

Lent II, Year "A": Genesis 12:1-8; Psalm 32:12-22; Romans 4:1-5 [6-12] 13-17;
John 3:1-17

Title: Change is in the Air

There is a saying that the only things certain in this life are death and taxes. While this may be true, I think there is a third thing that is certain, and that is change. Change is pervasive in our lives. It seems everywhere and all the time. It seems that maybe the only thing certain NOT to change is that things change.

I once read a story of an English woman whose husband divorced her after thirty-eight years of marriage. His complaint was that his wife was compulsive about re-arranging the furniture. Every day of their married life, it seems, he would come home to find tables, chairs, couches, the television set, beds -- all in a different spot. Finally, he said that he could not *stand* so much change in his life anymore and he divorced the poor woman. Her response apparently was that she didn't understand why her husband was so upset. Surely everybody has their little obsessions.

Well, maybe we don't experience that much change in our lives -- at least not on a daily basis, but we do all, each of us, live in a world where there is a lot of change going on. Experts tell us that our generation has experienced more change than the previous ten generations combined. Three years ago they said that the total knowledge baseline was doubling about every two years. Now, it is estimated that the knowledge base is doubling about every seventy-three days.

Change, it seems, is in the air. And although we have a tendency to resist it, we are sometimes called to embrace it.

Today's scripture readings are about two men who were compelled to deal with change. One, Abram, was called to it and quickly embraced it. The other, Nicodemus, was attracted to it like a moth is attracted to a light breaking through the night darkness; a moth which sort of flirts with the light not quite knowing what to do with it or about it.

It is by way of our reading from the Old Testament that we are introduced to the first of the two characters in this morning's drama -- Abram by name, who turns out to be a key figure in the story of the Hebrew people, and by extension, a key figure in our Christian story as well. In our reading this morning we find Abram to be a

seventy-five year old man. Apparently, the first seventy-four years of his life are of little consequence, at least as far as the story teller is concerned.

Ultimately Abram, or Abraham as he will later come to be called, will live to be some one hundred and seventy-five years old and his story will occupy the next eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis. But I get ahead of myself.....

At this point in the story we are just learning that Abram was a successful and wealthy man. We are not told how he came to be successful and wealthy, only that he has many possessions and servants. In other words, he is comfortable. He has arrived, he assumes, at that point in his life where he can enjoy being settled and savor the fruits of his labors. But God, it seems, has other ideas. And Abram hears God's voice. And God says to Abram, "Go. Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you..... So, Abram went as the Lord had told him."

Thomas Cahill, in his book *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* says that the two boldest words in all of literature are simply these:

Abraham went

Indeed, the case can be made, and made with some power, that these are indeed some of the most significant words in all the Bible for it was from the life of this one man, who was so remarkably and unflinchingly obedient to the voice of God that an entire nation would spring forth. And not just a nation, but as Cahill says, the way the whole world thinks and feels -- even to *this* very day -- is attributable to the obedience of this one man.

But what did the voice of God call Abraham to do? It was to change. In his case it was to change his place of residence. To move geographically. To what *exact* place, to what end, and for what purpose God apparently did not think it necessary to tell him. God just said, "Go," and Abraham went. And it is from this single act of obedience from which springs the rest of this story. Not just the story of the life of Abraham, but the rest of the story that is human history.

With that said, let us turn now to the Pharisee who visits Jesus late one night. Like Abraham, Nicodemus was up in years as they say. A senior citizen. He had worked hard to arrive at his station in life. He was a member of the Sanhedrin who were the leaders of the people's religion -- and in that time and place that also meant that he was an important member of the political power structure as well. He was learned. He was well respected by his peers and by his community. In other words Nicodemus had arrived. We might say that he had it made and he had accomplished most everything that, as a young man, he had imagined himself having achieved as an

older man. Time to settle back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of his labors and the admiration and respect due him from his peers.

But God, it seems, has something else in mind for ole Nicodemus. Nicodemus' spirit was stirring. Winding his way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem the question which pushes him through the streets this night is almost palpable. You can almost hear it in the air: "Is this all there is?" There has to be more to the story. There must be a more satisfying conclusion." And so he would seem to be a man on a mission of some urgency. He moves with a sense of purpose. And we sense that he sensed that the answer to his yearnings might just be found with this Jesus. And so he steals through the night seeking an audience with the itinerant Rabbi -- Jesus.

It's almost as if behind the questions he asks of Jesus we can hear echoes of a life which has settled comfortably into a strong set of beliefs and a strict adherence to orthodoxy -- beliefs which all together would seem to make up a kind of spiritual and religious security blanket -- and yet which is not all together satisfying. Indeed, thinks Nicodemus, he has fallen in love with a religion -- albeit a religion that leaves him wanting and, which at times even seems to suffocate.

His religion, his belief system has served him well, but not well enough. We can say this for here he is standing before Jesus asking, "Is there not more? Is there not more that I am to know and to understand?"

It's as if Nicodemus' questioning of Jesus suggest that he imagines that somehow in the presence of Jesus he might breathe in a kind of fresh air; an air which is made up of the stuff of a more creative and dynamic faith than he has known before. Maybe the religion of his yesterday could profit from some fine-tuning.

Someone has said that Nicodemus is not unlike a beggar who shows up at a spiritual soup kitchen driving a Porche. He has the outer trappings of a rich man, but on the inside he is bankrupt and starving.

And Jesus says, "Yes. Yes, it's true Nicodemus. There is more. There is much more. But you wont find it in a theology book. You wont find it in the strictest keeping of the law. You wont find it in the diplomas on your wall. You wont find it on the path of good works. In fact YOU wont find it at all..... However, if you but let it, it will find you.

This is Jesus speaking of God who is the Great Mystery. This is Jesus introducing Nicodemus to the way of of the mystics.

Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, if you are open to it, the "more" will find you as sure as the wind finds and washes over one walking down a lane on a summer's eve. And you will neither know where it comes from or where it goes from there. You will only know that it is. And that it has changed you. And it will have changed you

because you were open to being changed. And it will have changed you because you were open to hearing the voice of God. And because you were open to responding to it.

And there you have it.

Two men who are changed -- *birthed* if you will into incredible new lives, a kind of second life, a fresh new way of seeing and being that neither could have imagined. Lives that neither could have possibly experienced had they not been open to it and had they not both sort of bet the farm that there is indeed more.

Abraham left the comfort and security of his home. Nicodemus ventured out of the comfort and security of his well tailored, well crafted, theology book-bound spiritual and religious construct. And on the basis of this experience he risked it all. He risked his standing in the community.

Had not each man been available to God, to hear God's voice, and had not each been to willing to respond with a kind of "Yes," their names would likely be unknown to us today. And certainly, we would not find ourselves reading about them on a Sunday morning here in the 21st century.

Well, may we also be available May we also be of a mind to say a kind of "Yes." May we be available to be washed, and refreshed, and renewed by the winds that blow through this Gospel.

And so I dedicate this day and I dedicate this sermon to the two most recent converts, now baptized and fully enfolded into the community of the Christ. By way of Chrism and Holy Water but mostly in the presence of and by the grace of God, Suzanne and Margaret were changed this morning.

Lent is about change. Lent is about changing those things in our lives that need changing. Lent is about blessing those things that need blessing while saying 'good bye to that which inhibits our blesseing. And to knowing the difference.

Lent is about being available and open to the voice of God. May this Lent be a time of listening, a time of hearing, and and a time of responding for us all.

My friend Ken Kendrick who lives in Suches put it this way in his book- a book which was spawned by his experience of walking the El Camino in norther Spain. The book is eintitled *Pilgrimage: The Sacrament of Walking*. Therin Kendrick writes: Faith is not an intellectual decision to believe in the face of doubt. Faith is the act of taking doubt by the hand and going out for a walk to see what God has in mind. Suzanna and Margaret, we wish you well on your journey – in all the ways that that rightly means.

But let us all do this during this Lenten season. Let God take us by the hand and go for a walk so that the Divine Spirit of the Universe might speak to us about who we are to be and where we are to go.

Amen.