**FAITH #3 – ABRAHAM #1 *MM***

**Heb. 11:8-10 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.***

**Last week we thought about Noah whom God sent on a journey. He didn’t know where he was going – it turned out to be Mount Ararat in modern-day Turkey (Gen. 8:4) – and he had to trust God entirely to get there – he and his family were drifting rudderless on the water. Because he travelled by *sea* he had to have clear instructions from God on how to build a boat (Gen. 6:14-16) – an *ark* – because, as far as we know, he had never seen one before.** **It was all done *by faith (Heb. 11:7).***

**Abraham, too, didn’t know where he was going. It turned out to be Canaan, the Promised Land, of course - modern-day Israel and Palestine. He had to trust God entirely to get there – well, of course he did, if he didn’t know where he was going! And, unlike Noah, he travelled by *land.* But, just the same, it was all done *by faith.***

**Actually, when he was called he wasn’t called *Abraham*. He was *Abram*. I remember when I first read the Bible as a teenager, I thought I’d found a misprint! Hebrews is anticipating his name-change here. I’m sure you’ve noticed that many people in the Bible either renamed themselves or were given a new name by God. Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was originally Sarai (Gen. 17:15). Jacob, mentioned earlier, became Israel (Gen. 32:28). It happened in the New Testament, too. Probably the two most famous examples are Peter and Paul. Simon became Peter and Saul, Paul (Ac. 13:9). Our names are our identity, so a name-change in the Bible is always significant, unlike when 23-year old Tyler Gold became Mr. Tyrannosaurus Rex. (At 23, I would have thought he would have known better!) So, for example, Simon became Peter *the Rock (Mt. 16:18)* because Jesus was doing some building and He needed Simon as a foundation, or, rather, as it turned out, according to Galatians (2:9), a pillar.Why did Abram become Abraham? Well, we’ll look at that another time, but, seeing as Abram means *Exalted Father,* and at the time he was renamed he had only one son born in dubious circumstances (Gen. 16), you’ll gather that it’s to do with his convoluted family life. Did you know that *you* have another name that God has given you? You have – it’s just that, like Abraham not knowing his destination even though he believed that it existed, you’ve got a new name, but that you don’t know what it is yet! Jesus said to the Christians in Pergamum that He would give those who remained faithful *a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it (Rev. 2:17).* Husbands and wives sometimes give each other pet names that only they understand – it seems that Jesus communicates with us on a similarly intimate level!**

**Where were you when you first heard from God? Abraham was in his home city of Ur (Gen. 11:31). Ur - remember that, won’t you? It’s useful in quizzes. Actually, it’s not:**

 ***Where was Abraham’s home town?***

 ***Er….***

 ***Correct! Next question….***

**Ur was not a good place to be. Today it’s in Iraq, so it may still be a bit dodgy, but, then, as Ronke told us last week, it was a place where false gods were worshipped. In fact, Joshua tells us specifically that Abraham’s family were pagans – *Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham….lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods (Jos. 24:2).* Ur was a centre of moon-worship. Now, the moon is only a lump of rock. It’s not worth worshipping. But, because it appears to shine (it’s actually dark but, because the sun’s so bright, it seems to have a light of its own) and because it seems to change shape in the sky and it moves and it has a cycle in sync with a woman’s menstrual cycle (although actually it’s the other way round), you can see how fascinating and alluring the moon was to ancient pagans. I say *was,* but I once met a moon-worshipper in Devon who told me that, on moonlit nights, she would disrobe, go up to her flat roof and commune with the heavenly objects. I made my excuses and left before she had the chance to invite me to join her! Like the ancient Chaldeans in Ur, she was worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. It’s Hallowe’en this week. Now, modern Hallowe’en is *not* an act of worship - for most it’s a bit of fun - but it *is* the soft end of paganism and behind it are the false gods. And every false god is, ultimately, a devil in disguise (Deut. 32:16-17)!**

**But God had chosen Abraham and so he called him to leave Ur. As Paul said, *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons (1 Cor. 10:21).* When the trick-or-treaters come, don’t *treat* them, will you? God told Abraham to have faith and to go. And *By faith,* we read, *Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.* He had faith, but not *blind* faith – he didn’t know *where* he was going, but he knew he was going *somewhere.***

**What does Jesus say to us? *Follow me (Mt. 4:19).* That requires faith, but not *blind* faith. He leads us. And, unlike Abraham, we *do* know where we are going. *In my Father’s house are many rooms,* He said. *I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (Jn. 14:2-3).* If you follow the moon, you will just go round and round in circles as it arcs up into the sky, drops below the horizon and rises again behind you! In fact, after the full moon, it will gradually wane until it disappears and your guiding light goes out. Jesus offers us a double guarantee – He will lead us and, to be doubly sure, will come back to meet us on the way and take us home!**

**But the path of faith is never easy as we are learning from Hebrews 11. I was hoping to talk about Abraham’s tent and Isaac’s and Jacob’s too. But, guess what? We’re out of time! I’ll carry on next week. Meanwhile, Happy All-Hallows’ DAY on November 1st! Look at Hebrews 13:12 - you are one of those who are “hallowed”!**