

“He went out. . .  
not knowing where he was going.”

Heb 11:8

Nowadays, thanks to GPS, we always seem to know where we are going. Clumsy paper maps are a thing of the distant past. And, I imagine that this is something to which some people are more than happy to say “Good riddance” given how difficult they were to re-fold after use.

I, for one, have always been a map guy. My father was into over-land transportation and brought me home a big map of the U.S. produced by the Union Pacific Railroad. I used to stare at it as a kid, wondering where in this huge country I would be able to travel: In particular, the big empty spaces in the West were intriguing. . . like a different planet from my dank, damp Southern New England home.

We are blessed to live in a free country with freedom of movement from coast to coast. We can, theoretically, go where we want, when we want.

However, as we all know, life doesn't always accommodate itself to this freedom. Sometimes we are compelled to go where we had not planned on going: A storm strikes the destination and all flights are diverted and we end up in some other airport, sleeping on our luggage.

*“My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation, great, strong, and numerous.”* (Deut 26:5)

I think that the ancient story of Abraham in the Book of Genesis is profound in its simplicity. He is identified by the One True God as a particularly righteous man who is genuinely humble. In contrast to so many figures in the sacred history, Abraham is the one who is always, immediately ready and responsive to God's call: In Genesis 12 God says to Abram, “Go forth!” and, without qualification, it says “Abram went.” In Genesis 15 the Lord makes a covenant with him, promising him offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and, even though he wondered how this could be without having children of his own, it says that *“Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.”* His ready response continues through the “Covenant of Circumcision,”

(ouch!), the migration to Egypt and, in the ultimate test, the call to sacrifice his son Isaac. In this ultimate test, the narrative tells us that God called to him “Abraham!” and the patriarch immediately replied “Ready!”

Freedom is a great gift from God, ordered toward a free choice for the good and the true. It is not really itself outside of a humble “fear of the Lord,” in the biblical sense of that word, (awe, wonder and reverence). The freedom of movement promised by that old Union Pacific Map on my wall is sorely tested by the requirements of faith and sacrificial love. Sometimes, perhaps often, the requirement is to go to an undesirable place, or a place of mystery and uncertainty.

Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, comes into the world with the infinite freedom of God and, yet, it is not exploited. The severe test in the desert by the temptations of Satan are a dramatic demonstration of the subjugation of freedom to obedience and faith. And, as we all know, his ministry and journey lead to Jerusalem where his personal freedom seems to be utterly erased. In fact, his freedom is fully engaged: He has chosen the will of the Father. He has chosen to “drink the cup” to the very bottom.



Prior to meeting this fate, Jesus imparts a sobering vision on St. Peter concerning this relation between freedom and faith. He tells the Apostle, *“Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”* (John 21:18)

In all of this we are shown the way to shape our freedom in a graceful acceptance of God's direction for our lives. Sometime it is frightening and seemingly arbitrary and, like Abraham, we go out not knowing where we are going. But, after all, this is faith. It is the disposition with which we receive Holy Communion; not necessarily feeling anything but believing, trusting and doing it in remembrance of him.