

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
January 3, 2016
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV
Jeremiah 31:7-14

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth . . . (Jeremiah 31:8 N.R.S.V.)

God Is in the Relocation Business

In our Old Testament Lesson, Jeremiah assures the exiles in Babylon that God will move them back home to Jerusalem. There is an article in the January 2016 issue of Homiletics magazine (pg. 9) that points out that God is in the relocation business; hence the title of this sermon.

In scripture, God is always moving his people about. Abraham and Sarah moved from Mesopotamia to the promised land in Canaan. Joseph was taken sold into slavery in Egypt and later brought his whole family there. Moses led the people of God out of Egypt and to the edge of the promised land. Ruth moved from Moab to Judah. The Jews were taken captive and moved into exile in Babylon. Joseph and Mary moved to Egypt soon after Jesus was born, and then back to Nazareth. Jesus himself was always on the move, wandering the countryside proclaiming the good news.

We live in a society where people are becoming more and more mobile. People move for school, or work, or retirement. Some people will move many times in their life. I counted it up and I have moved 11 times in my life. Every time except the first one, I have looked forward with excitement and anticipation to the move. That first one was when Uncle Sam moved me to Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas for Air Force Basic Training. That one scared the beejebers out of me.

Even so, each move had its share of sadness, stress, and disorientation. The article in Homiletics pointed out that many companies offer moving benefits to ease the transition. Some of those benefits include paying for the moving truck, help with selling your old house, and help with buying a new house.

In this new year some few among us will be moving physically to a new location. Others will be moving emotionally with a change in attitude. Hopefully all of us will be moving spiritually closer to God.

As a wise person once said, "You cannot stay where you are and follow God."

That being said, all moving has its share of sadness, anxiety, stress, and confusion. The best companies offer moving benefits to ease the transition. God also offers certain benefits when he calls us to move.

1. Some companies pay to have your furniture and stuff moved to the new house. That is one of the benefits that the Presbyterian Church offers to incoming pastors. The church pays moving costs. That is something that has been a tremendous blessing for me. Even so, even the best moving companies lose some of your stuff. How this happens is somewhat of a mystery. Kind of like what happens to socks in the washer and dryer. No matter how careful you are to put only pairs of socks in the wash, there will be one or two single socks coming out of the dryer. Where those other socks go is one of the mysteries of the ages.

It's that way with moving too. One of the church members from the Parkersburg Church once told me that three moves is equal to a fire. That is to say that you lose about the same amount of stuff in three moves as you would lose in a small house fire. I don't know if he is correct, but it sounds right.

So when God calls us to move, he helps us to keep the important things of the kingdom with us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Some also helps us by losing some of our baggage. Some things we are better off without. For example: enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, bitterness, and guilt.

2. The best companies pay the moving costs. God also takes care of moving costs. With God it is all free. God moves us from lost to found, from condemned to saved, from defeated to victorious. God does it all through grace. Our salvation and our trip to heaven is all covered by the death of Christ and the grace of God. That is all free!

3. The best companies offer 24/7 access if you have questions. God does too.

A. God wants us to call. In Jeremiah 33:3 God says, "Call to me and I will answer you."

B. God knows your name and will recognize your voice. When we call to God in prayer we will not have to "press #1 for English" or explain what we need and who we want to speak to several times. In John 10:3 Jesus compares himself to the good shepherd. "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

C. God is always in. In Psalm 121:4 we are assured, "God will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber."

4. The greatest benefit that God the mover offers to us is that he will go with us. Too many people think that God is like the construction boss. Everybody gathers in the morning and the boss then sends them off to do the various tasks that need to be done. Unlike the construction boss, God can be everywhere at once. So God never sends us into danger alone. God always goes with us.

In Isaiah 43, God says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the

rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. . . . because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, . . . Do not fear, for I am with you.” (Isaiah 43:2-5)

Remember also these words of Jesus when he was about to ascend into heaven. “And remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

In this new year, God will be asking us to relocate. For God is always on the move and we cannot stay where we are and be with God. Some that may be called to make a physical move, but for all of us are called to be on an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey with God.

Perhaps the first move that we would want to make in this new year, is a move back to God’s side. Over time it is possible to simply drift away from God.

The story is told of the old farmer and his wife who were going into town in his pickup truck. She sighed and said to him, “Sam, do you remember when we were first dating, we used to sit close together on the seat as we drove into town?” Sam looked over at his wife as she leaned as her door. “Well,” he said, “I haven’t moved.” That is probably funnier for the men than for the women. Full disclosure, Sam probably had moved emotionally. For in marriage both people have to be working on the relationship.

However, when we are talking about our relationship with God, we know that God will always do his part. If in the journey of life, God seems to be far away, we might ask ourselves, “Who moved?”

God is calling each of us to move spiritually in 2016. We can start that move by relocating ourselves back to God’s side through repentance, through worship, and through service. God has promised to help us in all our relocations. For is in the relocation business. And God will never send us where he will not go himself.

Amen.