

Three years ago, my first sermon with you was on this scripture. I think it is so neat that the lectionary listed this scripture for this Sunday, as if we have come full circle. At the beginning of our journey together, I invited you to have a faith like Abraham's, like we see in this scripture. A faith that is so devoted to God that one still follows God up the mountain, not just down the mountain. A faith that answers the extraordinary call to sacrifice the most important treasure in your life – even when you don't want to nor understand how God could even ask you to make such a sacrifice. A faith that listens and surrenders, especially when you have no idea how you can actually do what God is calling you to do. A faith steeped in Big, Hairy, Audacious work.

Do you remember talking about BHAG's, the Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals? The God-sized, impossible dreams. The dreams so big that we don't see how we can accomplish them on our own. Dreams and goals that will force us to rely on God to accomplish instead of trusting and relying on ourselves, like Abraham.

Abraham probably thought, "I don't know how I'm going to do this, but God will see to it. God will provide." Abraham continued each step of the process with that trust, fully relying on God at each turn. He got up early to make the journey up the mountain. He gathered the wood needed for the fire. He asks for help to carry the heavy load and arranges for two men to go with them on this impossible journey. He listens to God at every step, to Isaac, and to the angel from heaven. Abraham doesn't want to do any of this, but he does the hard work and fully relies on God to lead him to the right place.

For the past three years, we have walked together, up the mountain, carrying heavy loads, listening to God's direction and

fully relying on God to lead us to the right place. At each step, we came together, prayed, listened, and trusted that God would provide. At times, it was not easy. The work God called us to was hard and seemed downright impossible, yet we kept walking up the mountain and trusting that God was leading us, that God would show up and provide.

We set and accomplished some Big goals. We increased worship attendance and membership. We increased giving. We created an inspiring, welcoming worship experience. We created new ministries, groups, and discipleship opportunities. We served the community in new ways. These big goals often got hairy too because when God moves in big ways, things can get a little hairy. I'm sure it got a little hairy for Abraham when he tried to explain to his son what was going down.

We have done some pretty incredible work together, but God isn't finished with Chapel of the Hills. We only set big and hairy goals to lay the foundation, but now is the time to listen for God's audacious goals. The bold and daring dreams, the recklessly brave and innovative goals that will take Chapel of the Hills into its next chapter.

Our God is in the business of being audacious and asks us to be audacious too. God calls us to Big, Hairy, Audacious work, so that we allow room for God to show up in big, audacious ways. God asked Abraham to do the unthinkable. It sounded like a crazy thing to do, but Abraham listened. God directed Abraham where to go, and when Abraham was willing to go all the way with God, God provided.

When we have a faith like Abraham's that trusts God to provide, our faith is strengthened. Our faith grows and we continue transforming more like Christ. If we play it safe and only set goals that we know we can accomplish, it makes us look

good, but it doesn't give room for God to show up in a big way. We are relying on our own strength. But if we trust that "God will see to it," no matter how crazy it sounds, God *will* see to it. God provided the ram in the thicket for Abraham, and God will provide whatever is needed for the BHAG's that God is dreaming for Chapel of the Hills now.

You may be feeling like Abraham right now. That you have no idea how you are going to accomplish what God is calling you to do. But, keep doing what Abraham did. Listen, come together, help each other carry the heavy load up the mountain, and trust that God will lead you to the right place, that God will provide. God is not going to lead you to unrealizable goals. It will require everyone to do their part. It will be a Big ask and sacrifice, and it might even get Hairy, but God will provide.

The God moments that I've experienced here in the last three years are too numerous to name. Every time we were up against something big and hairy, God provided. The prayer group can attest to that. We prayed for some really big and specific things and God worked them out in unimaginable ways. All God is asking you to do is to listen, answer by saying, "Here I am," and God will see to it. God will show you the right place and will lead you at every step. Do the hard work together and trust that God will provide.

I will close by reading a prayer from unfoldinglight.com:

O Beloved, spring of mercy,
call us, and no matter the path ahead
we will go with you.
In strange cities of change and challenge

you will guard us and guide us.
In meadows of beauty and grace
you will open our eyes to see.
Through deserts of hardship you will
provide.
In narrow passages of hurt and suffering
you will be present.
In landscapes of loss and sorrow
you will be enough.
When you lead us into the world's pain
and move us to act for justice
you will be our nerve and our strength.
When we step into the unknown
you are with us;
you are the light in the darkness;
yes, even the darkness itself is you.
O Holy One,
Lover, Beloved and the Flowing of Love:
beckon, and we will go with you.
Bless us and be with us as we look to the
future
and step into the present.¹

Amen.

¹ Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *We Will Go With You*,
www.unfoldinglight.net.