



August 30, 2020
The Thirteenth Sunday of Pentecost
The Rev. Anthony Estes, Associate Rector

Readings: Exodus 3: 1-15, Romans 12:9-21
Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

As we continue the story of Moses, we heard about his birth and the context in which he bursts onto the scene of history. As we continue to hear about his story today, looking at Exodus: Chapter 3, I found myself very easily identifying with Moses.

Moses is minding his own business after spending so much time away from Egypt, so much time away from the Pharaoh and the woman that raised him, spending so much time away from the trauma and the turmoil that has been reeked upon the people with whom he shares an ancestry.

And he finds himself in the wilderness near a holy mountain where he sees a bush that is burning but, surprisingly, is not consumed. And he is not afraid. He is intrigued. He turns aside to investigate further, and when God sees this, the Bible says, a messenger of the Lord in the fire in the bush begins to call out to Moses.

That singular moment changes Moses' life. It changes the course of the history of the Children of Israel. It becomes a significant pivot point in salvation history for all Christians, because Moses is going to play a significant role for both the Hebrew faith, the Jewish faith, and our faith.

I identify with Moses, because as God speaks to him and tells him all the things that God wants Moses to do, he is reluctant. He is having an identity crisis. Because all the while God is telling Moses who he is going to be, Moses' question, his reluctance, his rebuttal is about who he is not. For he says, *"Who am I that I should go to the house of Pharaoh?"*

And God says, *"The answer to that is you are the one that I am going to be with. You are the one whom I am choosing. I am going to be the Children of Israel's deliverer, and you are going to be my agent."*

It's a story about identity.

Moses is trying to figure out who he is, and God is trying to tell him who God is: *"I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I am the one who sees the oppression. I am the one who hears their cries. I am the one that knows their sufferings. I am the one who is going down to Egypt to rescue, to deliver, to render safe my people. And, Moses, you have a role in that great destiny."*

We live in a moment where it seems like people all over the world are crying out for justice, crying out for an end to suffering.

And God speaks to us across time, not only in Exodus but also in the suffering Jesus of Matthew, that God has acted. His work is still presently working to save us from the oppression and tyranny and death that sin brings into the world.

The question is, as it always has been, *who* is going to be God's agent in the world *today*? Now? Who will be the vessel, who will be the mouthpiece of justice? Who's going to be the vessel?

Is it you?

Will it be you?

Will you be able to move past all of the reasons we give God for why it *shouldn't* be us, *shouldn't* be you, *shouldn't* be me?

Your credibility comes from the very fact that God has called you and me by name: "*Anthony. Anthony. Christ Church. Christ Church.*"

Say your name twice right now wherever you are. God is calling you by name.

"Well," Moses says, "OK. Well then, who exactly am I supposed to say has sent me? OK, I'm clear that your calling me and that's fine. And who exactly are you?"

And God says, *"I am that I am. Or I will be what I will be. If anybody asks you who I am, tell them, 'I Am sent me.'"*

The one who is responsible for all being is the one that calls us into service. God is clear about who God is. God is clear about who you are.

I think it is easy to also identify with the Children of Israel, crying under the hand of the oppression of a powerful regime that was bent on genocide, all in order to preserve this vast empire.

I think it is easy to identify with those people because some of us currently live in an oppressed people group. And you've been crying out for help for a long time.

Know this: God hears. God sees. God feels.
God has come down...in Jesus.

And God has already worked out a plan for rescue and a plan for deliverance. And it is working today...consummated in Jesus. It is still in effect today.

But what about the bad guys?

God has a plan for vengeance and vindication. So we must remember that, just like the Children of Israel, we have been set free from the oppression, from the oppressors, and from what that oppression does to us inside.

We have been set free from hate. We have been set free from anger. We are now free to live as Paul says, *"To not render evil for evil...to pray for our enemies...to do what we can to live in peace."*

God is already working to make us safe from sin.

And that doesn't mean that we don't speak up and stand up for what is right! That is not what I am saying. Because God has an agent of deliverance in the world, and sometimes...you have to be the agent for you.

Sometimes you need to claim that agency and speak up for what is right. And you need to claim that agency and speak up for what is right for the sake, and on behalf, of another.

But let us be clear that the true salvation that this world needs has already come to us in Jesus. And since that is the case...what is left for us more than radical love?

God is love.

Will you be love's agent?