The Lessons Appointed for Use

on

Proper 17

Year A

RCL

Exodus 3:1-15
Matthew 16:21-28

The Collect

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ

our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen*.

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are

standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will

send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Is-

raelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who

want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

SERMON

I have a serious question for you. What does your faith demand of you? You are faithful, life-long church attenders. What does your faith demand of you? It's a question we do not, in my experience, entertain seriously very often. It's much more pleasant to view our faith as a familiar habit than as something which demands. Nevertheless, living a life of faith comes with demands. Entering into the Kingdom of God demands transformation. What does your faith demand of you?

For some, their faith demands that they abstain from alcohol. Others understand their faith to demand that they be "nice" people who don't pick fights or use bad language. A shocking (to me)

number of people to whom I speak seem to think that their faith demands that they stand for the playing of the national anthem and display the flag at their homes, though I don't get that connection at all. I meet a lot of "or else" people who believe that they are to do what their church says or else they'll go to hell and they don't want to go to hell.

Another example might be the little friend of Kat's we once took to the buffet at Carter Caves. She insisted that we say grace before we ate, and we did. Then we went back for seconds and she insisted that we had to say grace again because, she explained, praying before eating made the food taste better. She had been taught that following the teachings of one's faith grants personal benefit.

That said, what does your faith demand of you?

In the passage we read from Matthew, Jesus has just ruined everyone's day.

> Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Just try to imagine how you would feel if your friend and teacher said such a thing to you! How would you react?

> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

Jesus, the Son of the living God, was having none of that and reacted with considerable force.

But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Whoa! That’s pretty rough! Can’t we have a difference of opinion without getting personal? Well...no, not if one of the parties to the conversation is God’s only Son. There’s one answer to the question of what your faith demands of you. Living a life of faith demands that we set our minds not on human things, but on divine things.

Last week, though Facebook didn’t like it and refused to boost it, I spoke about our “flags”, the tribal totems which we follow so faithfully. These are the beliefs and behaviors that define “us” as different from “them”. This is a fundamental mis-

take, as an old friend of mine pointed out this week, “You will never look into the eyes of someone not loved by God”. We know this. We just agree to forget it when it is inconvenient. Demanding that we turn our backs on something as intimate as our connection with our own community is hard.

This week, in a discussion of the political convention, someone, perhaps tongue in cheek, reported that a person “out Wayne” had expressed his belief that the Democrats were coming for “our guns, our Bibles and our chickens”. One has to be from around here to know that Wayne County, West Virginia is always referred to as “out Wayne” and that some people out Wayne still keep chickens

in their yards. The fear is that our tribal totems will be destroyed. My totems are holy. Your totems are just “your opinion”.

Sorting out our totems from the demands of our faith is what what makes Moses’ theophany so powerful. God tells Moses what to do and say, and Moses asks, “Says who?” God thunders His answer.

“I AM WHO I AM.”

This is clearly where the rubber meets the road and why Peter got so strict a correction. God is not an opinion, your position with Him is not an opinion, whether your acknowledge God or not is not relevant. You are His creation, and He Is Who He Is! This rings throughout the Scripture.

God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

Over and over, this is the message of Scripture!

No one is as holy as *Adonai*, because there is none to compare with you, no rock like our God.[1]

Over and over Scripture thunders that no matter how fondly attached you are to your chickens, no matter how passionate a UK fan you are, no matter your politics or your preferences, no matter even if you attend church just to be seen as a decent sort of person or because it makes the food taste better

1 1 Samuel 2:2

your relationship with God isn't defined by what you think about it. It is ordained by God, Himself!

God could not be clearer about it than this:

> I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me.[2]

However much you hunger for the approval of your friends and relations, your loyalty is to God. Not your first loyalty or your best loyalty. Your complete and total loyalty. Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared that the primal sin of humanity consisted in putting the knowledge of good and evil before the knowledge of God. There must be some substantial continuity between what we mean by good and evil and what God means; otherwise we are in moral darkness indeed.

2 Exodus 20:2-3

For the Christian, there can be only one. The demands of God upon your person, your life, your very thoughts are owed to Him alone.

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Only that, church. Only that.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The church teaches:

> **When we come to Christ, the goal is not to do certain things, to check off the box to show that we have a right to enter into the kingdom of God but it's a transformation of who we are. It's a transformation of our hearts. It's a transformation of our desires. The person who serves others begrudgingly is not serving. The person who is generous, hoping to get something in return for it is not really giving.**

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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