

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
The Burning Bush
God's name is revealed.
Scripture: Exodus 2:23-25, 3:1-15, 4:10-17
Rev. Steve Filyk
Communion Sunday
October 3, 2021
Opening Hymn: Holy, holy, holy
Chorus: Days of Elijah
Communion Hymn: This I believe (The Creed)
Closing Hymn: Come thou fount

What God do you worship?
What God do you worship?

You are probably thinking,
“what sort of question are you asking, Pastor?”

We are at a Presbyterian church
during Sunday worship.
We aren't worshipping Ganesh.
We aren't worshipping Gaia.

We are worshipping the God
Found in the pages of the Bible:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But who is this God?
What is this God's character?

Does this God reward the faithful?
Does this God intervene in history?
Does this God punish sinners?

We are all sitting together in this sanctuary
(some of you are online).

But if we started discussing these questions
We might find that though we are sitting together,
We are actually miles apart.

In their book “Who Is Your God”
“Paul Froese and Christopher Bader argue
that many of America’s most intractable social
and political divisions [can be traced to]
differing beliefs about God.

They show that regardless of religious tradition (or lack thereof),
Americans worship four distinct deities:

the Authoritative God,
who is both engaged with the world and judgmental;

the Benevolent God, who loves and aids us in spite of our failings;

the Critical God, who catalogs our sins
but does not punish them
(at least not in this life);

and the Distant God, who stands apart from the world He created.”ⁱ

So what God do YOU worship?

PAUSE

Today we have hit the ‘fast-forward’ button.

Last week we heard the story of Jacob
And his dream about a ladder reaching to the heavens.

That Jacob who we met while he was fleeing for his life,
Eventually found his place in the world.

Jacob became a prosperous rancher with a big family.
He eventually travelled back to Canaan,
The land of his youth,
The land his grandfather had been promised.

Just as Jacob was favored by his mother,
Jacob had a son that he doted on.
This son, Joseph, was also a dreamer.

But these dreams didn't make Joseph everyone's favorite.
Joseph's brothers sold him to slave traders
Who took him down to Egypt.

In Egypt Joseph faced a series of challenges and opportunities
But eventually rose to great power,
Being second only to Pharaoh.

During a time of famine, he saved the very family who sold him.
They resettle and prosper in the land.

But... they remain foreigners
And years later the growing nation of Israel
was perceived as a threat to the people of Egypt

When another Pharoah who knew nothing about Joseph
came to power, they were enslaved.

Which brings us to today's story.

Today we meet Moses.

Moses is in the unique position of being an ethnic Hebrew
Who was adopted by one of Pharaoh's daughters.

While he grows up with privilege

He maintains some sort of connection with his people,
And as a young man even tries to take leadership among them.

But when this attempt at leadership fails
he runs away to start a new life,
this time as a shepherd.

Today we are told that as he is working on his ranch

He sees something curious:
A distant bush appears to be burning
And the flames are not destroying it.

Moses' curiosity draws him closer.

And when approaches it,
the Lord speaks to him saying:

"I am the God of your father,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."ⁱⁱ

Up to this point we don't know

If Moses really knows the God of his ancestors.

We know that his own mother acted as his wet nurse.

But being raised in Pharaoh's household
We can only imagine his religious instruction
would be in the Egyptian pantheon:
gods like Isis and Osiris, Anubis and Thoth.

This God speaking to him in the wilderness
Could effectively be a stranger to Moses.

So what does Moses learn about God in this encounter?
And what does it teach us
About the God we say that we follow?

It seems pretty clear from today's lesson
That this God is interested in God's people.

You can see this by looking at what God tells Moses.
All those verbs about care and concern:

"I have indeed SEEN the misery of my people in Egypt.
I have HEARD them crying out because of their slave drivers,
and I am CONCERNED about their suffering."ⁱⁱⁱ

God sees,
God hears,
God is concerned.

God is very interested in God's people;
God is interested in their wellbeing.
This is pretty obvious from the text.

What is also obvious
Is that beyond simply showing concern or pity
God has plans for action.

God has plans to liberate them
From their desperate circumstances
And provide them with better lives:

“I have come down to rescue them
from the hand of the Egyptians
AND to bring them up out of that land
into a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey...”^{iv}

This God is concerned.

This God is ready to act.

And this God invites Moses, to be his human partner
In God’s rescue plan.

After all this talk about God’s concern

And God’s plan, God turns it over to Moses.

“So now, go.”

“So now, go!”

This is maybe the most interesting part of the story.

And an important lesson about God’s character.

This God is concerned and capable,

But CHOOSES to work with and through human beings.

Even people like Moses.

Despite Moses being revered in history,

at this point in the story Moses is an unlikely partner.

While he has experience in Pharaoh’s court,

Moses is a criminal, a murderer.

Moses lacks confidence.

Moses even has some sort of speech impediment.

Moses is an unlikely candidate.

He doesn't even seem interested.

It is amusing when you consider the different attempts of Moses

To avoid God's call:

"Who am I?" Moses asks.

"What shall I tell them?" Moses continues.

"I am slow of speech." Moses argues.

"Please send someone else." Moses begs.

But this God persists.

This God accommodates Moses' concern

Sending his brother Aaron to be his associate.

This God is determined to have a human partner

In God's work.

PAUSE

So what does this all teach us about the God we worship?

This God is concerned about God's people.

God feels your pain.

God knows when you're at the end of your rope.

God feels all your sorrows and your fears.

This God "allows suffering to enter deeply

Into the divine being."^v

The same God that feels your pain

Is working out plans for your deliverance.

We are told elsewhere in the Bible
That “God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.”^{vi}

When everything looks dark,
And you can see no hope for the future.
God is busy accomplishing something beautiful and good.

But God who feels our pain,
The God who has plans for our rescue,
Continues to look for human partners.

To me this has two distinct implications.

It means that when we are looking for help,
We should be prepared to receive that help
From human hands, even if God ordained it.

But... but...
We should also be prepared to be the instruments
Through which God is working out the healing of others.

So have you learned little more about our God?
So much more remains to be discovered.

When Moses asks about God’s name,
The response Moses is given is:
“I am who I am.”

This can also be understood as:
“I will be who I will be.”

[As in] “Who am I? Wait and see, Moses. Wait and see.”^{vii}

Amen.

ⁱ "Who Is Your God | The Book." 1 Oct. 2021, www.thearda.com/whoisyourgod/thebook.

ⁱⁱ Exodus 3:5 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 3:7 NIV

^{iv} Exodus 3:8 NIV

^v Terence E. Fretheim *Exodus* 60

^{vi} Romans 8:28 NIV

^{vii} Brent A. Strawn “Exodus 3:1-15” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts*” 84