

## **2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT (Cycle A)**

March 20, 2011 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Back in the last century . . . in 1999, Thomas Cahill wrote a book entitled “The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels.” He looked at the world-view of most of the religions and cultures of the time and saw an essentially circular pattern – plant, cultivate, harvest, rest, plant again. An endless cycle of Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring.

He suggested that one of the “gifts of the Jews” was a change in the way people looked at the world around them. When I was studying philosophy, some of those egghead professors called it “*Weltanschauung*” – a German word that means essentially, the framework of ideas and beliefs through which a person interprets his world and interacts with it. So if you ever want someone to think you’re one of those University of Chicago types, throw the word “*Weltanschauung*” into the conversation somewhere.

Cahill wrote that before the Jews, the various ancient religions and philosophies saw human life as just part of an endless cycle of birth and death – time was like a wheel, spinning endlessly.

Somehow, the ancient Jews began to see things differently. They came to understand that time had a beginning and an end. Our world is a story, a narrative, moving toward some future conclusion that can be foreseen through revelation.

### **MOVE**

The natural extension of this is the idea that human beings are individuals with unique destinies, choices, rights, hopes, dreams aspirations, a belief in progress, the sense that tomorrow can be better than today. Cahill suggests that this was a critical change in human thought that eventually made western civilization as we know it possible.

Thus individuals like Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the Pharaoh, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, are even more significant than we might realize.

So often in Scripture, and so often in our Sunday readings, we hear stories about how God intervenes in human history – how specific individuals, touched by God, change everything – the whole direction of the human race.

This is another one of those Sundays when we hear a reading that tells us of one man touched by God, whose actions made all the difference.

## **MOVE**

The human race had been around for a long time before God called Abram. Adam and Eve and their children and grandchildren had lived and died. Noah and his family had been saved from the flood. The Tower of Babel had risen and fallen. A lot of time had passed since the creation, and a lot of people had come and gone, lived and died, unremarked and unremembered. But today, we hear how God chose a particular time and place, and one particular person – Abram – to begin the revelation of Himself that eventually brought us all here, to this church, today.

Today, God touches one man, in one particular place and time. God calls Abram to leave his homeland, to leave his father's house, and travel to a new homeland that He, the Lord, will give him. God promises Abram that He will make of him a great nation, and even his name will be a blessing. Even today, we speak of three great religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – as Abrahamic religions. The Lord chooses Abram and his descendents as His own.

Ogden Nash wrote a strange little poem about it . . .

How odd of God  
To choose the Jews.

Maybe he meant, “how odd of God to choose anyone.” How odd, how interesting, that God would intervene at all, let alone through one man, one people.

Abram listens. He has a choice, and he obeys. He trusts in the Lord, that His promises will be fulfilled. It’s the beginning of something really big, something that made us who we are.

Abram was a young man, in the prime of life. Well, he was seventy-five, and that’s looking younger and younger to me all the time – but he was apparently living in his father’s house, where he’d lived all his life. Now God is asking him to pull up stakes and go somewhere else, to another country, somewhere he’s never been before. Scripture doesn’t say anything about how Abram must have felt about all this – I can only imagine. But he did it. And look how it all worked out.

“Abram went as the Lord had directed him.”

## **MOVE**

In today’s Gospel, we hear an account of another spectacular event, another unique moment in divine revelation – the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus. Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet and miracle worker are present to reveal to the apostles that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. It all must have been pretty spectacular. But remember that Elijah was the one who heard the voice of God as a tiny whispering sound.

Only three of the Apostles are there to see it, and to hear the voice of God. You can tell from the story that they’re pretty well overwhelmed and confused by it all. But Jesus cautions them not to tell anyone what they saw and heard until after His resurrection from the dead.

## **MOVE**

Most of the time, we listen to the readings on a particular Sunday – at least I hope we’re listening – and don’t really make much of a connection with what came before and what comes after. I think I’ve talked about that before.

Today is one of those Sundays when we can look back, and look forward, and see a theme develop as we travel through Lent. Last Sunday was the first Sunday in Lent. You remember – we heard the story about Jesus fasting alone in the desert, then being tempted by the devil.

Other than a couple of angels there at the end, the only characters in the story were Jesus and the devil. Only the devil was there to see who Jesus really was and what that meant. The rest of the world has not yet seen it.

Through the Sundays of Lent, the door will open a little wider each week. More and more people will receive the revelation that Jesus the Lord, the Messiah, has indeed come into the world.

Next Sunday, we'll see Jesus reveal Himself to the Samaritan woman at the well. She already knows that the Messiah is coming. In next Sunday's reading, she begins to understand that this man standing before her, this man talking to her, the man to whom she has just given water, is none other than the Messiah Himself.

The Sunday after that, the Jewish leaders will learn that Jesus is the Messiah, through the healing of the man born blind. Through the blindness of one man, the power of God is made visible to the world. Then the Sunday after that, the greatest miracle of all – victory over death itself. Lazarus is raised from the dead, for all to see.

So you see, over the next few weeks, we'll see how salvation history unfolds – slowly, little by little, over a period of time, at the times and places of God's choosing, and with the people of God's choosing. Sometimes it seems almost hopeless. But God's promises will be fulfilled.

Through it all, God is fulfilling His promise in His own way and in His own time.

“We are moving!”

I love that image in Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*. A man on a raft, drifting aimlessly on an endless ocean . . . until suddenly he stands up and realizes that the raft is moving! Sometimes when I mention that particular French Jesuit – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin – I get a little static from a few people – he was more or less in official disfavor for a while . . . maybe he still is. But Teilhard wrote of “The Omega Point” – a cosmic view of Christ as the ultimate goal to which all mankind is moving, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Slowly, it all happens – time passes, many incidents, adventures, progress, setbacks, fresh starts, recastings, tired Gethsamenes and tense Golgothas – but we are moving!

## **MOVE**

Jesus didn't show the glory of His divine nature very often, as He did today. Mostly, he preached, and taught, and served as an example. Most of His miracles involved relieving human suffering. But some were signs for his apostles to understand who he was and what his mission was. And to remind them of the need for faithful obedience. That's what we see today.

Maybe Peter said it best – “Lord it is good that we are here.” I hope Peter speaks for all of us.

“Abram went as the Lord had directed him.”

## READINGS

### Reading 1

Gn 12:1-4a

The LORD said to Abram:

“Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk  
and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.

“I will make of you a great nation,  
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,  
so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you  
and curse those who curse you.

All the communities of the earth  
shall find blessing in you.”

Abram went as the LORD directed him.

### Responsorial Psalm

Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

**R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Upright is the word of the LORD,  
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;  
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

**R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,  
upon those who hope for his kindness,

To deliver them from death  
and preserve them in spite of famine.

**R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Our soul waits for the LORD,  
who is our help and our shield.

May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us  
who have put our hope in you.

**R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

### Reading 2

2 Tm 1:8b-10

Beloved:

Bear your share of hardship for the gospel  
with the strength that comes from God.

He saved us and called us to a holy life,  
not according to our works

but according to his own design

and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,  
but now made manifest

through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus,  
who destroyed death and brought life and immortality  
to light through the gospel.

### Gospel

Mt 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother,  
and led them up a high mountain by themselves.  
And he was transfigured before them;  
his face shone like the sun  
and his clothes became white as light.  
And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them,  
conversing with him.  
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,  
“Lord, it is good that we are here.  
If you wish, I will make three tents here,  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”  
While he was still speaking, behold,  
a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,  
then from the cloud came a voice that said,  
“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;  
listen to him.”  
When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate  
and were very much afraid.  
But Jesus came and touched them, saying,  
“Rise, and do not be afraid.”  
And when the disciples raised their eyes,  
they saw no one else but Jesus alone.  
As they were coming down from the mountain,  
Jesus charged them,  
“Do not tell the vision to anyone  
until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”