

# PENTECOST 14

## *Proper 17 - Year A*

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### **Exodus 3:1-15**

**3** Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.” <sup>4</sup>When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup>Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup>He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup>Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup>and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup>The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup>Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” <sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” <sup>12</sup>He said, “I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

<sup>13</sup>But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” <sup>14</sup>God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to

the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,  
and this my title for all generations.

### **Commentary from Maxine King**

How fitting that after we pray this Sunday’s collect, asking God to “graft in our hearts the love of [God’s] Name,” we hear this breathtaking lesson of God’s first intimate encounter with Moses that culminates in the revelation of the Divine Name. With Moses as our forerunner, we might well desire to emulate him in our encounter with this unfathomable story, removing our sandals and hiding our faces out of respect for the sheer holiness and otherness of God depicted in this text. Such a reaction would surely not be out of place!

But we would do well to note that God’s radical otherness that Moses encounters in this story is neither that of a detached and distant deity nor is it of some artifact whose presence causes a face-melting Hollywood special effect. Exodus teaches us that neither of these all-too-human conceptions of the divine applies to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This God is not merely a disinterested observer of a creation God assembled long ago. No; this God has observed the misery of God’s oppressed people, this God has heard their cry, this God knows their sufferings, and this God acts in loving freedom to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. No; even the most intimate revelation of this God’s personal being—the Divine Name—does not annihilate the creature but reveals that God is for the creature’s life and freedom.

### **Discussion Question**

Does this passage challenge any popular ideas held in your context about who God is and what God is like?

## Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c

- <sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name; \*  
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to him, sing praises to him, \*  
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- <sup>3</sup> Glory in his holy Name; \*  
let the hearts of those who seek  
the Lord rejoice.
- <sup>4</sup> Search for the Lord and his strength; \*  
continually seek his face.
- <sup>5</sup> Remember the marvels he has done, \*  
his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,
- <sup>6</sup> O offspring of Abraham his servant, \*  
O children of Jacob his chosen.
- <sup>23</sup> Israel came into Egypt, \*  
and Jacob became a sojourner in the land of  
Ham.
- <sup>24</sup> The Lord made his people exceedingly fruitful; \*  
he made them stronger than their enemies;
- <sup>25</sup> Whose heart he turned, so that they hated his  
people, \*  
and dealt unjustly with his servants.
- <sup>26</sup> He sent Moses his servant, \*  
and Aaron whom he had chosen.
- <sup>45</sup> Hallelujah!

### Commentary from Maxine King

We have asked for the grace to love God's Name, we have heard God's Name, and now we praise God's Name. We might pause with Psalm 105 to wonder just why Holy Scripture teaches us to have a reverence for the Name of God – why does the psalmist teach with such insistence to call upon and glory in God's holy Name?

For us as well as for God, a name denotes individuality and particularity. This one is not another, but is this very one. This God has this Name, and as the psalmist lists, this God has done particular works, marvels, wonders, and judgments. This Name denotes a particular history and ongoing relation with particular humans: offspring of Abraham and children of Jacob, Moses, and Aaron. And again, as we learned from Exodus, we also learn again in the psalms, this particular God acts in history to vindicate his people, making his people fruitful, sending Moses and Aaron. Such a recollection can only culminate in the ancient praise-shout, as our psalm does in verse 45: Hallelujah!

### Discussion Question

In what ways have you recently made God's deeds known among the peoples? Are there any opportunities for you to do so in the coming weeks?

## Romans 12:9-21

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### Commentary from Maxine King

This section of St. Paul's letter to the Romans is justly famous. Love, mutual affection, hospitality, harmony—it seems we are getting the greatest hits of Christian ethics. And it is always worth remembering that St. Paul is no great innovator here—quotations from Deuteronomy and Proverbs feature prominently in this majestic list. As the 39 Articles put it, “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New” (BCP 869). We can never remind ourselves of this too much, especially when reading St. Paul!

What strikes me most in this passage is verses 17 and following: “Never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God.” Whew! Nietzsche and the many others who have critiqued Christianity for encouraging a passive submission to earthly oppression would have a field day with such a teaching—and from much of the historical record, it seems like these critiques are not entirely misplaced. Love for one's enemies can be a dangerous teaching to the abused and oppressed, and we should not pretend its danger can be piously waved away. But I think there is something more than a merely passive acquiescence to evil being taught here. For those of us who have been addressed by St. Paul's exhortations, we are not meant to call the evil of abuse and oppression good, nor should we sweep uncomfortable truths under the rug. No; we must learn to be comfortable with hating what is evil and always holding fast to the good! This cannot and must not be a teaching that hinders any attempt at true justice and living peaceably with all.

### Discussion Question

What is one of these exhortations that you find easy to practice? What is one that is more difficult?

## Matthew 16:21-28

<sup>21</sup> From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

<sup>27</sup> “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. <sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

### Commentary from Maxine King

There is always a temptation to confidently read any of the bumbling apostles stories from our post-resurrection perspective. Unlike the silly disciples, we know what happens next; we wouldn't make their mistakes. But I think this attitude can often distort just how similar to the apostles we truly are, despite our supposedly enlightened position. How often do I—like St. Peter—desire a Lord who would destroy his executioners rather than forgive them with his dying breaths?

It is perhaps telling that Jesus immediately references the effects that his death and resurrection will have on those who follow him, that they must also take up a cross. Perhaps this is why St. Peter and I tell Jesus “God forbid,” when he goes to the cross—we know what it will mean for our lives, and we cling to them as if we could save them by striving to gain the world. The redemption that Jesus promises is both more terrible—according to merely human things—and wonderful—according to divine things—than we could ask or imagine.

### Discussion Question

What have you had to deny in taking up your cross and following Jesus?