

**Sunday, March 5, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**

**Bible Study**

**Genesis 12:1-4a; John 3:1-17; Psalm 121**

**Second Sunday in Lent: “Go From Your Country”**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In groups of two or three, have participants respond to the question, “How do you most often seek direction from God?”

**Genesis 12:1-4a. Context.** The story of the Bible is the story of the relationship between God and God’s people. The story really takes off when God liberates the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. But just as the United States has a “pre-history” leading up to the Revolution, so the book of Genesis tells the “pre-history” of the people of Israel before the Exodus. A central figure in that prehistory is Abram. Born in Ur in Mesopotamia (located in modern day Iraq, 70 miles south of Bagdad), Abram travelled with his father, his wife and his extended family, heading for the land of Canaan. They stopped for some time in Haran (in SW Turkey). It was there that God spoke to Abram, making him the promise of this week’s reading: Abram would come into a land, he would become a great nation, and he would become a blessing to all the other peoples of the earth.

**John 3:1-17. Context.** Early in the story of Jesus’ ministry in the fourth gospel, we encounter the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus. Jesus speaks of being born “from above,” but Nicodemus thinks he is speaking about being physically born “again.” It’s the same word in Greek (anōthen). It becomes the occasion for a discourse from Jesus on being born of the Spirit. Nicodemus comes at night, which has a theological meaning: ignorance of the truth. No wonder Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus! Towards the end of this discourse Jesus alludes to the story from Numbers 21 where Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a pole when the people were being bitten by real poisonous serpents, so that those who could see the bronze serpent would be healed. Jesus adopts this image to describe the exaltation of his crucifixion and ascension. (In Greek, the same word means either “lifted up” or “exalted.”) The conclusion of the passage spells out most succinctly Jesus’ mission.

**Psalm 121. Context.** This week’s psalm is part of a collection of 15 psalms called “Psalms of Ascents.” They are associated with “going up” to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. The psalm speaks of God’s protection and vigilance over the pilgrim 24/7. Along with Psalm 23, it is one of the most popular in the Bible.

### **Read Genesis 12:1-4a, John 3:1-17 and Psalm 121**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

### **Read Genesis 12:1-4a, John 3:1-17 and Psalm 121 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

### **Some reflection questions –**

- How do you think Abram felt when God called him to a new land with so few specifics? How would you feel? How do you think he felt about the promises of being a great nation and others being blessed through him? How do you think his wife and others with him might have felt?
- Over the next few chapters, Abram and his wife seem to make some missteps. How does it make you feel knowing that God does not call those who are perfect to be used by God?
- What do you already know about the Nicodemus story?
- It can be helpful to read this passage in a few different translations to get out the difficulty in translation. For example, some will read “born from above” while others might read “born again.” What might it mean to be “born from above” or “born again”?
- How might verse 8 help us understand what it means to be “born again” or “born from above”?
- Oftentimes, to believe connotes intellectual comprehension. To say it another way, “I believe that gravity exists or that this chair will hold my weight.” There is another connotation to belief that is at least as helpful. There is “belief” in the sense that Abram had—the belief that God is guiding or the Spirit is leading, even when we do not fully intellectually comprehend everything. How might this latter understanding help us to see what Jesus is calling us toward in John 3:16?
- Where might the Spirit be guiding you?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of reconciliation, you call us into an eternal and grace-filled relationship with you. Because of your great love, you sent the Son and have given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, which breathes your breath of life within us. Help us to be sustained by your grace; and by the power of the Holy Spirit, may sacrificial love come flowing out of us this week.

**Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.