You have all probably heard the old joke about the smoker who said that quitting smoking was easy because he had done it hundreds of times. We could all probably substitute something else for smoking and have it be just as true. We have all had bad habits we intended to rid ourselves of or virtuous habits we desire to acquire only to find ourselves roughly the same people a few weeks or months later. I know a few instances where New Year’s resolutions have stuck, however, in most cases they are quietly forgotten. What this tends to tell me is that the beginning of the journey is fairly easy; it’s the later stages that are the hard ones. And it would seem that the most neglected part of life is this middle stage, which is really the one that makes all the difference, because it is in this stage that a goal will either be successfully completed or dropped altogether. And at first glance our reading from Genesis today looks like it is all about the beginning of a journey. It says, “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. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I 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.’” God says “go” to Abram and the rest is history. However, if you read the verses that proceed today’s passage it becomes apparent that what we hear today is not necessarily that start. In the proceeding verses we read, “Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there.” From this it looks like they were on their way to Canaan, which is sort of the area of modern Israel, but stopped in Haran, which is obviously not in the land of Canaan but was in what would be southeastern Turkey today. The journey started and then stopped and that is the context of what we hear today. So today God is in many ways showing up in the time where Abram has forgotten all about the New Year’s resolution to go to Canaan and is reminding him to get back on track, to get moving onto his goal. And while I realize that this is only the second week of Lent and that none of you have slacked off in terms of what you promised to do at the beginning of this season in terms of spiritual growth I do want to talk for a moment about the need for encouragement and refocusing just in case you have a friend who doesn’t always follow through with their plans.

We often talk about Lent as if it is something outside of the realm of our normal Christian life. That is it is a season where we do something different than we do the rest of the year. And there is some truth to this, after all if this were not at least partially true there would be no point in making it a different season; however, just because it is different does not mean that we are to seal it off and take nothing out of it into our lives the rest of the year. Last week we talked about our life in faith as being an eternal journey towards God and in the context of today’s reading and the season of Lent in general it might be good to think of part of Lent as being the voice that tells us to keep going, to keep journeying forward. And I think this may be the great forgotten point in our spiritual life – the encouragement to keep going.

One thing that I find a little concerning with weddings is when you hear a bride or groom tell you that their wedding day is supposed to be the happiest day of their life. Now please don’t think I am against nice and festive weddings, but such a sentiment seems to not only put a tremendous amount of pressure on a specific day but also seems to limit the rest of a married couples life together. I mean if you peaked on day one that means it is all downhill from there. Similarly, Christians can be tempted by this same phenomenon, a phenomenon that I will call peak Christianity. Meaning that people see a certain point in time as the peak of their life in Christ. The most common way this expresses itself is the conversion experience. That is when a person recounts the day they were converted. And there is obviously nothing wrong with conversion, but something is supposed to happen after it. I mean when St. Paul had a rather dramatic conversion but he didn’t stop there. He didn’t just go and sit around in the old Pharisees home telling people about that one time on the road to Damascus. No, instead he went on to become arguably the greatest evangelist in the history of Christianity. But it is not just conversion experiences where people get stuck believing that they have hit their peak there are other experiences that are not so obvious wherein Christians seem to believe that have hit peak Christianity. It could be in the form of a certain time in their life in a particular Church – maybe it was during the time of a beloved rector, or a certain level of Church attendance or a time at summer camp. Whatever it was people pine for the good old days and see no reason to grow because they hit peak Christianity at some point in the past.

This morning when God spoke to Abram, Abram could have replied thanks but no thanks. He could have said that he was comfortable where he was and that life in Haran was really the bee’s knees so there was no need to venture to a new place about which he knew nothing. I mean he had already traveled once, what was the point in moving on again? But as we know Abram did move and with that move God did what he promised he made a great nation and blessed and cursed just as he had said.

I seem to be on something of a roll with quoting C.S. Lewis and forgetting from which book it came so let me continue with that trend. Lewis talks in one of his books about a child who sits in his backyard playing in mud puddles. One day the child is invited to go to the beach for the first time in his life and declines because he is happy with his mud puddles and cannot imagine anything greater. And such is the danger for us. We can sit down and say that we have reached the peak and there is no need to journey to the land of Canaan. But there is another possibility; we can use Lent as an opportunity to get us unstuck from wherever it is in which we may be stuck. We can use Lent as an opportunity to remind ourselves that peak Christianity does not lie somewhere in the past, but rather lies every day in the future. For God has greater and greater things in store for us as we grow in our love and service of him.

Our text this morning does not give us enough information to assess Abram’s mental state. We don’t know why he stopped on his way to Canaan, but we do know that he did stop. And here in our reading we have God showing up with both information and promises. In Lent I would encourage us to take some time in solitude and quiet to listen for that still small voice of God and see what it is telling us in both information and promises. It may be to continue on in the direction we are headed. It may be telling us to start up something that we have stopped or it may be telling us to begin something new. Whatever it may be, it will be calling us to grow further in God’s love and care so that we may be his both now and forevermore.