

"Go"!

My son and his young wife moved from Brazil to New York last year with just 8 suitcases. Ah, les jeunes! As you know, we moved to Barrowden in May last year with 2 large vans, 6 car loads and several extra buckets of plants and we are still not straight!

'Go from your own country' said God to Abraham, 75 years old and Sarah his wife.

Moving house at any age is very traumatic but as a septuagenarian it is almost beyond the pale. Furthermore, Abram and Sarah didn't have any children to do the work for them: no Pickfords to do the heavy lifting; not even any idea where they were moving to! That takes some courage yet this couple were prepared to trust God with their future. Many people in this village will have moved many times during their military service. 14 times is not unremarkable, I understand.

We find this story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis chapter 12 – the first book in the bible. Up to that point the biblical writers had been talking generally about the act of creation, the discovery of sin and its consequences but now the writer becomes specific and concentrates on these two elderly people Abraham and Sarah. God creates a covenant, a pact with them. They will spawn a great nation and will become a blessing to many people.

So these two elderly people set off at the request of God together with their household not knowing where they would go. Shame hung upon the family as they had no children so Abraham remonstrated with God. How could they create a great nation childless? Eventually God visited them in the wilderness and Sarah, aged 90, bore a son.

Implications

All of this we know. It is the start of the Israelites wanderings in the desert before they entered the Promised Land. There are 3 things in this story that are relevant to us as we consider our own covenant, our own pact, our own stewardship with God:

Firstly, Abraham and Sarah had to leave behind their old life with all its patterns, security and comforts.

Secondly they had to trust God's promises. They were to leave their land; they had no children; they didn't even have a ticket! They were set in their ways. They didn't want to change!

Thirdly, they were prepared to be used by God, to do his will. In response, they were blessed with a child and became a blessing to many other people and through Christ, to us also. What was barren in Abraham and Sarah now becomes full in Christ.

Us?

How then is this story of Abraham and Sarah relevant to us today in the 21st century as we prayerfully begin to consider our stewardship?

Firstly, God made his covenant, his pact with us at our baptism. This is a guarantee of our special relationship with him as part of him, part of the Body of Christ. In that service, we turned away from our old life in order to follow Christ. As we turn from one path of life to another – to 'King's Cross' – we are adopted by our fellow Christian pilgrims.

Secondly, we trust God to keep his promises towards us assuming that God's plans are better than our own. We surrender more and more of ourselves to God and his company. They become our new family as depicted in Rublev's famous Icon of the Holy Trinity. We live within that company and share its resources, the food on the table, the shared hope, the common pursuits. This involves fighting those same temptations of Christ in the wilderness; the temptations of power, popularity and comfort.

Thirdly, we become a blessing to others because we are prepared to be used by God. One of the most chilling comments in my SWOB analysis of the benefice was from a lady who asked, 'What does the church do for this village?' Now I am confident that the churches do contribute to the life of our villages but sometimes the answer to that question is ill-defined.

We have been considering the covenant between God and Abraham. It involved risk; it demanded their trust; it brings benefits to them and to others.

So it is with our stewardship. It is not a money-raising ploy. Rather it involves the whole of our Christian response to the generosity of God. It is not a financial challenge but a spiritual challenge. Are we up for it?