
It's all a part of the adventure
Wesley Mimico United Church
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by Rev. Dr. Paul Shepherd

Based on Genesis 22:1-14

I have had a long and somewhat interesting history with the company, U-Haul, because I have used their services on a number of occasions. One thing that fascinates me about U-Haul is how their slogans have changed over the years. Their current slogans sound quite friendly. One of them is, “Moving families to better lives since 1945”. Another one is, “Making moving easier”. But I'm old enough to remember one of their older slogans, which was, “Adventure in Moving”. Do you remember that one?

I notice that slogan because I myself have moved enough times to know that “adventure” is perhaps something we don't really want when we move. When you move your home, I think it's much more common to want a complete *lack* of adventure. We want things to be predictable, sensible, reasonable, uneventful. Wanting an adventure when you move is about as likely as wanting to have an adventure when you visit your dentist. Sometimes, we want predictable.

The first time I went to U-Haul as an adult, I went to rent a truck to move from Saskatoon to Toronto. I discovered that the cost to rent the truck was \$1600 plus fuel. And so, being a poor student, instead of doing that I bought a car and rented a trailer. I bought a 14 year old station wagon with a 460 cubic inch engine. That was a massive engine in the style that was popular in the 1970's. That car could pass anything except a gas station. But, car in hand, the adventure began. After buying the car, a friend who knew more than I did about cars inspected my car and tweaked it up a bit. While cleaning the fuel filter he created a situation which later led to an engine fire. And when I got the trailer, I was a complete innocent and actually got as far as Manitoba with about 1 inch of clearance under the trailer hitch. And I won't even tell you about the method I used to load my motorcycle into the trailer! Obviously, I am willing to learn as I go. I won't tell you about the rest of that trip just now, but suffice it to say that when I move,

adventure is just about the *last* thing that I want to add to the menu. Besides, I usually find more than enough adventure without making any particular effort to make more of it.

But I realize that I have only given you a tiny glimpse into my move from Saskatchewan to Toronto. I have only described the actual moving part. The larger story about moving from Saskatchewan to Toronto was much broader than that. That much larger story is about Marjorie and I pursuing graduate degrees at York University. It was about moving to be closer with family. It was about moving to a place with more job opportunities. The story about our move is a much larger and more complex journey. The tiny part of the story which is about the physical relocation and the drive is almost completely irrelevant compared to the big picture that includes the reasons for the move.

[discussion – journey with unpleasant elements]

Our Old Testament reading today is a bit like that too. Abraham is considered one of the “Fathers of Faith”, and is part of the larger story of the Christian faith. If we consider the big story of faith, Abraham is an important part of it. But the story we read today - that tiny piece of the story - is somewhat ... how shall we say it ... unpleasant. Abraham lies to his own son, loads him like a beast of burden, ties him up, and threatens him with a knife. By today's standards, Abraham should be arrested and incarcerated. And we can only imagine what Isaac thought about the events of the story.

In the words of Rick Morley, “The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is about as scary as it gets in the Bible. There are, of course, bloodier chapters with high body counts. But lying helpless beneath Abraham's knife was a child. When I consider preaching this passage, I always wonder if there are going to be many children in church that Sunday. It's also a story that confronts our understanding of the goodness of God. What kind of God would ask this of a father? What kind of God would put a child through that? One could even say that this story is embarrassing, presenting a disdainful picture of God.”¹

I couldn't agree more. But it would be a mistake to dwell on the tiny piece of the

¹ *The Abingdon Creative Preaching Annual, 2014*, page 141.

story that we read today. We should not imagine that that nasty little story frames the larger story. Rather, the larger story frames the tiny story we read today. The big picture is about a much longer story. The bigger story is about faith. The bigger story is about being on a journey with God. The big story is the rest of the Bible.

And I think it's a bit like that with our own journey here at Wesley Mimico United Church. We have been on a long journey too. A journey that has been going for over 150 years. A journey that we celebrated – in part – at our Celebration Service on June 15. A journey that is continuing. Our story, like the story of the Bible or my move from Saskatchewan, is a larger story that contains some unpleasant elements. Like Abraham's abuse of Isaac, or having your car engine catch fire. In a long journey, there are bound to be unpleasant moments.

In fact, I sense that we are coming to one of those unpleasant moments this summer, as we leave our building of 92 years. But really, this stage is just one more stage in the journey that we have been on as a congregation for over 150 years. In some ways it feels like an ending, but we are not ending. In some ways it feels like a beginning, but we are not beginning either. We are simply continuing on a continuing journey. We are continuing on our continuing journey of faith.

Should we grieve? Sure. Should we learn to let go? Of course. Will we find new life as we move on in new ways? Absolutely!

This chapter is ending. The next chapter awaits! As Lego said this week, "You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading the last one."

Thanks be to God.

Amen.