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Exodus 3,1-15

Transfiguration 2015 — 25 January 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the first lesson from the Book of Exodus, the Second Book of Moses, which was read earlier:

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: The desert is a hostile environment to humans. In the day time the heat can be awful and in the night it can be freezing. We can boil or we can freeze. If we drive through the American southwest we drive through long stretches of uninhabited desert. Often there is a gas station and a sign will read: “Last Service for 100 miles.” That sign is a reminder to us that we should check to see if we have enough gas and water to get us to the next gas station. In the night, these gas stations have neon lights which are bright signs in the middle of the darkness. Again, these are reminders.

So it was in the desert of the Sinai that Moses came across a lit sign, a burning bush. But while the bush burned, it was not consumed by the flame. Moses paid attention and came closer to investigate. Then,

out of the bush, God spoke to Moses. God spoke to Moses and this morning God also speaks to us, and reminds us that “**God Is The ‘I AM’ – The Ever-Present God.**” This morning I’ll develop this theme in three points:

- 1) God Calls Moses**
- 2) God Tells Us Who He Is; and,**
- 3) God Calls His People To Himself**

1) God Calls Moses. Almost 3,440 years ago, Moses was in the middle of the Sinai tending his father-in-law’s sheep. It was the wilderness, a near desert. It was probably lonely – Moses and the sheep and a whole lot of nothing.

Forty years before, Moses had lived in Egypt as a prince in the household of Pharaoh. He had lived in the lap of luxury as one of the elite. But Moses knew that he had been adopted and that his brothers and sisters were the Israelites, who now toiled as slaves in Egypt.

One day Moses saw an Egyptian task master beating some Hebrew slaves. There was probably nothing unusual about this, nor are we to think that it was a worse beating than might otherwise have been the case. But Moses got angry and killed the Egyptian. The next day Moses tried to break up a fight between two Hebrews. One of the Hebrews, instead of being grateful, asked Moses: “Who made you a prince or judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?” (Exodus 2,14) Moses then realized that what he had done was known.

When the Pharaoh heard about what Moses had done, the Pharaoh wanted to kill Moses, but Moses fled to the east, to the land of Midian, when he eventually married and now was tending his father-in-law’s sheep.

Moses had tried to take matters into his own hands. But things did

not work out the way he intended. He had killed somebody. He was a murderer. There was no excuse for his excessive use of force. When he had done this he was not a teenager, but rather a man who was forty years old. Can there be any excuse for his actions? He certainly couldn't blame it on being a hot-headed youth. What he had done was premeditated, because before he killed he looked around to make sure no one was looking (Exodus 2,12).

No, there was no excuse. Now another forty years had passed. Moses was eighty and alone in the desert with his thoughts and, of course, the sheep.

When Moses saw the burning bush he was intrigued. There was flame, but the bush was not burning up, it was not being consumed as might ordinarily happen. Moses talked to himself (a good clue that he was alone with the sheep) and went to investigate.

God spoke to Moses out of the bush. The Bible does not give us any record of God having spoken with His people for over 400 years before this moment. But Moses still recognizes that God is the God of the Promise, of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In spite of all the external evidence, God still had blessed them to “be a blessing” (Genesis 12,2; Zechariah 8,13). God had not forgotten His people. Now God would continue His work of deliverance by telling Moses that God had chosen Moses to lead God's people from slavery to freedom.

Moses had been trained to be a leader in Egypt. He was educated, he could read, he knew of the literature and science and law codes of the Egyptians. As a prince he would have been trained to lead and command. Now after forty years in the desert Moses also knew how to survive in the wilderness.

Perhaps Moses thought about his vain effort to take matters into his own hands forty years previously. Perhaps that soured Moses on the idea that he was a deliverer; after all, what happened was that he became

a murderer and an exile, a “stranger in a strange land” (Exodus 2,22). At sometime during Moses’ forty years of being in the wilderness, Moses must have asked God for and received forgiveness, for we know that murderers, among others, “shall not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Galatians 5,21; Revelation 21,8; 22,15).

Moses, however, made excuse after excuse to get out of doing what God wanted. In fact, in all, Moses made five excuses to God (Exodus 2,11.13; 4,1.10.13). Moses felt that he, Moses, was inadequate. By himself, Moses was correct. But God kept telling Moses that even though God would use Moses, as well as his brother Aaron, ultimately the power and authority would be God’s. At the heart of God’s response is that

2) God Tells Us Who He Is. Moses recognized God as the God of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But in a real sense that was the past, that was history. So Moses knew that when he went back to Egypt he would have to have a name which would show the children of Israel Who sent him and by Whose authority he was coming to lead them out of Egypt.

God still had patience with Moses and answered, “Thus shall you say to the sons of Israel, ‘The I AM has sent me to you.’”

By this God said to Moses that He is more than the God who created the heavens. There are many who view God as an impersonal, cosmic force Who set the universe in motion and then took a long, long nap. God is more than that. God is saying that He is the living and ever-present God.

God is more than just the God Who made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Again, there are those who think that God was active in the past but that He is not longer active in the same way today. God is saying that He is the living and ever-present God.

God is more than He Who is in the future. There are many who think that God is some kind of pie-in-the-sky idea, always in the future and beyond our reach. While it is true that He is beyond our reach, we are not beyond His reach, for He has reached out to us and is saying that He is the living and ever-present God.

With Moses, God came to deliver His people from slavery and bondage. But 1,400 years later God would come Himself to deliver His people from the slavery to sin and death. God sent His Son, Jesus, true God and true man, to make this new exodus for us and the world.

Once, when Jesus was being questioned by the religious leaders of His day, they were hostile to Jesus. They did not believe that Jesus said He was the Truth who had come to free them from sin. Jesus said that those who keep His Word will not “taste of death” (John 8,52). By this Jesus meant the eternal death, the eternal separation from God that all people by their human nature deserve on account of sin. Jesus went on to say:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.” The Jews therefore said to Him [Jesus], “You are not yet fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was I AM.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the Temple. (John 8,55-59)

Why did they pick up stones to stone Jesus? What was it Jesus said to make them so angry?

Today, there are many so-called Bible scholars who claim that Jesus never claimed to be God. These scholars say that the claim that Jesus is true God and true man was something that Saint Paul made up. But it is clear from Jesus’ own words that He knew He was God. When He said, “I AM,” every religious Jew knew exactly what He meant. Those are the same words that God used in speaking with Moses, “Tell

them that the I AM has sent you.” The religious leaders of Jesus’ day wanted to stone Jesus for blasphemy. The religious leaders did not think that Jesus was crazy, because you do not stone a crazy person. They knew that Jesus believed that he was God, but they did not believe it. And Jesus makes the claim again and again: “I AM the Bread of Life” (John 6,48.51); “I AM the Door” (John 10,9.11); “I AM the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies” (John 11,25); and so forth.

Even death could not stop the I AM from living. Jesus died for our sins and the sins of the world, but on the third day He rose from the dead. He IS and He lives.

His death and resurrection is the new exodus, the passage from death to life, from slavery to sin and to death, to freedom in the life that Jesus gives us through the forgiveness of sins.

Moses lead the Israelites to a freedom from slavery in Egypt to a land of promise, but Jesus effects a greater and more permanent exodus by leading us from death to life; life with Him now and life with Him forever. Jesus is the every living and ever present God who reaches out to us through His Word so that “he who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies.”

Just as God told Moses to lead the people out of slavery, so also Jesus calls us to realize only in Him is forgiveness and life. Moses is a type who points to Jesus. In both

3) God Calls His People To Himself. One of the signs which God gave to Moses sounds a bit strange at first. God said: “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I Who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”

The word “worship” can also be translated as “to serve.” In this

context, to serve God is also to worship Him. To serve the ever present and ever living God is to be chosen by Him and to receive the gifts of forgiveness and life from Him.

This stands in sharp contrast to service in Egypt. Here the service of the children of Israel was slavery. In Egypt, the Pharaoh was said to be not only a representation of one of the gods of Egypt but even a god himself. The exodus is a passage from service to a false god to service to the true God.

“At this mountain” refers to Mount Sinai. At Sinai, God further revealed His will to His people by giving them the Ten Commandments. Through these commandments God showed what true service meant; first, service to God, and second, service to one’s neighbor. But even though I use the words “first” and “second,” you cannot really separate the two, because service to God and service to one’s neighbor go together. This is the call to service. As Moses later said,

And now, Israel, what does the LORD require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD’s commandments and His statutes, which I am commanding you today for your own good? (Deuteronomy 10,12-13)

What comes first is God’s love to His people and His steadfast promise. His promise to Abraham and the fathers. His rescue from the land of slavery and false gods. And when the right time had come, God sending His Son to save the world from sin and death.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3,16)

In both the Old and the New Testament, it is made quite clear that God’s love is not earned. He did not choose His people on account of

what they had done or had not done, but rather because He is full of grace and mercy.

In the Old Testament God called His people together around the holy mountain, and then continually renewed that call through His Word. In the New Testament, that call is made through His Son, Jesus. Through Word and Sacrament, Jesus promises to be with us. These are the means by which He calls us out of darkness into His marvellous light. These are the means by which that light continually shines in our lives so that in loving service to Him we may reflect that light to others.

Conclusion: In a real sense the call to gather at the holy mountain was a chance to refuel at a spiritual gas station with God love. And being fueled with that love to continue to be a blessing. This morning we have that same call to refuel our spiritual gas tanks. To hear the God's Word, which calls us out of the spiritual darkness of an unbelieving world and to know that we have been forgiven to share that life and forgiveness with others, to continue to walk with the ever-living and ever-present God, blessed to be a blessing. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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