

So, what's the plan, Stan?

Modern society gets (and gives) big points for planning. We've got calendars, organizers, daytimers, weekly minders, even computer programs that can tell us where we're supposed to be every hour of every day.

We've got the career plan, the dating plan, the mating plan, the family plan, the vacation plan, the kids' college plan, the dental plan, the insurance plan, the installment plan. Pretty much a plan for everything .

So did our First reading's heroic team of Abraham and Sarah. They had big plans. Finally (in their 80's!) a son to carry on their lineage and take over the family business. Finally, everything was working out the way they wanted it to.

Until, at the Mountain of Sacrifice in the land of Moriah, they came face to face with the reality that for every situation there are two plans — their plan (small “p”) and THE Plan (big “THE” and big (very big)“P.”

Imagine the chaos, the confusion, the resistance, the crisis of faith, the crushing pain at that mountain top as Abraham prepared to dash his dreams, lose his beloved, start from scratch yet again.

Or maybe it wasn't such a struggle for him. Maybe in his wisdom he actually got it, the difference between his plan and THE Plan. Maybe he so believed, so trusted the Grace that surrounded him that *surrender* to the moment was more important than *control* of the moment. Maybe he'd already found his happiness by lovingly embracing the people and circumstances in his life as perfect in that

Abraham, Isaac, and the *BIG* Plan

moment, as beautiful as they were intended by God to be.

No “If only...”

No “When he finally...”

No “If they'd just...”

Simply relinquishing control and saying “This isn't what I'd imagined, what I'd have planned, but God's imagination is even bigger than mine.”

Maybe he'd already learned the sanity of letting go and letting God.

And then, in our Gospel, there's Peter,

probably the first documented case of foot-in-mouth disease. Here's this burly fisherman, the pope-in-training, having followed Jesus for three years, still thinking that hanging out on mountaintops with celebrities (dead ones will do) is what Jesus was all about.

“Let us build tents here for you, Moses and Elijah.”

Yeah, now there's a great plan—let's, just days after the healings at Geraseth, days after the washing of Jesus' feet by the local call girl, let's set up a retirement villa on Mt. Tabor.

How could Peter be so dense?

Easy!

Isn't that what we all do, listen to the part of the plan that matches our hope for the plan? Don't we want to hear the neat stuff (the glory, the rewards, the golden parachute) and forget about the blood, sweat, tears, the failures, the struggles that make it possible?

Peter's no slouch here, no more than you or I, not as interested in the cross, the self denial, the daily nailings and hangings, as in the benefits package, the “What's in it for me” stuff.

It's not that Jesus didn't want the Transfiguration experience for himself or his disciples— heck, he invited them up to the mountain. It was a good thing for them all to recharge their batteries, reconfirm their mission, reestablish

their connection with the patriarchs and matriarchs that guide them. It wasn't the *being* there that was the problem, it was Peter's insistence on *staying* there that shows he missed the boat.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus shows himself as quite capable of retreat, introspection, mantric ecstasy. But, he never stays in that safe, secluded place that place of sheltered comfort where we so like to stay. He doesn't stay because he knows that true comfort comes not from transcending the human experience, but from embracing it.

Through Peter's petulance, Luke reminds us that as much as Jesus calls us to the interior, to the visionary, to the beatific, he calls us as well to the practical. The mundane, the tangible, the difficult. We need the glory, the ecstasy, the sense of safety and comfort, but we can not live there.

We are actually at our best when the vision fuels us, not when it lulls us to sleep.

So, let's not be too hard on Peter. Maybe in this reading and so many others he doesn't get it right off the bat, but his heart is in the right place. Like us, he's excited about what Jesus has to say, but he tends to hear more clearly what is consoling, and less clearly what is challenging.

Perhaps this balance of consolation and challenge, retreat and action, is why Lent can work so well for us as a season for figuring out The Plan.

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So, our music this week speaks to our need for the comfort of God's mercy ("Hold Us in Your Mercy") the challenge of God's call ("Return to God"), the invitation to understand and embrace God's Plan for us, ("Hosea, Come Back to Me") and the celebration of the joy of God's creation

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