

Gen. 12

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.

2 Tim 1

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.

Mt. 17

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.”

The transfiguration allows Peter, James, and John to experience Jesus’ divinity. The transfiguration points them and all of us toward the Resurrection. As we move more deeply into the mysteries of suffering and death in the Lenten season, the Transfiguration reassures us, the Glory of God is here, among us, inextricably tied to what is most painful in our lives, the loss and death of those we love. Importantly, this experience of Jesus’ Transfiguration follows closely Jesus’ claim that *he* will suffer and die. And again, after the Transfiguration, Jesus returns to the theme of his own suffering and death AND he tells the disciples that they too will have to take up their cross. There is no space between life and death; they are two sides of the same coin. And really two sides diminish the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ’s life, suffering, death, and resurrection. More than two sides, the paschal mystery is the interconnectedness of **life, suffering, death, and resurrection**. The paschal mystery is the great gift of love and wisdom that Christianity brings to the world.

Let me begin by talking about Abram. Abram and Sarai leave the city of Ur of the Chaldeans for a nomadic life. Some of the most memorable stories from Genesis are a critique of the empire of the Chaldeans. A strong message that empire is not good for humans or the rest of creation emerges in these early chapters of Genesis. Sarai and Abram reject city life for the vagaries of wandering to create a life of faith in the God of hospitality. They live and worship in nothing more substantial than tents. Build temporary altars. Move from country to country. We know they are blessed with family *because they host three strangers*. They tell their family the stories of creation, Cain and Abel, Noah and Naamah and the Ark, the Tower of Babel. We know too that the Tower of Babel is a reference to the Ziggurat, that Ziggurat dominated the life of their city of birth Ur. While a symbol of power for the king of the Chaldeans, the people on the ground must have seen the Ziggurat as a place of great suffering. The Ziggurat, that great tower that exists even today, a structure not unlike the later pyramids and our contemporary skyscrapers. In ancient times as in our own, impoverished and enslaved people build these monuments for wealthy, powerful men who want to be immortalized. *These towers* do not

benefit the people; they do not benefit the earth. In fact, they are an arrogant scourge on the earth wasting human lives and precious resources from our beloved earth. While the story of Genesis 11 says that God took away our single language, so that we couldn't keep building the Tower of Babel to the gods, we know in our own time, we reduce the beauty that is the diversity of our languages in the name of convenience and commerce and once again we have what has become a universal language, English, to build great moments to our egos. English, simultaneously the language of wealth and exclusionAnd Sarai and Abram share the wisdom of this story with their children who share it with their children. And they share the story of Noah and Naamah, the ark, a floating peaceable kingdom that ends with God's sign of friendship, the rainbow, and instructions to eat with care. And Sarai and Abram's faith and the wisdom they received in this relationship to God has the potential to bless all of us as we navigate how we treat our siblings (how we treat each other), what we eat or don't eat, how and what we build and who builds it. Abraham and Sarah's new life comes from leaving; they face the loss of family, of what is familiar, of their culture in leaving Ur. Their story is one of death of the familiar to new life of faith; their story is one of the blessing that relationship with God, one another, and the earth brings. (*big pause*)

Before going up on the mountain Jesus has been telling the disciples that he will suffer and die. They cannot bear it; they will not understand. When Jesus takes a week-long break with three of his closest friends, he goes into the wilderness and up the mountain. And after 6 days, he appears transfigured. His appearance wholly reassures his good friends Peter, James, and John of his absolute oneness with God, Jesus is the Christ, the divine one. And they hear clearly that Jesus is the beloved of God and feel the affirmation of God's love in their own closeness with Jesus. When they return from the mountain to continue their work, Jesus goes one step further, not only will I suffer and die, but each of you must take up your cross. The experience of God's glory in Jesus' transfiguration ties together the reality that death and life are inextricably linked. It is futile or worse to wish away death - we recall Jesus' words to Peter when he denies Jesus will die, "Get behind me Satan."

In holding death and life together we experience our own oneness with the transcendent. In that moment of feeling the beauty of fall or spring, the grace in caring for the dying,

reconciliation after estrangement, telling the story of our grief, feeling the desolation of unpredictable climate. Facing even embracing our failures, our losses, our inadequacies paradoxically ties us to our glory, *the glory of God in being fully ourselves* in our living and dying, in our rejoicing and grieving. Even in our mourning or most especially when we weep, we feel that we are not separate at all but painfully and beautifully connected through our Creator.

We protect what we love. So we must allow ourselves to fall in love although we know our hearts will break. We must be like James, John, and Peter and accompany our friends on their journeys up the mountain. And we must love the mountain itself. This place of ancient wisdom and respite. What we love we will lose. When we connect deeply and experience the divinity that shines from each of us, we will be reassured in our journeys of love. Our own entering into the paschal mystery - life, suffering, death, and new life unites our lives with Jesus Christ. Love of self, neighbor, God, and all of God's creation. And what we Love and lose *will be transfigured* into something new.

For those of you who connect with a poetic telling -

Each grain of dust contains the soul of the miracle. Your face had been covered in the dust of grieving, and upon the day's wakening your ashes will disperse throughout the garden. Your ashes will fly to the sky to make love to the stars. -Joan Miro