



Third Sunday of Lent
Light of Christ Anglican Church
The Reverend Mike Moffitt
March 20, 2022

Everything Points Us to Jesus

Text: [Exodus 3:1-15](#)

Today is the 3rd Sunday in the season of Lent. Lent is meant to be a time of repentance and an awareness that sin separates us from God and what it cost Jesus for us to be reconciled to Him. It's not to be just a season for shame, even though there is a place for that if we continue in our sin.

Feeling ashamed is not the same thing as repentance of sin. Our enemy can take our striving for obedience to God and turn it into a source of pride. Repentance is the appropriate response to our sin when we long to be in fellowship with God. Remember the story of the prideful Pharisee in Luke 18:11,

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'"

Jesus pointed out to His disciples that the tax collector stood away from the others and wouldn't even look up but beat his breast saying, "***God be merciful to me a sinner.***" In verse 14 Jesus compares the two men saying,

"I tell you; this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Lent is the season where our focus is on the cross of Jesus Christ reminding ourselves that salvation only comes through repentance of sin and the

finished work of our Savior who hung there in payment for our sin. It's the reminder that we have entered into a sacred and holy relationship with God in Christ and therefore must see our sins as a reflection that we have taken our eyes off of Him. Repentance is the solution to this dilemma.

Before we look at our passage in [Exodus 3](#), it is helpful to remember that the story written about God approaching Moses was actually written by Moses as the children of Israel wandered the desert for 40 years. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is both a composite of individual books and a seamless narrative that renders a complete story from creation to the death of Moses.

Each book in its own way guided Israel from Egypt to the conquest of the land of Canaan. Each book is linked together as the narrative of God raising up a people for his own possession that ultimately points us to the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of God's kingdom on earth. Moses wrote the story to encourage Israel to seek intimacy with God and willingly follow him to the Promised Land. Of course, the other reason for the Lord moving through Moses to chronicle these stories is so that future generations would be able to remember how God saved their forefathers and left them the stories and laws of God as a written witness.

In this morning's passage Moses reminded Israel that it was God who brought them out of the land of Egypt where they had been enslaved and in bondage for 400 years. Let's begin by reminding ourselves of the setting of Exodus 3 by hearing the end of Exodus 2:23-25,

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning, and he

*remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.
So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.*

So with that in mind let's consider our story from Exodus 3. Moses was 80 years old had been in the land of Midian for 40 years after he fled the land of Egypt for killing an Egyptian who was attacking an Israelite. He married the daughter of a priest of Midian and for 40 years tended the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. One day as he led his flock to the far side of the desert he comes to Horeb, called the mountain of God. Exodus 3:2-4,

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight — why the bush does not burn up." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see. God called to him out of the bush.

It's important to understand who appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Notice how easily the text moves from the Angel of the Lord in verse 2 to "the Lord (Jehovah, "The existing one"— the proper name for the one true God) saw that he had gone over to look, God (Elohim, the true God, plural) called to him from within the bush in verse 4. This easy movement shows that this person was a real being that was identified with God and yet was sent by Him and was therefore distinct from Him. Most Bible scholars agree that this was the pre-incarnate Son of God, Jesus.

There are many passages like this but suffice it to say in the Old Testament the Angel of the Lord is the only one who reveals the complete divine essence while still being able to be in the company of sinners, and yet while revealing the power and wrath of God is also able to demonstrate his absolute mercy. In this passage the Angel of the Lord appears in flames of fire within a bush and yet the bush is not consumed. The fire points us to

the fact of the divine presence and is a frequent Biblical symbol for the presence of God, sometimes symbolizing (as here) the threat of his holiness. An example is Hebrews 12:29,

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

The fire demonstrates the holiness of God as he purifies that which is unclean much like sterilizing a needle with fire to kill any bacteria that has infected it. It also shows us that God is the one who brings judgment upon the unrighteous. The Lord shows up as fire within the bush to demonstrate that he is the consuming fire but does not need the fuel of the bush itself. He is able to move in ways that we cannot, and his holiness reveals that he is separate from us and must be approached with extreme caution.

In [Genesis 3](#) Adam and Eve are willfully disobedient to the command of God but many would say that what they did doesn't seem like such a big deal. This is due to a serious misunderstanding of the holiness of God. Our first parent's disregard of God's command meant that they had to be banished from the garden and they could never return because of the extreme danger for them. The holiness of God endangers the unrepentant sinner because it is not a passive force but an active force that embraces all that conforms to it but destroys all that offends. This is not just the difference between the created and the creator or the lowly before the almighty but the fear of sinners before the pure holiness of God. The biblical symbol for this holiness is fire and it is throughout the Book of Exodus. It starts with the fire in the bush and ends with the fire on Mount Sinai, in Exodus 19:18,

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently.

Moses decides to go over and check out why the bush is not being consumed by the fire and that is when God calls out his name twice, symbolizing urgency.

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

The place was made holy and sacred by God's presence. This is a frequent theme throughout Exodus and will be resolved in the symbolism of the Tabernacle. But this was the starting place for Moses as the Lord's servant, as it is for anyone who enters into the service of the Lord. Until you have been on your knees undone by the holiness of God you have not begun to understand your desperate need of his mercy.

God commanded Moses to stop and to take off his sandals because the very place where livestock had been walking was now made holy and set apart by God's presence. God was not banishing Moses from his presence but was setting the conditions for Moses to approach him. Psalm 24:3 says, *"Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?"*

God was making it simple but definite: "take off your sandals." The God who is Holy, Holy, Holy is held in such high esteem that the Cherubim and Seraphim who are before the throne of God continually night and day bow before Him crying out his praises ([Revelation 4](#)). Even though they are sinless they cover their eyes before the glory of God ([Isaiah 6:2](#)). They are

careful as to how they approach him and this theme continues throughout scripture, even though the forms change. In the full Mosaic system, acceptance into the presence of God was through the atoning power of the sacrifice presented at the altar ([Leviticus 17](#)). These sacrifices point us forward to the atoning sacrifice that Christ made upon the cross, *“the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God”* (1 Peter 3:18) and through whom we *“have access to the Father by one Spirit”* (Ephesians 2:18). The point of Moses taking off his sandals is one of simple obedience and the reward was that he was to be allowed into the presence of the Lord Almighty.

Then God identifies who he is,

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

At this point Moses realized who was speaking to him and he falls to his face out of fear of the God who to see his face meant death. Moses the unrighteous sinner is confronted by absolute purity and holiness, and he is undone.

God identifies that he is the God of Moses’ father of which we know nothing but his name, Amram. Apparently his father had revealed enough of the Jewish heritage that Moses knew the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Again, it is important here to remember that Moses is writing this story to Israel encouraging them to trust in Jehovah as he did and just like their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had. He is pointing out to them that they had been rescued from Egypt because God remembered his covenant promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that from their lineage

beginning with Abraham, a people would be raised up with the result that all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

They were to remember that their Father Abraham had left everything behind and set out for an unknown destination just because God had told him to ([Genesis 12:1](#); [Hebrews 11:8](#)); Isaac faced impossible odds of death itself and experienced a God who did provide and whose promises could be trusted ([Genesis 22:1-14](#); [Hebrews 11:17-20](#)); and Jacob discovered the foolishness of living by his cunning when he should have been trusting the promises of God ([Genesis 27](#)). Moses was telling Israel his story and relating it to their forefathers as a way of showing how they too should faithfully follow God.

Now back to our passage in Exodus 3: God explains to Moses that he has heard the cries of his people Israel and has seen their misery and distress. Moses' task was simple, he was to go to the Pharaoh and tell him that he must let Israel leave Egypt because their God was going to send them to the land promised to Abraham. The Lord revealed to Moses that the land was already developed and ready to live in because it was occupied by the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. These nations had become pagan in their worship, so God was giving the land to the descendants of Abraham as he had promised, and Moses was to be used by God to accomplish this. Exodus 3:9-11,

“And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending 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?”

God was inviting Moses to a part of something wonderful that God was absolutely going to do. Moses' reaction is the same as what most of us would have had. I am sure he was thinking, "I'm a shepherd, why would Pharaoh listen to me? I'll bet that I couldn't even get to see him and what if someone remembers that I was once the Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son but that I left in a hurry after killing an Egyptian? God chose Moses for the task at hand and really the discussion was just a preliminary to Moses doing what God was commanding. However, God in his patience knows that what he is asking is overwhelming and Moses does not yet see all that God is going to do in and through him. Remember until this episode Moses had no real knowledge of the God of his father Amram.

So God answers Moses' objection,

"And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

God promises Moses that his call would be confirmed by future action and that God would bring him and Israel out of Egypt and they would worship God on this very same mountain. For 400 years Israel had been the servants of Egypt but now they would come and serve (worship) God in a covenant relationship with him.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"

God also said to Moses,

“Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ ‘This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.’”

The question that Moses was assuming that the children of Israel would ask is also the same question that he was asking, “Who is this God and what revelation does he bring?” In Genesis the most common name for God was Yahweh as when people called upon the name of Lord (Yahweh). In ancient times a name was not merely a form of address but also a description of character and personality. The mysterious use of “I Am who I Am” or it can also be translated as “I will be who I will be” is God revealing to Moses and to Israel that he will be with them, ever-present. Whatever sense of inadequacy that Moses felt about himself would be answered by the creator God who was more than adequate for all situations. Where Moses was weak the power of the almighty would be brought to bear. The God who was the consuming fire that needed no outside source for energy would be there not because he was invited but because he was there to accomplish his holy purpose. He would be the God who was the great “I Am” who would allow his people to know him as He is.

Time and again God would live up to His name even when Israel lived in unbelief and apostasy. God delivered Israel out of bondage to slavery and revealed himself time and again as the great “I AM” but they persisted in turning from his mercy and grace to worship other gods who were man-made and not gods at all.

In this morning’s Epistle from [1 Corinthians 10:1–13](#) Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to not repeat the sinful ways of Israel but to repent and turn in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ the reigning King of all. Paul

worked to establish the church at Corinth and God had poured out his Spirit in large measure upon them and they grew and flourished under Paul's initial ministry of around 18 months. I Corinthians was a letter from Paul in response to reports that divisions and factions had arisen within the church and there were many reports of immorality and drunkenness being tolerated within the Christian community. They were being torn apart because they had stopped following the example of Christ and of Paul their father in the gospel.

In our reading from this morning Paul reminded them of how Israel had been blessed by God by his presence symbolized by the cloud that followed them by day and the pillar of fire by night as they wandered in the desert for 40 years. He reminds them that God had brought Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground and fed them manna, the bread of angels and living water from a rock, which symbolized the living water of Christ, the rock of our salvation. Paul reminded them that Israel after being given all these things and being led by the very manifest presence of God turned and set their hearts on evil desires with the result being that God killed 23,000 of them in one day. Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 10:11-13,

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

When I read Paul's letter to the Corinthians and consider all the ways that their church had turned from Christ and begin to follow the influences of

godless teachers and pagan customs all in the name of Christ, I find it all too familiar.

In today's world when someone tells me that they are a Christian I find it necessary to ask them what they mean by that. Are they saying that they follow Jesus Christ, as He reveals Himself to us in His Word and through the Spirit?

Do they use God's Word as the standard of faith and practice, or are they saying that they believe that Jesus was a good man and maybe even a prophet but certainly not God?

Are they following a secularized version of Jesus that is more compatible with how they want to live and assume that he certainly understands that they have the right to decide what truth is?

I'm afraid that the worship of many churches in this country would not be even remotely recognized by the Apostles and early church fathers.

In our gospel reading this morning Jesus tells a parable about a man who had a fig tree growing in his garden that had not produced any fruit for three years and needed to be cut down. He went to the vinedresser and instructed him to cut down the fig tree because it had no right to use up the soil if it was not going to produce figs which is what it was created for. The vinedresser pleads with the owner and says, "Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine. If not cut it down."

That God doesn't punish those who have turned from obedience to God doesn't mean that he approves of their sin. Instead it shows that he is a merciful and patient God but that sinners should repent while there is time. The fig tree especially depicts Israel, which was being given an extra opportunity to repent.

All three scripture readings this morning reveal to us that God is not to be taken for granted because he is Holy and worthy of our praise, honor, glory and obedience. God is calling us to respond to his word in faithfulness and today's readings reveal that there is no excuse that we can give for not responding to his call. His name reveals to us that he is able to go with us into any endeavor that he calls us to perform.

"But God I'm too weak" — "Child, I AM strong enough for you."

"But God I won't know what to say" — "Child, I AM able to give you the words."

"But God, I can't afford to go." — "Child, I AM your provision"

"But Father, I'm afraid" — "Child, I AM your courage and protector."

"But Father, I'm sure they won't hear me" — "Child, I AM sending you because I have a purpose for them. Trust me."

"But God, I have done so many things that I am ashamed of." — "Child, I AM your redeemer. Turn to me in faith and I will save you from your shame."

To say that the world is in crisis is an understatement. Many in our community are in crisis, perhaps some of you here or on live stream are in crisis—the invitation is to cry out to the great I AM and see where he will take you. I believe that God is calling us into greater faithfulness than ever before, and if we follow Him I believe that we will see greater outpourings of his power and glory because of it. Moses went from being a shepherd of someone else's flock to one of the greatest prophets to ever live. He is still read and spoken of thousands of years after his death but has now taken his place in Heaven before God. Only God can accomplish a journey like that. I want that for myself and for you.

Let's pray.

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