previously there was rejection.

The words, "Follow me," spoken to Matthew, and "Take heart," spoken to the woman, are also, I think, at the *same* time addressed to the leader of the synagogue who is in mourning the death of his daughter. I think it is also implied that these same words are addressed, at a distance, to the dead girl at the synagogue leader's house: "Follow me", and "Take heart."

The synagogue leader enters into Matthew's house, where Jesus has just invited himself over for dinner. He asks Jesus to come urgently for his daughter has died. He must have known who Jesus was, and what was potentially possible. If not, his entry into the tax collector's house is an incredible risk. "Come," he demands, "lay your hand upon her and she will live."

By the time they leave Matthew's house and arrive at the commotion of the synagogue leader's house, Jesus announces that the girl is not dead, she is only sleeping. And they *laugh* at Jesus, for they *knew* she was dead. This is an ancient laugh.

Abram and Saria too laughed, when they found out, in a land far away from home where they were experiencing a famine, childless, in their old age, that they would bear a child. Like the crowds outside the dead girl's house, they laughed in disbelief. And they named their son Isaac, meaning "he will laugh."

But the remarkable thing in all of this is how in spite of the laughter of disbelief, in spite of the alienation of an agent for a distant and oppressive empire, or in spite of the overwhelming grief of a father, or the suffering of a woman, something new is given birth, that under all the circumstances would not ever thought to be possible: new life; belonging; healing; and most of all blessing. For this, we come to this house of prayer and blessing this morning, and despite the circumstances that contradict it, we are given a sign of God's blessing: bread and wine. Jesus says, is about mercy, not sacrifice. Thank God for this mercy. We are blessed.

