

In the 1870s, two inventors Elisha Gray and Alexander Graham Bell both independently designed devices that could transmit speech electrically. When Bell began experimenting with electrical signals, the telegraph had been an established means of communication for some 30 years.

Although a highly successful system, the telegraph, with its dot-and-dash Morse code, was basically limited to receiving and sending one message at a time.

Everyone wanted a multiple message telegraph. Just improve what we already have was the mantra of many. Bell began working on his "harmonic telegraph".

By October 1874, Bell proceeded with his work along with Thomas Watson, a young electrician whose services he had enlisted. His financial backers thought he was working on a multiple telegraph.

If they had known what he was trying to do they would have never supported him. After all we just need a better telegraph not a new invention.

March 10 1876 marked not only the birth of the telephone but the death of the multiple telegraph as well.

The communications potential contained in his demonstration of being able to "talk with electricity" far outweighed even a multiple telegraph.

Speaking through the instrument to his assistant, Thomas A. Watson, in the next room, Bell utters these famous first words, "Mr. Watson -- come here -- I want to see you." And the world changed overnight.

There is probably not anyone here today who has not used a phone. We have all made calls to someone and we have heard calls received from someone. We have probably heard something

in a phone call that has changed our lives.
I know I have. Especially when a DS is calling.

Calls and change very often seem to go together.
In our scripture lesson for today
David is about to get the call of his life.
He has no idea what the future has in store for him
or where his calling will take him.
He only knows that he has a calling
that has been confirmed by the priest Samuel.
Who could have ever thought that a king
could be born in Bethlehem?
That could never happen could it?

Notice in this passage that the one called
is not the one everyone would expect.
Even Samuel the Lord's chosen
saw Eliab and thought surely the
Lord's anointed stands here.

But the Lord said to Samuel no no no
don't look at his outside look at his inside.
God was saying don't always look to the
all American football star or the latest beauty queen
because I call all kinds of people in-between.
Everyone here has a calling, not a select few.

But with calling usually there comes change.
If we admit it we are all fearful of change, of transitions.
We might even say change is good.
But quickly add you go first.

June for most of my adult life has been a season of change.
Two years ago I was saying goodbye to Brentwood
and the 6 ½ years of ministry as their Pastor of Inviting Ministries.
During those years we grew from
4,500 members to 6,800 when I left.
And as big as that sounds there were many
that I had grown close to who made it feel like
it was the smallest church in the world.

A new beginning awaited me at Bethlehem
just down the street and a new family was about
to be created as Susan and I would be
married at the end of July.

And I left behind a beautiful parsonage
that I had worked on for many a day
but a new house of our dreams awaited us in Spring Hill.

Now its June 2005 two years before I leave Brentwood
and I have no idea in a couple of months
that my wife of nine years is going to ask for a divorce.

Now its June 2003 and I am an expectant dad
waiting on the birth of my beautiful daughter on July 10th.
I am there in the delivery room for the c-section
and I can't imagine a greater miracle than birth.
For seven years we tried and prayed that
God will allow us to have children.

After two miscarriages we had given up hope.
My wife at the time had come to grips with that fact
and wrote a devotion in our advent devotional
about Hannah praying for a child and
receiving Samuel whom she dedicated to the temple.
Weeks later we found out she had been pregnant
when she wrote those words.

We didn't know what we were going to have,
or at least I didn't.
I think we have taken too much of the
mystery out of life because we don't like
to be unprepared or surprised.
It all goes back to that change thing again.
When we did find out we named her of course Hannah.

Its amazing how scripture connects through
our personal stories and calling isn't it?
There is the story of another couple in the bible
who didn't have children and yet he would
be called the father of many nations.

But in Genesis 12 he is still a
youngster at the boyish age of 75.
Hey in the bible that is young.
His father lived to be 205.

And when I thought about the journey we start today,
the scripture I kept coming back to was Genesis 12:1-2.
The Lord had said to this young man Abram
“ Leave your country, your people and your father's household

and go to the land I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation and
I will bless you and I will make your name great
and you will be a blessing.

Now there is a collect call from God that most of us
don't want to accept the charges on isn't it?
That kind of calling is going to bring transition and change.
Susan and I know all about transitions.

The transition of a new marriage, new family,
new church over the last two years.
Our house is in transition at the moment as it awaits
someone to lease it while we had to pack 60%
of our stuff just to show it.

It feels hollow and devoid of our personality.
Simply becoming a house again.
Goodbye home of the last two years.
Goodbye Spring Hill.

We have had the hardest transition as we have
had to figure out how we can still be involved
in Hannah's life as we live in Pleasant View
and her mother lives in Spring Hill.

I admit we were spoiled to have been so close
but that is one goodbye Susan and I couldn't do.
So she will leave Spring Hill Elementary
and enter David Lipscomb Campus School in the fall.
Now we will see how in the heck we are going to afford it.
Another transition.
And of course there is the transition in our hearts
as we left our Bethlehem congregation
and begin anew with all of you.

There is the getting to know time in that transition
when you don't know us and we don't know you.
I told Bethlehem in my last sermon that it makes
you wish you could bottle or write down
all the recommendations from your last church
and just pass them along to your next to get the green light.

Instead you have to start from scratch
and build relationships all over again.
Just thinking about all this change overwhelms me

and you might ask why in the world would anyone submit to this kind of lifestyle for themselves and their families? The answer is calling.

Writer Jack Kerouac puts it this way

"What is the feeling when you're driving away from people, and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? -it's the too huge world vaulting us, and it's good-bye. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies.""

It's the next crazy venture that allows us to say goodbye to the place we know and love and come to the place where hello is just the beginning. A new beginning.

It is the knowledge and the faith that has been confirmed in our hearts that tell us we can do nothing else. And Abram especially shows us what calling takes. Trust. Ruthless trust.

During times of transition, what we most need to practice is "ruthless trust." Brennan Manning has written a brilliant book by that title and tells the story of John Kavanaugh who went to work for three months at "the House of the Dying" in Calcutta.

He went not only to give help, but to receive it. He was seeking a clear answer as how best to spend the rest of his life.

The first morning there, he met Mother Teresa. She asked, "And what can I do for you?" Kavanaugh asked her to pray for him. "What do you want me to pray for?" she asked. He voiced a request he had long been burdened about and had come half a world seeking the answer for: "Pray that I have clarity."

To that simple but sincere request she said firmly, "No, I will not do that." When he asked her why, she said, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of." When Kavanaugh commented that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for, she laughed. "I have never had clarity, what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."

We have to trust that God's calling in our lives will work out,
if we only trust God's divine leading.
We are on a bicycle built for two and guess what?
when you answer God's call upon your life
you are not the one pushing the pedals
in the front holding onto the handlebars.
You are the one behind enjoying the ride.
So just hold up your hands and let the wind
just sweep over your face.

It's like the older catch phrase from the bumper sticker:
God is my co-pilot. Except we have said that wrong for years.
The co-pilot in an airplane is second in command
and only takes over at the pilot's discretion.
What we should be saying is that God is our pilot
and we do our best as co-pilots to fly the plane
where God wants it to go.

Each one of us has a unique calling.
It may be to the ministry or to something else.
There is something inside of your soul
that calls out to be fulfilled,
that God needs you to do in this world.
Its part of my job to help you find it.

There is something in this world in which
only you can make the difference.
Let me say that again.
Abram felt that. David felt that. I feel that.

There are many of you probably here that
are involved in volunteer ministries
that have been called especially to those areas.
But there are still others who have not answered your call.
Calling is scary because it means saying goodbye
to part or maybe all of our old life.

That wise philosopher Billy Joel once said
to us in a song "Say goodbye to the oldies,
but goodies, because the good old days weren't always good
and tomorrow ain't as bad as it seems".

We fear what the calling might bring that is different.
We often think that tomorrow will never be as good
as today or what we had in the past.

We can never imagine that things might better
or at least as good as they were in the past.

There is an old story about a pastor leaving a church.
At his farewell dinner, he tried to encourage one of the pillar members,
“Don’t be so sad. The next pastor might be better than me.”
She replied, “That’s what they said last time,
but it keeps getting worse.” Ouch.

I hope you don’t feel that way about the future of Pleasant View.
This God we pray to, that we worship,
that we rely on in the bad times,
why do we think that God would have plans to harm us or hurt us?
It this God who says in Jeremiah 29:11
For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.

We have to have faith as individuals and a congregation
that God has a plan and purpose for us that only we can fulfill.
And that we are willing to live out that calling
even when we don’t know exactly how.

Its June 2000 and I am finishing my
first year at St. Paul in Manchester.
My first appointment after seminary.
I have been reappointed for my second year
but Brentwood is about to become my future in an
unusual mid year move in November.

Its now June 1999 and I have just graduated
from seminary at Emory University and I am
moving from Rome GA to Manchester.
Three years before that I was packing a U-Haul
with all my belongings and moving to Athens GA
to serve my first appointment as a student pastor.

Brand new house. Brand new job at Statham UMC.
Brand new school that begins in Aug.
Brand new wife as we are married in Aug.

Its now almost June 1996 and I am wrestling
with what to do with the rest of my life.
Is God really calling me to the ministry
and three more years of school after seven already?

God is calling me out of my comfort zone
to go on a journey with Abram's faith as my guide.

Now its June 1987 a regular run of the mill guy
has just graduated from high school with no plans for college
but with two suitcases in his hands.
But there are other plans for his future.
God's got a calling on his life he just doesn't know it yet.

Who could have guessed on this day
you would be asking who is this new pastor?
Can he preach? What is he going to be like? Will I like him?
Call not only involves change
but it also involves risk and it involves hello.

That brings us back to the one of the
greatest changes at the turn
of the 19th century the telephone.

Once the telephone was perfected,
people had to learn to use it.
There was a very fundamental question to be answered,
one that seems quite odd to us today,
and that is: What do you say when you answer a ringing telephone?
Talk about a change.

Alexander Graham Bell and his rival Thomas Edison
had different notions about how to let a caller
know that you'd picked up the phone.
When Bell invented the phone he didn't use 'hello' at all.
He used 'ahoy.' He used it twice, 'Ahoy. Ahoy.'
And Bell was not even in the Navy,
so we don't know why he insisted on using a call that way.

But if you study the origin of the word 'hello,'
it may come from 'halloo,'
which is the call of a ferry boat operator,
and you called them over when you wanted
a ferry boat to come to your doorstep.
Hello also comes from the French word Hola
which meant stop and pay attention.

Then in 1877 Edison wrote that he thought
the word 'hello' should be used for
opening a telephonic conversation.

When you call on a telephone and you are speaking basically to a stranger, it ran counter to what people expected at that time in their day-to-day meetings, that you would have to be properly introduced. And you're never introduced on the telephone that way.

So you have to find a word or a phrase that very quickly cuts to the chase and allows people to start speaking, and `hello' was pressed into service.

What's unusual about `hello' in the United States is that words that are used in other countries for greetings on the telephone never move to everyday speech, person to person.

But `hello' in America is used both on the telephone and in everyday speech and we are the only country to do that. So on this day of new beginnings I offer a hello to you as we begin our journey together. Hello to Pleasant View. Hello to a beautiful parsonage. Hello to wonderful people. We thank you for your welcome and all of the hospitality each of you are doing to help us feel at home. You have already made being called to a unknown land a little easier and I know that God has a great vision for Pleasant View's future in the days to come. May we all be open to God's call. Amen.

I even got interested in the history of the `hello' badge, which, you know, when you go to a convention, you see all over the place. `Hello, my name is.' And I think I've actually determined the date and location of the invention of the first `hello' badge, which was in 1880 at Niagara Falls, which was the site of the first telephone operators convention. And I found the minutes of the meeting, and in there he's very proud to see that they're all wearing their name tags. And he says, `We have a new word to go on our name tags, the word "hello.'" But I've been looking for years, being a collector, for an example of the first `hello' badge from--it will say, `Niagara Falls, Telephone Operators Convention, September 1880.' So somewhere out there I'm sure one of your listeners has it in a drawer, and I would be delighted to see it.

Used to greet someone, answer the telephone, or express surprise.

n., pl. -los.

A calling or greeting of "hello."

intr.v., -loed, -lo-ing, -loes.

To call "hello."

[Alteration of hallo, alteration of obsolete holla, stop!, perhaps from Old French hola : ho, ho! + la, there (from Latin illāc, that way).]

Word Origin: hello

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Origin: 1885

Alexander Graham Bell's much-talked-about invention gave us not only the new word telephone (1876) but also the greeting hello. To be sure, something like hello had been with us for a long time as a shout that the English had learned from the French in the Middle Ages. Ho là! they would say. It meant both "stop" and "pay attention," or in the words of an early translator, "hoe there, enough, soft soft, no more of that; also, heare you me, or come hither." In various English shouts and reshouts over the centuries, this became holla (1523), hollo, hollow (1542), and hillo, hilloa (1602). For long-distance shouts the ending was lengthened to -oo, leading to halloo (1568) and hulloo (1707). By the nineteenth century the variants included hallo, halloa (1840) and hulloo, hulloa (1857).

It is not surprising that a call to stop and pay attention should become associated with the first telephones. But with all the possible ways of saying it, why should telephones call for a different pronunciation, that of the present-day hello? Because it is rude to shout, and hello discourages shouting. The short e keeps the mouth more closed than o or a, and -lo makes a quieter ending than -loo. Telephones badly needed this civilizing because the first ones required people to shout and the first telephone exchanges were manned by boys who enthusiastically shouted right back. "Nothing could be done with them. They were immune to all schemes of discipline," noted one author. So within a few years, in the mid 1880s, "In place of the noisy and obstreperous boy came the docile, soft-voiced girl"--often called a hello girl in recognition of her civilized calling word. In 1889, Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court included this tribute: "The humblest hello-girl along ten thousand miles of wire could teach gentleness, patience, modesty, manners, to the highest duchess in Arthur's land."

The telephone hello soon became a face-to-face greeting too. It could take the place of How are you? and How do you do?, although it did not replace the informal hi and howdy derived from those expressions. At the end of the twentieth century, there was also a hello? that expressed surprise and a Hello-o-o with an exaggerated up and down of the voice that implied, Wake up! What do you think you're doing?

The call to Abram is a call out of what is familiar into something entirely unknown. Yahweh's challenge to him is about leaving things with which he is accustomed behind and going to a place he has never seen. The command from Yahweh in Hebrew is 'lek leka', an emphatic form which we could translate as 'get going!' Three things are mentioned which Abram is to leave. Yahweh tells him 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house ...'. The pronoun 'your' is repeated with each item mentioned driving home Abram's past connection with them. Each item intensifies the separation require. The nouns progress from the broadest and most distant ('country') to the most intimate and near ('father's house'). By contrast, his destination is mentioned just once: 'to the land that I will show you.' We extend back out to the most distant item with reference to 'land' (//'country') and the pronoun 'your' is no longer attached to the noun. I is now a land that 'I will show you'. Abram does not have any choice in this land nor at this point does he seem to have any stake. Yet this is the calling he receives. This journey into the unknown, which moves between relinquishment and the new, is often still an essential aspect of a move of faith.

In Genesis chapter 12, the biblical narrative undergoes a monumental shift. Genesis 1-11, what scholars term the primeval history, is the history of humankind as a whole, but now the story shifts towards a focus on one people and God's dealings with them, starting with the figure of Abram who would come to be known as Abraham.

And in this text found at the beginning of chapter 12, we see in microcosm three major themes that will under gird the rest of the Old Testament witness to God's activity in and through Israel: call, covenant, and journey. And these three themes are intertwined, so much so that if you want to grasp one of them, you really need to grasp all three.

The story of Abraham (and thus, God's people Israel) begins with a call: "The LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you'" (Genesis 12:1 NJPS). Nothing in the text indicates why God chose Abram to be the one whom God called; Abram is first mentioned in 11:27, in one of Genesis' genealogy lists but the only thing that stands out is that Abram's wife Sarai was barren (Gen 11:30), which sets the stage for the next part of the story.

God calls Abram to go to this strange place, but side by side with the call is the covenant, namely that from Abram would come a "great nation," that he and his name would be blessed (Gen 12:2). And from Abram's point of view, this probably sounds wonderful; his wife is barren, he himself is a nomad from Ur, not a king or warrior. But God has promised him greatness, even if it is primarily a future oriented greatness. It seems like this covenant is a great thing for this one person in space and time and for those who are descended from him.

But the promise is not restricted to Abram, but is the launching point of a much larger project. The covenant with Abram is a continuation of the previous covenant with Noah, which was for the entire creation, a promise that God would not destroy the entire creation but instead would work within the creation for renewal. As such, the covenant with Abram must be seen as part and parcel of God's larger salvific activity, namely the reclamation of the creation that had gone so wrong and fallen under a curse in chapters 1-11. As God promises Abram, the entire world and all who live in it will "be blessed/shall bless themselves" through him (NOTE: the Hebrew verb form of *brk* 'to bless' could either be passive or reflexive. Compare the NRSV and the NJPS).

There is no triumphalism to be found in this promise of covenant, for the covenant is a means to an end, namely the blessing of all peoples. To offer hope and reconciliation to the people of the world, God has called into covenant a people, but a people who are just as much a part of the problem. This is evidenced through the rest of the Old Testament, as God's people Israel go up and down, up and down in their dealings with this God of covenant. Alongside all the stories of faithfulness are the stories of failure; alongside the stories of trust are the stories of doubt. Exodus and exile; deliverance and judgment. Covenant made, covenant broken, covenant restored.

This brings us, in kind of a round about way, to the third theme of journey. The call comes, the covenant is made, but the promise is not yet fulfilled. There is a journey to be

made; Abram undergoes the first leg of it, traveling from Haran where he had settled to Canaan, where God reveals to Abram that *this* is the land which will be given.

And the journey isn't finished, even as Abram stands before the altars at Shechem and Bethel. His descendants, the people of the promise, will have their own journeys to make; a journey to and out of Egypt, a 40 year journey in the wilderness, the journey into the land, the journey into exile, and the journey back. Through it all, the call and the covenant remain in the background, offering hope in the midst of the journey, in those times when the road seems the most treacherous, those words of hope and promise remain in the memory of God's people.

Today we stand as children of this call and covenant. Those promises made to Abram are promises we ourselves cling to in the midst of the world we live in. As we see devastation and destruction, as we witness pain and hurt and brokenness, as our world suffers from war and hatred and oppression, we hear the word of God calling again and reminding us of covenant. Yet the journey is still before us, a journey to try and make the covenant real in this world, to enact those covenant promises, that we might be blessings ourselves to all the families of the earth.

Call, covenant, journey. In these things we see revealed the activity of God, the One who calls us, who makes relationship with us, and who guides us wherever we go. And in these promises, we don't know the entire picture, much like Abram didn't know exactly where he was going when he obeyed God's command to "Go." But maybe like Abram, we'll hear it when we get there. But first, we have to heed the call, trust the covenant, and begin the journey.