

February 25, 2024
The Second Sunday in Lent
St. Stephen's, Catlett; St. Andrew's, Ada
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Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:22-30
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

If the Book of Genesis has taught us anything, it's that God is going to do what God says. If God says that childless, 100-year-old Abram is going to be the father of a nation, then Abram is going to be the father of a nation and get his name changed to Abraham in the process. If God says an eternal king is going to come from one of Abraham's descendants, then a king is going to come, even if He's born in a feeding trough. We know that God does what God promises, especially when the promises have already been fulfilled. It gets trickier when God tells us about what hasn't happened yet. God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, told Peter what was going to happen, and Peter decided that he had a better plan. This is our story because in one way or another, God tells us what is going to happen, and more often than not, we decide that we have a better plan.

It's easy for us to remove ourselves from today's Gospel though, because in all the years we've been praying to God, God has never once called us Satan. Here comes another big translation issue: before Satan was a proper name, it was a perfectly ordinary word that meant adversary, and later, accuser. It's like how the name Miller originally just meant someone who made flour, and Smith was originally just someone who built things out of metal. I don't know when Satan became a proper name, but in the Greek of Mark's Gospel, it's *satan* with a small *s*: plain old adversary or accuser (*Σατανα* vs. *σατανα*). The real question we face, then, is not whether we are devils, but whether we do in fact stand in the way of God's plan for us. Are we ever God's adversaries? Or worse, God's accusers?

Of course not, we say! Who would dare to accuse God of anything? It seems to me that any time we point out the flaws in God's plan for us, we are in fact accusing God of bad planning. Of course we don't do that. We are more in line with Psalm 22, in which we pledge allegiance to God and promise that our "souls shall live for him" and "our descendants shall be known as the Lord's forever" (vs. 29). That is, until the Lord comes up with a really bad plan that involves suffering, rejection, and death. Even when the plan involves mild inconvenience, doing something we've never done before, or forgiving someone, we can come up with a better plan than God's. Which does indeed makes us God's adversaries, the people who accuse God of having a pretty crummy plan.

Then there's the other thing Jesus said: "Get thee behind me." That can mean any number of things, from "get out of my sight," to "get out of my way," to "let me be the leader." But today, when we decide to "get behind something" – a person, an idea, a cause – it means throwing our whole support into it, without hesitation or reservation. Who doesn't want to hear that someone is actually behind us, that someone "has our back?" Today's Gospel is an invitation for us to consider whether we are behind God or something or someone else. Paul's letter to the Romans describes what it means to get behind God and God's hopes and dreams for us and for our lives. Paul tells us that "no distrust made Abraham waver" (4:20). As with so many spiritual issues, this one comes down to trust, and whether we trust God enough to make really good plans for our lives.

If the Book of Genesis has taught us anything, it's that we're a lot better off trusting what God has to say to us than we are with arguing with it. Just as in a great kitchen, where the only correct answer is, "Yes, Chef," the only correct response to God's promises and plans for us is "Yes, Lord. I'm right behind You."