

ERECTOR SET RELIGION Psalm 121; Genesis 12:1-4a
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV 2nd Sunday of Lent (March 16) 2014

Psalm 121

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills.
 From where does my help come?
 2 My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth.
 3 He will not let your foot be moved;
 he who keeps you will not slumber.
 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.
 5 The LORD is your keeper;
 the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
 6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
 7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
 he will keep your life.
 8 The LORD will keep
 your going out and your coming in
 from this time forth and forevermore.

Genesis 12: 1-4a

¹ 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. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I 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.' ⁴ 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.

The Worship Committee, after studying the scriptures for Lent decided that Lent is about a journey. And the scriptures we are using talk about the issue of **TRUST** on this journey. Last week, we began Lent in the wilderness.

Today's lesson talks about the **TRUST** that Abram had to have in order to move from the civilized Haran out into an unknown wilderness, just because God said so.

As I danced and played with this scripture, the notion of AN ERECTOR SET, of my childhood years, became a propos in my mind. So, I'm going to go out of the pulpit now and work on one of today's modern versions of the Erector Set, while I talk about this. I invite you to follow along with the tear off sheet of the bulletin, filling in the blanks, that I hope I cover.

1. The first Erector Set, built and patented by Alfred Carlton Gilbert, was sold in the year 1913, and successor models have been used as actual prototypes for such things as:

- the first modern artificial heart by Drs. William Sewell and William Glenn of the Yale School of Medicine,
- the “Soarin” ride at Disney World, and
- Dr. Khevorkian’s unpatented first special medicine machine.

2. Let’s be real clear about this: Abram did **not** play with an Erector Set. It’s just a metaphor that helped me to understand the issue of **TRUST** in Abram’s journey of faith.

3. Today’s poet laureate of Saint Marks UMC, the Rev’d Harold Slate, said that the key of Psalm 121 (that we read in our Call to Worship) is not using the hills to which one lifts their eyes as a **DIRECTION** but rather a **CONNECTION**. What a difference in “ECTION” between **DIRection** and **CONNection**. Perhaps you can see the distinction in the stories of Billy and Johnny.

Billy and Johnny were two lads, now about my age, who grew up with Erector Sets that they got for Christmas.

Billy’s father opened the Erector set for him and explained to him how the steel girder parts fit together with bolts and nuts. All you had to do was follow the directions that came in the Erector set. After Billy’s father explained these basics to Billy, he sat back and watched Billy go to work. Occasionally, Billy would have questions about how the directions were to be read, and applied, to the particular pieces. Whenever Billy asked his father such a question, his father would say to him, ***“Billy, I bet that if you sit down and actually read those directions and try to follow them, without running for help every time you get a little stymied, you will be able to figure it out. Don’t make me ruin this learning experience for you. You go back and see if you can’t get it figured out. I’m sure you can; you’re a smart lad.”***

Johnny and his father opened the Erector set together, and Johnny's father explained it all to him, much in the same way that Billy's father explained it to him. But the similarity stopped there. Johnny's father sat down on the floor with Johnny, and they worked on the projects together. When they got to a place in the instructions where Johnny had a question, he and his father worked it out together. Johnny's father said things like: ***"Jiminy Christmas. Who wrote these directions? Someone from Mars? This doesn't make any sense at all."*** And then they would try to figure it out together. They would laugh and make mistakes, and often times would end up starting over.

4. Billy and Johnny worked on their Erector sets with their fathers in two ways: Billy's Dad made it into a ***DIRection learning Erector project; learning life skills***. Johnny's Dad made it into a ***CONNection Erector project; developing the father-son relationship***.

Billy grew up into being a great directions follower. He is very successful in the business world. He knows how to follow directions. He is independent, and task oriented. He knows how to succeed, and he is, as I said, successful.

Johnny, on the other hand, still has problems in following directions. He is much more relationship oriented than task oriented. He acts like he thinks the relationship he shares with people is at least as important as the task they are working on together. He is very good in working together to form consensus, and has good relationships with people.

4. Billy and Johnny's Erector set experiences ended up shaping how they see, and deal with, life: ***Billy's first response in life is to look for how to follow the DIRections; how to be successful***. ***Johnny's first response is to see life as an opportunity for forming CONNections***. Both are variations on their ERECTOR set experiences.

And, Billy and Johnny, like most of us, tend to see in life what we are looking for.

5. Closely related to these two ways of dealing with ERECTOR and LIFE issues, there are basically two types of ways to practice one's religion (be it Judaism or Christianity.) One approach to religion focuses on an **IDEA**. The other approach to religion is about an **EXPERIENCE**. D.H. Lawrence said that **you can do WHATEVER YOU WANT with an idea**, but **experiences GET AHOLD OF YOU and SHAPE YOU**.

6. Abram gave up his established, and comfortable establishment life, and risked everything, in order to set out on this journey, in Genesis 12. He took that risk, scripture tells us, based on faith. Do you think his faith was a **DIRector project** or was it a **CONNector project**?

Was Abram's leap of faith focused on an **IDEA about God** or was it about the **EXPERIENCES he had with the God Who called him**?

When we have the office visit with the doctor, who tells us, *"I'm sorry; there's nothing more that I can do. You have about six months left,"* what do you think will do you more good: **an idea about God**, or an **your prior experience with God**? Which is more helpful, **some directions that you've read about in the Hospice book**, or **memories of your connection with God that enable to you remember how God always stood by you**?

7. There's a question that we each need to ask ourselves, as we go through our journey (be it Lenten Journey, or Life journey): Is my faith a **DIRector project** or it is a **CONNector project**. Is my faith is focused on an **IDEA** or it is about an **EXPERIENCE**?

You need to know that **IF** it's only been about **directions** and **ideas**, this doesn't mean you simply chose that way. **Billy had no choice of how his father would deal with his Erector set any more than Johnny did**. And for many people, the success that comes from being a good direction-follower

has become the norm of their life. It may be difficult for them to think [now] that anything *else* would be good. ***It's hard to change habits built over time.*** But, with God, T R A N S F O R M A T I O N is always possible.

However, if you've gotten to the point in life where mere ideas and direction-following seem to leave you with an emptiness, and you don't know what an **experience**, what a **connection**, is like – don't worry. Don't push it.

Just be open to the experience, and God who, in Jesus words, says: ***"How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..."*** this God will give you that **experience**, that **connection**, if you look for it ... if you allow it.

Some people may be able to make the leap of faith, with the **TRUST** of Abram, based on **just an idea**, based on **just following the directions**. **But, methinks that TRUST comes from more than just an idea.**

Methinks that the **TRUST** upon which leaps of faith are built – not just for pilgrimages like Abrams', but also for the "*valleys of shadow*" along the way, needs more than just a **direction**, but indeed **requires a connection**; needs more than just an **idea**, but indeed **requires an experience**.

During this season of Lent, as we focus upon our Journey and upon the **TRUST** needed for life, may you find a way to be open to, and to look for, **experiences**, and for **connections**.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.