

“Ready, Set, GO!”

Genesis 12:1-4a

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Psalms 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills

- from where will my help come?

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

God will not let your foot be moved;

God who keeps you will not slumber.

God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;

the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Ready, Set, GO!

Genesis 12:1-4a and Psalm 121

March 5, 2023

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

This past Wednesday, after a 6 month enrollment in the Rev. Mike School of Driving, our own Cameron Boswell took his Road Test and...PASSED. To say this star pupil and (mark my words) the school's *final* graduate, had to learn a great deal through this experience would, of course, be a gross understatement. Cameron had to learn all those things associated with being a licensed driver: both the objective things like stopping, starting, turning and the dreaded parallel park, as well as the subjective things like driving defensively, anticipating possibilities before they happen and driving in the snow and slush.

However, I also challenged Cameron to learn a whole host of *other* things as well, like the definition of "objective," "subjective" and the difference between the two. Things which have absolutely nothing at all, and precisely everything to do with driving a car.

II.

Please recognize the incredible ordeal that Cameron has just lived through: he had to endure an entire hour alone with Rev. Mike, in a confined space no less, for just about every week over the past 6 months (how 'bout *them* apples?). As you are all well aware, I can be a *bit* of a talker; and, boy, did I ever talk to Cameron. While it is true I did this in part to teach him to stay focused on driving and not to get distracted, it was also an incredible and rare opportunity to chat him up; both to continue to build the important relationship he and I share, and to try and teach him some valuable life lessons as well: like the importance of *leaning* into life, living with a sense of confidence and hopeful expectation, tuning into what is going on around you and seeing things from other perspectives rather than just your own and, most critically, to not allow *thinking* about things to interfere or prevent you from actually *doing* those things.

III.

Cameron was not the *only* one doing the learning, however. I learned you yell a *lot* less at other people's kids than your own. I learned it is much less stressful to teach someone to drive using *their* car rather than your own. I also learned that, counterintuitively, driving is much more physical than mental. In fact, more often than not, it is the mental stuff that gets in the way of the physical. Which, as it turns out, is true for life as well.

While Cameron spent a stunning number of hours getting *ready* to take the Road Test, and when the day and hour had come for the test he was certainly *set* with all his papers in order and being clear in his head on what he needed to do, he still had to actually *GO!* and take the test, *GO!* do the thing, just *GO!* drive the car. Which is what I find in a lot of young people: they are good at getting *ready*, and more than *set* to take the next step, but the real challenge comes when, now, they have to *GO!* do it.

IV.

In the first of today's scripture readings, from Genesis 12, we find God speaking to Abram and establishing a covenant with him. God will make of him a great nation, and God will bless him, and make his name great, so that he will be a blessing. God will bless those who bless him, and the one who curses him God will curse; and in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Note, this is early on in the story as Abram would later become Abraham (along with Sari becoming Sarah) on the occasion when, after demonstrating a lack of faith in fathering a child with Hagar, God reestablishes a covenant with him, that he would be the father of many nations (with male circumcision being a sign of this covenant; suffice to say Noah got off easy with the rainbow!). Some years later, when he was 99 years old, Sarah conceives and gives birth to Isaac and both are renamed by God.

V.

Back to the story, recognize this was no modest request. Abram and Sari were being asked to leave all they had ever known, both their native land and their kinfolk who served as their community of support, to set off in search of a new place about which they had no inkling. I mean, just the logistics *alone*

of doing such a thing would be paralyzing to contemplate. I'm sure God was well aware, as Abram and Sari most assuredly were, that there would be so much to do just to get *ready* for such a journey, not to mention getting *set* in their own hearts and minds to say their good-byes knowing full well they almost certainly would not return and never again see their people or the place they had always called home.

God doesn't fuss with any of *that*, however. Instead, God simply says, "GO from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." So...Abram went, as the LORD had told him.

VI.

The story of Abram and Sari certainly speaks to the issue of what it means to "GO!" and the dynamics involved in stepping out in faith, and with courage to an unknown and uncertain future. To some degree, this is something each one of us has experienced and can understand. Which is why we know it is so vitally important that whenever *we* see a new person come to church, as every single one of us did at some point, we go over to greet them and help them to feel welcome.

"GO!" though, is different than the "*Going*." While the first step is absolutely crucial, the 1000 miles to follow matter as well. Which is certainly borne out in what happens to Abram and Sari in the story that follows from today's passage. It is my hope today that we might, first, recognize all that getting *ready* and being *set* doesn't matter very much unless we finally muster the strength and the fortitude to actually *GO!*; and, second, to help us in what follows: that is, to help us in the *Going*.

VII.

You see, Cameron wasn't the *only* one who had a Road Test this week. This past Monday our son, Arlo, left Ithaca college, where he is a senior majoring in Sound, to drive to Poughkeepsie to catch the train to NYC and work at the Tibet House US Annual Benefit Concert at Carnegie Hall put on by composer Philip Glass and Friends. Turns out that two of these friends are Kris and Mike, our neighbors at the lake. They invited Arlo to come down, fed him, put him up in a hotel, and got him to the gig. It was an incredibly generous thing to do and a wonderful opportunity for Arlo; one for which he was tremendously excited.

Monday morning, though, he called me from the side of the highway to tell me that while driving 60 mph the front driver side wheel came off, rim and all, but he managed to screech to a halt by the side of the road. He called AAA, they gave him a tow to a local garage that was able to do the repair, and within a few hours he was on his way to the train station.

VIII.

The whole experience, though, left me and Linda just shaking our heads: *darn kids*. The fact that he did not get killed, cause harm to another, or seriously damage the car was the only thing that (somewhat) eased the sting of the \$600 repair bill (*cha-ching!*). However, the garage did not have a new rim upon which to remount the snow tire so they put on the ridiculous, tiny, donut spare they include with cars now to save money for the manufacturer. They told him it would get him to Poughkeepsie, but that he would have to find a new rim on Thursday afternoon after returning on the train from NY and before making the 3 1/2 hour drive back to Ithaca. Well, there is no way that would happen very easily in a strange town where he knew not a soul while, at the same time, needing to get back for classes. So, yes, you guessed it, this looks like a job for Super Dad!

IX.

Which is how I found myself Thursday morning with one of the car's all season tires already on a rim, a floor jack, coveralls and a four-way cross lug wrench in the back of Linda's car heading off to make the 5 hr. drive to Poughkeepsie where I would swap out the tires in the train station parking lot and, then, turn around and make the 5 hr. drive back home. Like I said, a job for Super Dad.

The fact that I took Linda's car is integral to the next chapter of the story of this rather long, multi-day and multi-faceted Road Test. Though I love my recently acquired and very jacked up and cool looking full-sized Toyota Tundra pick-up truck, it features a 4.7 liter V-8 engine which while quite powerful only gets about 10 mpg (ouch). In comparison, Linda's sporty, red, little Honda HRV with its 4 cylinder, slightly-larger-than-a-lawn-mower engine gets over 30 mpg. A no brainer when you plan on driving over 550 miles, right?

X.

While I admit Linda's Honda is economical and awfully fun to drive, the cameras, gizmos, and other technological bells and whistles are somewhat mind-boggling to me and, because I do not drive it very often, not something I have really had the time or inclination to figure out. Chief among these, is the key; or, more accurately, the lack there of. Whereas I am accustomed to an actual *key* you insert and leave in the ignition to turn over the engine and drive the car, with Linda's Honda there is, instead, a button you push to start and start the car. Of course, there is little, plastic remote key fob you need to have with you in order to enable the push-button starter; which turns out to be a vital aspect of the operation (as I soon discovered).

I left at 7 a.m., and made my way to Lowville, then Boonville and stopped at the Kwik-Fill in Barneveld just north of Utica; there I would hop on the Thruway east. I got out, filled the tank, locked the car with the key fob, used the bathroom, walked out, unlocked the car with the key fob, started up the car and drove off.

XI.

At this point, the story line takes a sharp turn. No sooner had I driven out of the gas station that a message appeared on the display telling me the remote was out of range; which, of *course*, I promptly ignored. I *know* I put the remote in my pocket! What!?! Do I look like some kind of idiot? I know what I'm doing! I'm Super Dad! I have to be GOING! My son needs me! *Stupid* computer message...HA!

Two hours later, and a 150 miles south, I pulled off at the last rest stop before Poughkeepsie to use the bathroom. I parked the car and was about to press the "Stop" button to turn off the car when, for some inexplicable reason, I paused a moment to think and remembered that message. Better safe than sorry, I said, so I got out and checked all my pockets and guess what? No remote key fob. So, I check them again and again: no key fob. It didn't take very long for it to dawn on me that I must have dropped the key in the Kwik-Fill parking lot. I had Linda call them, they kindly looked but could not locate it; it just was *not* there.

XII.

No question this was a pretty bad mistake, but not nearly as bad as what would have happened if had shut off the engine: Arlo would be stuck at the train station, I would have been stuck at the rest stop, and Linda would be been driving my truck for 200 miles at 10 mpg to bring me the spare key fob, with Arlo waiting the whole time; and, then, we'd have to drive my truck back again, along with Linda's car.

However, like I told the kids last week, nothing is the end of the world: there is no problem which cannot be overcome, no fall from which you can't bounced back. It was then I realized, so long as I didn't turn off the engine, so long as I kept GOING, it would be ok. The worst case would be the cost of replacing the remote (not cheap, I'm sure) and the time in the doghouse I would endure in having lost not the key, but the stylized, silver, female goddess figure that Linda *loves* and has had on her keychain for over 20 years (don't let her kind demeanor fool you, Linda's doghouse is *not* a place you want to be; this was going to hurt a bunch).

XIII.

So, not only did I GO! I just *kept on* GOING; never once shutting off the engine. I sprinted into the bathroom (yet another take on the need to "GO!") and, because no had driven off with my unlocked and running car, I made it down to the train station changed out the tire (with the help of the maintenance guys at the station) met Arlo and got him on his way, then got myself blissfully pointed North, gassed up again with my engine running all with the goal of returning to that gas station in Barneveld in the remote possibility (pun intended) of finding the car's key fob and avoiding an extended stay in Linda's doghouse.

Of course, throughout this many hour drive I was thinking about today's sermon as it relates to this multi-faceted story. While some sermons are like pulling teeth, and others seem to almost write themselves, every once in awhile there comes a sermon which, due to circumstances, just *begs* to be written; this was one of those sermon.

XIV.

Yes, after all the time and energy to get *ready*, to be *set* and, then, to finally *GO!* what remains is the *GOING*. In this last regard, here is what I took from my own Road Test this week and would share with all of you this morning. If you get the opportunity to *GO!* (like to go to Carnegie Hall) by all means *do so*; regardless of the effort required. If, while you are *GOING*, you get the sense that something just isn't right, like a loud noise coming from your car, then by all means stop and pull over and figure it out before the wheel comes off. Remember, while you may feel alone, or are actually alone in your *GOING*, others will appear and arrive to help you when you need them. Don't get so caught up in the *GOING* that you ignore the warning signs that come your way; signs that indicate there might be a better way to be *GOING*, or that you should turn around and backtrack when required as you'll be glad, later, that you did so. And, conversely, sometimes you need to just *keep GOING*, no matter what; because if you stop you may never get started again.

XV.

After many hours of pondering these things, I finally arrived back at the Kwik-Fill to make my own final search. I pulled into the lot and, miracles of miracles, it was there that I found it! I parked at the same pump, got out without putting on my jacket and started looking around; no luck. With my initial, cursory search having proved fruitless, I realized this might take awhile. Back up north, the temperature had dropped, the wind was howling and I was just in shirtsleeves so I ducked back into the car (which, at this point, had been running continuously for 7 hours) to grab my hat, then my scarf and, finally, my coat. When I snatched my scarf off the passenger seat, there, sitting there beneath it, was the key complete with the stylized, silver, female goddess figure that Linda *loves*. It/God/the Goddess was with me the *entire* time; I held the key all the while. I did not know if I should laugh or cry.

(Continued on next page.)

XVI.

It was in that moment I remembered today's second scripture reading from Psalm 121:

I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will our help come?

Our help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

God will not let our foot be moved; God who keeps us will not slumber.

God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is our keeper; the LORD is our shade at our right hand.

The sun shall not strike us by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep us from all evil; God will keep our life.

The LORD will keep our going out and our coming in

from this time on and forevermore. Amen.