

**Sermon, June 11, 2023**  
**Genesis 12:1-9; Romans 4:13-25**  
**“Ignited: Unfamiliar”**  
**Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor**



In order for our staff to do excellent ministry and keep up with an ever-changing world, we have added some new to us technology. One of those is that we now have the capability to access our files or what we might need from the church remotely, which means we can do a lot of our work anywhere, not just in the office. Something many of you have been doing for years.

Now, to make that work, our incredible business office has been upgrading over time the computers for staff. A few months ago, it became the pastor's office's turn. And so, the old computer in my office has been swapped out for a much needed upgrade and laptop. And I will say it's been a great help. I can work from anywhere, and if I am waiting for a meeting to get started somewhere, I can reach out and do some much needed work.

But, and I understand this might hit certain generations deeper than it will others, so everyone bear with me. It is new. It's new. It's different, and it's unfamiliar. Different and unfamiliar have never been my favorite words. It's great, but it's just unfamiliar, and so I discovered there is a steep learning curve. One must unlearn certain things in order to embrace others.

I think most of us have places in our life where we struggle with the unfamiliar. Where we struggle with the different. Being in unfamiliar territory in our lives is incredibly scary and disorienting. I remember my maternal grandmother came to stay with us one week when I was young. She got up and got a drink of water and then realized she had no idea how to get back to her room. It wasn't a sprawling house. It was a ranch house. But it was unfamiliar to her. And so we found her sitting in the living room where she had been since early that morning.

And, of course, we all felt bad, grandma was stuck in the living room. She laughed it off and said not to worry, she was fine. But she did comment "you know, I would have gotten more sleep if you didn't have so many clocks going off every fifteen minutes". We had a grandfather's clock and another clock that chimed on the quarter hour. And you know how after a while, clocks don't always stay synched? One would go off, and then the other would start. I'm sure it was annoying to her. We just stopped hearing it because it was familiar to us. Our brains filtered out the sound. But it was unfamiliar to her.

I have an acquaintance who was visiting someone else's house one night, and again got up looking for a certain room. But the home was unfamiliar. And they turned into what they thought was their room, but the stairs. They suffered a tremendous fall and were pretty severely injured. She is thankfully recovering very well.

But we understand those stories, we all get the idea that going into unfamiliar territory is dangerous, it's disorienting, and quite frankly, all sorts of things can happen to us. We dig our heels in. We want to stay in our comfort zone. Last week at Annual Conference, we had several teaching moments, and they both began with this: "I am going to take you out of your comfort zone this morning". And my initial reaction is, *no you aren't. I mean, I wish you luck, but it's a comfort zone for a reason. You know why I'm in this zone? Because it's comfortable. And if you are going to take me out of my comfort zone, what am I going to be? Uncomfortable.* The unfamiliar can be uncomfortable to us.

We resist it, and yet I submit to you this morning that while I understand we love the comfort zone, we love the familiar, there are blessings when we move out into unfamiliar territory where it seems strange and dangerous to us. In fact, some of God's greatest blessings in your life will come when you are willing to step out into unfamiliar territory. And at some point, that's exactly what God is going to call you to do. Every Christian is eventually called by God to go into an unfamiliar territory so that we might be blessed.

We are in our Pentecost series we have titled "Ignited." One of the symbols of the Holy Spirit is fire. Fire changes. You can't experience fire or be on fire and remain as you are. So many of us pray that God would send his Holy Spirit, oh, I want to be on fire for the Lord. But do you? We pray that God would set our hearts on fire. And then when He does, it changes us, we get upset. I thought I could be set on fire by the Holy Spirit and stay just as I am. But it doesn't work that way. Anything touched by fire is changed on a molecular, chemical level. That's true for our Souls, as well.

Look at Abraham, he is referred in both our Old and New Testament passages. Just minding his own business hanging out in Ur. It's pretty civilized, he's wealthy, in fact, life is pretty good. And then God says to Abraham, "I am going to bless you with a child." Oh, how incredible! The one desire of Abraham and Sarah's heart is going to be answered. "And through him, you will have an entire nation of descendants." Oh my gosh, God, thank you. "And through one of your descendants, I will bless the entire world." Tears of gratitude run down Abraham's face. "There's just one more thing. In order to have the blessing, you have to go, leave all that is familiar, and step out into new territory."

You see, there are certain blessings, certain promises of God that cannot be fulfilled as long as we live out a couch potato faith. God, I want you to bless me, but I also don't want to get off the couch. Sometimes going into unfamiliar territory is the only way to be ignited by the Holy Spirit.

God calls us to step out, to go in unfamiliar territory, because He wants us to learn to rely on Him. Our faith can become very self-strength centered. I do what I know I can do on my own. God want us to be in places where we have to rely on Him. I heard someone pray once *God, take me so far out that the only way I can be successful is because of you.* When was the last time you prayed that prayer? God, take me so far out that the only way this will be a success is because of You?

God wants us to go into unfamiliar places because it deepens our intimacy with Jesus. We become closer to Him when we rely on Him. We discover just how loving and powerful and faithful He is, not in theory but in reality.

There are times when God leads us into unfamiliar territory because the familiar, while comfortable, is dangerous to us. Sin is that way. I believe many of us are controlled by our sin is not that we are inherently wicked people. And it's not that we enjoy it. I know many people controlled by sins in their lives who hate it but can't get out from underneath it. Many of us live in our sins simply because it's what we know.

I live out this sin, not because I enjoy it, the momentary enjoyment left me years ago. In fact, I don't even think about it. It's just who I am, it's my go-to behavior, it's how I deal with life. And there is still something within that resists, that longs to be free, to be able to live differently, to not live in shame and self-loathing. I

heard God's call to come into a new place, a place of righteousness and holiness, a place of freedom, a home where Christ's character can be formed in me. But I resisted. I refuse to go because it's unfamiliar.

Is God this morning calling you into a new place? Is He calling you into unfamiliar territory? Is He calling you into a place in your life where if it's successful, it must be Him? Is He calling you to let go of your self-reliance and rely on His faithfulness and goodness? Is He calling you to let go of your pain and hurt, let go of your sin and become His? Will you go? Amen.