

Bible Study
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 17, Year A
September 3, 2017

[RCL:] Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Exodus 3:1-15

This passage presents the first portion of God’s self-introduction to Moses. Within this pericope, the reader encounters the well-familiar narrative of Moses and the burning bush. Here, the reader discovers God who, after being roused to action by the cries of a suffering people, commissions the reluctant Moses to appear before Pharaoh with the singular aim of delivering the Israelites out of Egypt. Also, the reader discovers the divine name of God, given by God to Moses, as the imprimatur of Moses’s authority with respect to the Israelites.

Given the familiarity of this passage, we might try finding a fresh entry-point through which to make this text come alive. Perhaps this entry-point may be found in vv. 3-4. Here, the author provides the reader with a glimpse of Moses’s interior monologue as such unfolded when Moses first observed the unconsumed bush. There, Moses makes the express determination to “turn aside and look at this great sight.” Critically, it is “[w]hen the Lord saw that [Moses] had turned aside to see,” that God beckoned Moses, ultimately setting him on a life (and world) changing course. Emulating Moses’s example of *turning aside to see*, one might do well to consider those instances in one’s own life where God may be poised to speak, if only one would—like Moses—turn aside to see.

- In what ways do you expect God to speak with you? In what ways has God spoken to you in ways you did not expect?
- How might we more intentionally *turn aside to see* in those instances in which God seeks to speak to us?

Psalm 105:1-6; 23-26; 45c

These selected excerpts from Psalm 105 provide a guided meditation that directs the reader, by way of recollection, to worship God in a way that is both participatory and celebratory. The psalter’s meditation instructs the reader to *give thanks to*, to *sing to*, to *glory in*, to *seek* God and his attributes, and to *remember* God’s present and pre-existing actions. Anamnesis of God’s great deeds done on behalf of his people fosters the reader’s more-complete performance of each of these directed actions.

Reflection on this pericope invites the reader to do precisely the imperatives set out in vv. 1-5, perhaps by asking the following:

- What are the deeds done by God in my own life about which I continue to marvel?
- How may my experience of God further prompt me to glory in and to seek him in my prayers and devotion?

Romans 12:9-21

Romans 12:9-21 falls near the beginning of an almost four chapter-long series of instructions to the reader concerning how one may appropriately function as a member of the body of Christ. (See Rom. 12:5.) Paul's instructions in this pericope seem, in many respects, to transcend simply behavioral codes (*cf.* I Cor. 5-8); instead these instructions—and the ones that follow—appear to operate as the means by which the Gentiles matriculate toward sanctification. (See Rom. 15:17).

While each of the directives contained in the lectionary excerpt are sufficiently dense to support multiple sermons, one possible approach toward proclaiming this text might be the identification of a composite theme that underlies vv. 9-21—irrepressible love, perhaps—and subsequent examination of how that theme contributes toward sanctification in Christ.

- What is genuine love?
- How is genuine love demonstrative of sanctification?

Matthew 16:21-28

Matthew 16:21-28 provides the narrative sequence in which Jesus first portends to his disciples that he must travel to Jerusalem, where he will suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. What follows Jesus's prognostication are Peter's misguided rebuke of Jesus's forecast and Jesus's response to the same. After Jesus's exchange with Peter, Jesus explains to the disciples the consequences of their devotion to him in paradigm-shifting terms: "[f]or those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who want to lose their life for my sake will find it" (v. 25). The pericope concludes with Jesus's apocalyptic and eschatological pronouncement concerning the Son of Man's coming in glory and reckoning repayment to all, commensurate with the deeds done during their lifetimes.

This pericope provides numerous points of entry for us. One might well consider focusing on the exchange between Peter and Jesus—particularly, Jesus's response to Peter's faulty rebuke. There, Jesus challenges the conceptual starting place from which Peter attempts to assuage Jesus's prediction of his own death. Jesus faults Peter for "setting [his] mind not on divine things but on human things" (v. 23). Perhaps by raising our consciences to those incidences in which we, like Peter, super-prefer human things to divine ones, we may evoke in ourselves a greater receptivity to Christ's death, resurrection, and coming kingdom.

- In what ways do I set my mind on human things rather than divine ones?
- Does my orientation toward human things impede—as a stumbling block—my receptivity to expressions of the divine?

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