

Year A Lent 2 1st March 2026

Genesis 12:1-4a. Romans 4:1-5, 13-17. John 3:1-17

Freedom!

As I entered my final year of training for ordination I was asked to express any limitations on where I could be placed for my curacy. I suppose I could have played it safe and stated that I wanted to be in the Central Belt and be close to family and friends. But that didn't feel right. So, throwing caution to the wind, and trusting in the Holy Spirit, and in the SEC's bishops, I said I would be free to be placed anywhere that the bishops felt matched my profile and style of church. Now, I was aware that there were not many places able to take a curate, but I had no idea where they were.

Someone had whispered to me (they shall remain nameless because I am sure they should not have tipped me off, and maybe their tongue was loosened by the champagne at the wedding reception we were coincidentally both at) that I was heading to the south-west, into the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway. That felt alright, and I awaited the formal letter to inform me where I would be placed, if I successfully completed my training, that is. So, imagine my surprise when I opened a letter from Bishop Bob Gillies, Bishop of Aberdeen at that time, indicating I was invited to consider a curacy in Aberdeen. Now my geography is pretty good and I can tell my north-east from my south-west.

So, some months later, I found myself driving around Aberdeen with Bishop Bob, as he explained the church I would be going to and the area of Aberdeen I would be ministering in.

The point of this story is not to show how the SEC can change its mind in a matter of weeks, but to show what can happen when we open ourselves up to new experiences, when we don't set limits or reduce our options. When being safe, doing what we have always done can limit our experiences and our growth, our outlook and engagement with people who we add to our list of friends.

In our reading from Genesis 12 we have the first words God said to Abram. You might have imagined God had conversed with Abram before this, but go and

read Genesis for yourself and see that this is the first time. In the previous chapter Abram's father set out from Ur to go to Canaan, but only made it as far as Haran, where he settled with Abram, Sarai, and Lot. We don't know why he left Ur and why he stopped short of Canaan.

God told Abram to leave his father and the land he knew and go with Sarai to a land God would show him. God didn't tell him the destination, just 'a land I will show you'.

How often do we think we travel on a journey without knowing the destination? I think it would be exceedingly rare. On a major road trip don't you punch in the postcode of your destination to your sat nav and off you go?

But, now think again. Think about your life. Did you have a very clear idea of the destination you wished to reach? In terms of life partner, in terms of a job, in terms of location? And have you always had things so sussed and been in such total control that your every wish and dream has come to fruition? That your plan for your life that you mapped out in fine detail was indeed what happened?

Maybe in your life, but definitely not in mine! I hope that in your life you may have been willing to let go of things, not hold on to dreams made years before, not to recognise that each new experience shapes us afresh and slowly changes us. What our expectations and dreams were may not fit who we are today or the world we find ourselves in.

I think we are all on an exciting life journey where we really don't know the details of our life journey, and so perhaps we are not as dissimilar to Abram, being led by God without knowing his destination. We are all on a journey of discovery. We should expect, and indeed hope, that the journey will shape and change us, will actually transform us into something different from what we might have envisaged.

In our gospel reading that fabulous character Nicodemus is on a life journey of discovery and transformation too. He comes to Jesus in the dark. We come to understand that although he may have visited Jesus in the night time, John is also using this to tell us that Nicodemus is about to have a spiritual awakening, moving from dark to light, from unknowing to spiritual enlightenment. Jesus

doesn't tell Nicodemus the destination of his life journey – in fact Jesus tells him that the wind blows where it chooses, and the Spirit will move him in ways he can't plan. Nicodemus doesn't run away from this notion, and I can imagine him being quite fired up by it.

John 3:16, almost at the end of our reading today, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' is often read as an individual route to personal salvation. You tick off 'belief'. You can tick off 'love'. So, phew! You can tick off 'eternal life'. But when read in the context of this whole passage I don't think John is quite giving us such certainty about personal salvation. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit blows through our lives, where it chooses. If we are attuned to the Holy Spirit to any degree, surely our journey is to some extent influenced by the Holy Spirit. And if we do believe 'we have been born of the Spirit' (verse 8) surely we must be open to the Holy Spirit blowing through our lives, and we must adjust our sails accordingly.

So, do we acknowledge that God wishes to have an influence on us? In terms of this reading, the Holy Spirit blowing winds through our lives that we can catch. Or do we tightly furl our sails, tie fast our boat to the harbour, and never dare set sail at all?

Although our journey through life cannot be punched into a sat nav, to be a physical point in a map, surely our destination is to journey towards love. It is to journey each day, hoping and being aware of small moments of transformation, of constantly becoming and being, and seeking to be an expression of love and connection, of helping others know what love is, which is the kingdom of God come to earth.

Maybe take a few minutes to look at your life in retrospect. Sometimes it is only in looking back that we see where we changed course, where we took the path less travelled, where we diverged from the original plans we had. I'd like to think some of those moments are when we became aware of the Holy Spirit, the wind that blows, with no clear geographical destination, but leading us on a journey closer to God, not based on the best laid plans of mice and men...

And what of now? Do you feel able to see, sense, discern where the winds of the Holy Spirit may be blowing you. God hasn't finished with you yet. Where is God calling you on towards? What new adventures in faith?

It is good to have plans, to help us move in the right direction. But it is also good to hold on to them lightly, and be ready for God through the Holy Spirit to prompt us to journey on a different path. Be open to those promptings.

I did, and went from a job in HR to being a priest, moving to Aberdeen and then here to be with you. You may regret God nudging me in this direction, but I don't. None of those were in my plans.

And remember how it changed Nicodemus. Our gospel story reveals what an encounter with the living Christ can do: transform the jaded attitude of one who thinks there is nothing new to learn about God into hope, which is "new every morning".

Be open to the Holy Spirit blowing through your life. May you open your sail and catch its power, and grow, in faith and in love, in exciting and unexpected ways.