



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Second Sunday After Trinity, June 1st, 2008

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

Today's Communion Epistle for the Fourth Sunday After Trinity talks about the suffering and sacrifices that Christians can expect to experience. St. Paul, quite matter of bluntly, tells the Roman Church that the rewards will far exceed the pain: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

It seems somewhat incongruous message for folks in this exceedingly comfortable country of ours. Considering the prosperity and liberty we enjoy here in America – even in the throes of a recession – a lecture about gratitude might seem a whole lot more appropriate.

Great blessings, however, tend to bring with them great responsibilities and great responsibilities require great sacrifices. And this is the way it has been from the very beginning. Consider Abraham, the guy we meet in one of the Old Testament lessons at Morning Prayer on the Fourth Sunday After Trinity. God showered great blessings on Abraham, but, at the same time, those blessings also required him to assume enormous responsibilities.

For starters, Abraham had only just made God's acquaintance, when God told quite peremptorily to pull up his roots and get out of town. The 12th Chapter of Genesis begins: "The Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee . . . "

The Genesis account of Abraham's life reveals a human being, just like ourselves, with hopes and dreams, fears and perplexities, strengths and, yes, an abundance of weaknesses. Abraham was no hero. He was simply an ordinary person, trying to do God's will. But it is his constant effort to do God's will that sets him apart from the other ordinary people like ourselves.

Judging by the fact that God speaks to everyone – not solely to us today, but to everyone who has ever lived. Abraham different from the rest of us is that he not only listened to God, but he responded to him.

Abraham originally came from a city called Ur of the Chaldees – in a part of the world that would very much later be called Babylon. Eventually his father moved the family business to another great city called Haran. Archaeology shows that in Abraham's day, Ur was a very wealthy metropolis with fine government buildings, magnificent temples, and a vibrant cultural life. Its banks and merchant companies dominated trade in that part of the world. Business tycoons, like Abraham and his family, lived like princes in Ur of the Chaldees.

Haran – the place to which Abraham's family moved their business – was smaller and rather less prestigious than Ur. But it was a frontier boom town, a bit like St. Louis in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ur's traders dealt with the world beyond the frontier through Haran's export-import companies, like Abraham's family firm. And after the death of his father, Abraham took over as chief executive of the family business, and was enjoying life as one of Haran's most influential citizens when God gave him his marching orders.

Now consider the implications of what God told him to do: Abraham was a hugely successful businessman, at the height of his career. Hundreds depended on him for their living. He exerted major political clout in Haran and Ur. Sarah, his wife, held a leading position in Chaldee society.

God was telling this man and this woman to give up everything they'd worked for and cherished and take a huge step into the unknown – to leave the one of the world's most civilized city, and to head off in a pioneer wagon train into a wild, untamed land of which they had only the very sketchiest of knowledge.

In return for all this, God promised them the one thing they hadn't got and the one thing they really wanted: direct descendants. Not just children and grand children, but a whole slew of descendants – a "great nation" in which "all the families of the world" would be blessed. It was a tremendous offer, but one could forgive a guy of 75 and his middle-aged wife for being a bit skeptical. Indeed, this episode might explain why Abraham was the first person to respond to God's call.

Answering God's call required him to leave his comfortable – indeed, palatial – home for a Bedouin's tent. He became a shepherd and wandering merchant, albeit on a grand scale. His wanderings took he and his extended family all over the Fertile Crescent from the Chaldees to Egypt to Canaan, the Promised Land. This was no light undertaking for a guy approaching his '80s

It was very far from the life he had anticipated. He had to cultivate diplomatic skills to deal with people such as the Egyptians, the Hittites and the Canaanites through whose lands his people traveled. In his mid-90s, he was forced to learn the art of soldiering to defend his people and their allies.

Finally, a few years after his wife had given birth to Isaac, the son they had been promised, God put him through the ordeal of tying the boy to a rough-hewn altar and preparing to sacrifice him as a burnt offering. God, of course, didn't intend for him to go through with the ordeal, but this didn't spare Abraham the anguish of the preparing for it.

More than four thousand years have passed since Abraham and Sarah gathered their employees together, loaded their possessions on donkeys and camels and headed off on a trek that would eventually lead their descendants to the Promised

Land. But theirs has not been an isolated experience. God has continued to call people to serve him by undertaking extraordinary missions.

Some might be called upon to exchange a tycoon's mansion for the austerity of a monastic cell. Others might be called to strange and dangerous parts of the world to preach Christ's Gospel to people who are barely civilized. Mercifully, however, most of us aren't put to such stringent tests.

For most of us, God's commission will be rather more modest. Some He will call to serve as priests, deacons, teachers and lay readers. Some he will call to serve him as acolytes and altar guild workers, wardens and vestrymen. But the vast majority will be asked to bear witness their faith in his only begotten Son Jesus Christ in their communities.

Every call, however, has one thing in common: God always asks us to do rather more than we think we are capable of doing. But no matter what task God sets us, no matter how inadequate we think we are to undertake it, there is only one answer to give him. The fourth verse of the 12th chapter of Genesis reads: "So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." *AMEN.*

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***