

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

March 7, 2021

The Third Sunday of Lent

This week is one of those weeks where as a priest you scratch your head and wonder where to begin. I hope you were listening to our readings because if you were, you might be feeling as overwhelmed as I am. Our lectionary this week covers just about every major topic we could possibly cover! From the ten commandments to Paul's discourse on wisdom of God, to Jesus' anger in the temple.

Needless to say, it isn't an easy week to discern what to preach. So instead of delving into any one text, I want us to consider the larger picture that is being presented to us. I think what we are given this week is an expansive teaching on what it means to be God's people.

But before we can fully discern what it means to be God's people we must name who God is for us....we start with our own hearts and move outward with our actions. In other words, we have to know who we are and whose we are in order to embody God's faithful commandments.

So, to begin...let's define whose we are. In our reading from Exodus we are given these words... *"I am the Lord your God, who...."* *"I am your God who brought you out of Egypt."* Now, the pronoun *"you"* is written in the second person and that's important because it identifies a relationship, a relationship of a group of people who have been saved and not only have they been saved but they have been claimed. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. These are powerful words of relationship and identity and they place God's people directly in God's line of care. God says...You are mine.

We are God's. God has claimed us. That's who we are.

And then in Corinthians, Paul expands that definition by telling us what it means to be God's. He teaches that when we live into being God's own, the world is going to think we are a bit crazy. We will inevitably go against the world's wisdom when we follow our faith. It will seem strange and foolish. It may even leave us wondering if we are missing some sort of rational critical thinking skills. But as Paul states so boldly. *"For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."*

Paul reminds us that following God will be challenging. But, we follow because we know whose we are and once we know that there is no other way we can live.

Finally, we have this unsettling image of Jesus...angry, physically angry. He overthrows tables, scatters animals, calls out people for their wrong doing. In this scene at the Temple, he seems far from a kind hearted, gentle savior. He is passionate and brave, disruptive and direct. I imagine him sweating, yelling, gritting his teeth. It's not a pretty picture. His identity in this

moment tells me that sometimes living into being God's people will require that we face head on systems and people who stand to harm what God is trying so hard to build. Jesus is standing for something so much greater than the corruption and materialism and self-serving ideologies that surround him. Jesus stands firm knowing he is claimed by God. He knows whose he is.

There is so much honesty in who Jesus is in that moment. It doesn't look like a text book kind of faith. And sometimes ours won't either.

And, thank goodness there is no such thing as a text book kind of faith....the "right" kind of Christian. Thank goodness we can face the challenge of faith with the grit of being human. And thank goodness God is going to claim us anyway.

This is an incredibly important fact...because before God even gave the Ten Commandments to his people he saved them from their exile. He brought them out from under their oppressors. Before he gave them any directions on how to live, before he gave them the law, he just loved them. No pre-requisites. Just love. I am the Lord your God, who loves you.

Think about that...God's claim over you doesn't depend on how well you follow the rules, if you are the "right" kind of faithful person. God doesn't give us a litmus test of how deserving we are. God loved us before the rules. That kind of love is so pure and so unconditional and so welcome.

I think of it like this...God's commandments were simply an extension of that great love. I like to think of God's laws as God's deep desire to help us live wholly and fully in a world that will constantly challenge us and push us, that will make us at times question our faith and act in ways that aren't in accordance with God's commands. And so, God asks that we just keep coming back, starting over, beginning again. These are the commandments.

Knowing that, makes wanting to accept the challenging parts of our faith a little easier, doesn't it? Because no matter how many rules or guidelines we are given, we are at times going to be just like Jesus in that temple. We will find ourselves angry...whether justified or not. We will find ourselves making poor decisions, doing things we shouldn't do. Wondering if God could even love someone as broken as ourselves. And then, we remember, we must remember, that we are already claimed...just as we are. There are simply no barriers between God and our messy selves. God claims us anyway.

I am the Lord your God, who loves you.

In our Lenten study this past Thursday, we did a beautiful exercise on naming who God is for us. The instructions were to simply fill in the blank...I am the Lord your God, who...

I asked if I could share their responses with you this morning and here are a few of them...I want you to listen to how faith has been embodied, how people came back time and again, how God healed them and loved them.

I am the Lord your God, who...

Gave you your life back after the car wreck.

Has given you many years on this earth.

Created the deep reverberations of music that thrill your heart.

Created all things, including those spring peepers and frogs that bring joy to your heart after the long winter.

Helped you love the church.

Brings families back together.

Listens to your prayers.

Gave you a Christian home in which to grow up.

Gave you minister/missionary grandparents to lead by word and deed.

Gave you amazing children and grandchildren

Knows what you need, are going thru, that you're grateful.

I am the Lord your God who is with you.

I have to say, as we read our statements out loud, most of us had tears in our eyes. There was a depth of recognition that God has been with us through our joys and our sorrows, through our times of sickness and our times of health. There was a fullness of God's love in each and every statement. A telling of what it means to be claimed by God.

So, this week, I want you to do the same. Consider what your statement might be. Who is God in your life? Allow yourself to be claimed and then allow yourself to follow. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Blessing the Body

This blessing takes
one look at you
and all it can say is
holy.

Holy hands.

Holy face.

Holy feet.

Holy everything
in between.

Holy even in pain.

Holy even when weary.

In brokenness, holy.

In shame, holy still.

Holy in delight.

Holy in distress.

Holy when being born.

Holy when we lay it down
at the hour of our death.

So, friend,
open your eyes
(*holy eyes*).

For one moment
see what this blessing sees,
this blessing that knows
how you have been formed
and knit together
in wonder and
in love.

Welcome this blessing
that folds its hands
in prayer
when it meets you;
receive this blessing
that wants to kneel
in reverence
before you:
you who are
temple,
sanctuary,
home for God
in this world.

—Jan Richardson