

Life Begins at 90

When I get on the train at Hackettstown for Penn Station in New York City I see it as my little vacation. These days the trains are not very full, I think that the conductors are nice, and trains have always been something that has given me great comfort.

Growing up in Nebraska trains took on an almost mythical nature. They were the “good” jobs and I had a few relatives who worked for Union Pacific railroad. The history of the state of Nebraska is connected with the train that crosses through the center of that state.

Whether it was a historic anger at the federal government for taking away land for rails, or the opportunities that it engendered for the state, people of my generation knew the train was both geographically and sociologically at the center of the state.

Every college break I took the train from Chicago to Nebraska for my visits home. I would enter Chicago’s regal Central Station. I would see the staircase featured prominently in the movie *The Untouchables* with a baby carriage. It was hard to believe that such buildings were ever made in a time when everything was steel and glass.

To me the train has always been magical.

One thing I notice on the train now that I couldn't have in my Midwest sojourns is the woods. As they zip past on the train, I am given a partially obscured views of the terrain beyond. Whether it is a neighborhood, or a lake the woods alter the complete picture of the landscape. For someone who came here from the desert and grew up in the mostly barren plains of the Midwest this is obvious to me and might be something that you have never noticed.

There is a piece of architecture that I have encountered that brings this type of experience to mind. It is my favorite room in the Art Institute in Chicago. Tucked in the very back of one of the side galleries dedicated to Japanese art is another small side gallery. Its name is the Ando Gallery and it is named after the architect Tadao Ando who created it in 1992.

The room is a filled with Japanese partitions behind glass cases, but they are not the most amazing part of this room. When you open the glass doors the first thing that you encounter is a forest of pillars that are set symmetrically on the floor. It can be disorienting at first,

but the quiet nature of the room and your movement changes the perspective of what you can view . You can walk through these pillars straight toward the Japanese screens or as most often is done a person wanders in the forest of pillars to realize that every movement reorients their field of vision. When in the forest there is no way to see the exhibit has a whole, but each movement reveals something new.

There is nothing that better illustrates for me the revelation we are afforded in this world by our God.

In our passage today we have an elderly man being promised a covenant of such a radical nature that it would change the course of history. He has worshipped different gods, lived in different places, married to an elderly wife who is unable to give him children, and is in the golden years. This would be a time of retirement, but we are told that God comes and tell Abraham that his faith will transform the region. That the covenant that they engage through Abraham's faithfulness and God's choice will make his progeny greater than the stars in the heavens. It is no wonder that later his wife Sara laughs.

Even in agreeing to this covenant God holds all the knowledge and Abraham is holding very little. When a

son does come Abraham, God will ask him to sacrifice that son. That son Isaac will be frustratingly human, and Jacob and Esau will also be completely human as well. Which means finite and limited in their view of the Revelation afforded to them by God.

We are no different today. We do not know what the future holds for the church as a whole, our nation, and this Church in particular. Some of us may get glimpses of God's revelation, but it is like being on that rushing train in the woods. I might see the colors of a beautiful sunset in the distance, yet it is nothing complete.

The future will be that way. Full of mystery. We want answers and we are told by God to be faithful. Cue anger, fear, questioning, and disorientation.

If we had a real crystal ball and I wore a turban maybe we could see the future, but I doubt it. What we are given is prayer, worship, service, kindness, working toward justice, creating peace, and humility. I know these are not certainty, but they are the tools of faith.

Let's endeavor to focus on these and move forward together in faith.