

## Second Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

Genesis 12:1-4a and Matthew 17:1-9

“Spoiler Alert!” How do you respond to this trendy warning that the speaker is about to reveal the end of a story you may not have finished? Ever notice how the speaker thrusts the ending on us? How pushy! Do you block your ears and hum the national anthem? Do you eagerly lap up the ending, happy to be “in the know”? Can you finish the story or is it finished for you?

The gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent is always the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus and it definitely requires a spoiler alert. The Transfiguration is a vision of the glory of Jesus, which he had toned down, in a manner of speaking, during his human existence. This is who he really is, the dazzling equal of God’s revelation in the Law and the Prophets, here represented by Moses and Elijah. In fact, standing in the center, Jesus surpasses them. Jesus is the beloved child, who tickles his parent pink. Jesus’ magnificence evokes the same reaction from Peter, James and John that Moses and the Israelites had before God on Mount Sinai: they fall down in worship and are afraid, as puny humans ought to be before the Creator of the Cosmos. Although Jesus will suffer and die, the true ending of the story is glory.

Besides worship and awe, what do we do with this revelation? We have several options in responding to this spoiler alert, thrust upon us by God. We can ignore it and we often do. We live as though we were the only sane actors on the stage of life. We say we believe in Jesus, but we do not “listen to him,” as the voice from the cloud commands. Our prayers are one-sided. We make choices that sometimes align beautifully with the mercy and self-sacrifice of Jesus and sometimes align with the self-aggrandizement, self-protection and greed of the devil. We do not reflect much on anything.

Another possible response is to push for a different ending. After all, who really wants to go through the humiliating, painful crucifixion? It is too hard and maybe even stupid to make the changes to stop global warming or to welcome immigrants and lift the needy out of poverty. As older folks, we may not approve of the choices many young people are making, so we hunker down in our churches and whisper to each other about how sad it all is. As younger folks, we may look at all institutions as failures and decide we must start from scratch, creating a world detached from tradition and rooted in ourselves. We endlessly increase military spending. We endlessly buy shoes.

We have two other options, forcing the ending and living out of the hope it brings. We see both of these in the story of Abraham and Sarah, the start of which we read this Sunday. In the first eleven chapters of Genesis, humanity kept falling further into sin: Eve and Adam disobey, Cain murders and human evil requires the Flood and the destruction of the Tower of Babel. Now God tries another tack: God reveals to Abram a plan for blessings. (We do not know what God said to Sarai. The story-tellers were male-biased.) I never stop being in awe of Abram and Sarai’s willingness to buy into God’s plan. They did not know God. They were past middle age, well off and settled. A baby, let alone a great nation, was out of the question. The promise of a five-fold blessing drives them, even though their new life is not easy. They have to wait another forty-five years for Isaac. They get caught in the wars of the local kings. They are given an arid land. So they also try to force the ending several times. Twice they lie about their marriage when Sarah is abducted into a harem. Sarah gives her servant Hagar to Abraham to produce an heir. Yet, God insists that Sarah, not anyone else, be the mother of this nation that will bless the earth. God has a plan and it *will* unfold.

Despite trying to force the ending, Sarah and Abraham mostly cooperate with God’s plan. They live out of hope, trusting that God knows what is happening and will bring about the promise. They listen to God. They worship God. As they do, God fulfills the promised blessings. Ruth Haley Barton writes in “[Discernment as a Way of Life](#),” “sometimes abandoning ourselves to the will of God is like floating down a river... We do not set the direction or the speed of the current; rather we seek the best way to let the current carry us in the direction God has for us.” The alternative is “being toppled by its force.” The ending is set, and – spoiler alert! – it *will* come true.

- ❖ It is not unusual for one person to respond to the Transfiguration in each of the four ways listed above. Can you see yourself doing each one at various times?
- ❖ Ask God about your role in salvation history. In other words, how is your life a blessing for others?