

Third Sunday in Lent, Year C

A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger

on March 23, 2025

Exodus 3:1-15 / Psalm 63:1-8 / 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 / Luke 13:1-9

*May my words be acceptable to God; faithful to the teachings of Christ;
and inspired by the Holy Spirit; that we may be blessed by the same Triune God.*

[At the 10am Service,] We have a Baptism today. We are bringing Ikenna into the Body of Christ. The readings today are set for the 3rd Sunday in Lent, and they don't concern themselves with Baptism. The Church believes:

- *Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as His children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.*
- *The outward and visible sign in Baptism is water, in which the person is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*
- *The inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.*

What if anything do today's readings tell us about what we are bringing Ikenna into today?

The end of the OT reading is interesting. In ancient Jewish tradition, you weren't a person until you were named. Naming happened on the 8th day after birth, and if the baby was a boy, he was circumcised on the same day. So, on January 1, the 8th Day of Christmas, the Church celebrates the Naming and Circumcision of Jesus, or the Feast of the Holy Name.

In this exchange, we learn God's name – God becomes *someone* to Moses. This theophany is *before* The Exodus; it is the impetus for The Exodus. Apologies if you

know Moses' background, but here's his life in bullet points up to where he meets God in the Burning Bush:

- The Israelites are enslaved in Egypt. The Israelite women appear to much more fertile than the Egyptian women, so Pharaoh commanded that all Egyptian baby boys be thrown into the Nile upon birth to prevent the Israelite community from becoming too big and overthrowing Pharaoh.
- When Moses' mother birthed him, she did not throw him into the Nile; she hid him. And when it became too difficult to conceal him, she put him in a basket and sent him down the river. It's a beautiful depiction in Disney's *The Prince of Egypt*, complete with song, fighting hippos and aggressive fishermen.
- Moses is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and grows up in Pharaoh's household as one of them.
- But when Moses gets older, he realizes that his people – the Israelites – are enslaved. So he runs away. He encounters an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so he kills him. Pharaoh finds out and puts a mark on Moses' life, so Moses hides out until *that* Pharaoh dies.
- Somehow, after that, without explanation, Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro...and he comes across a burning bush!

Knowing that he is in a divine presence, Moses asks the divine presence's name. The reply:

I am who I am.

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

God is made *real* to Moses through the revealing of the name *I am*.

It may come as no surprise that the Hebrew for '*I am*' or '*I will be*' is *ehyeh*. In third person it is *yihyeh* or *Yahweh*. This is where the Tetragrammaton may have come from: *YHWH*. It can be *I AM WHO I AM* or *I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE*. The most elegant translation of the Tetragrammaton is:

While I will graciously reveal my name to you, I will not be bound or defined by it.

How more *God* can that be!

In Baptism, one becomes *real*, a person of the Body of Christ. They will be who they will be. In ancient Christianity, a person was given their Christian name – their name – at Baptism. So, this passage has quite a lot to do with today's Baptism of Ikenna.

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses some atrocities that have occurred in the life of the Israelites. Pilate had some men killed in the Temple while the sacrifices were being offered. Not only was it a brutality, but it invalidated their sacrifices. It would be as if someone were to kill another during the Eucharistic Prayer. Some others died when a tower fell on them.

The two messages to take away from those brief mentions are that no one is considered better than anyone else, and we *all* are in need of repentance.

Repentance is inextricably linked with Baptism. Both John and Jesus in the Gospels, and then the Disciples and Paul in the rest of the New Testament repeat the mantra to all:

Repent and be Baptized.

The repentance leads the baptized to the inward and spiritual grace of forgiveness of sins. We will all say together in a moment, as part of our Baptismal Covenant:

...whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.

Responding with “*I will with God’s help*” is our way of saying, “*Yes, but sometimes it will be a challenge, but with God, all things are possible.*” That links up with something Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

You may have heard it said that:

God won’t give you more than you can handle.

That way of thinking is totally bogus. It’s bad theology and bad psychology. But the good part if this is the reminder to have reliance upon God. Paul’s motivation in writing this to the Corinthians has to be put into their context. They were in a large seaport with lots of different people from lots of different places and *lots* of different religious customs. The Christians in Corinth wanted to follow Jesus, but they also wanted to fit in! So Paul reminds them to rely and trust on God to help them from going astray. That’s quite different than losing your house in a wildfire or a tragic death in the family or multiple traumas or abuse.

When you are struggling, don’t forget to pray. God is listening. Pray not for a fix – pray for guidance, insight, understanding and how to respond to the outcome of your situation, particularly if the outcome isn’t what you want. Also, ask others for prayer. At every Baptism, the congregation is asked:

Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?

We respond with a robust “*We will!*”. But we can’t do it if you don’t tell us. So, yes, repent and turn to the Lord, even it’s going to be difficult. But don’t forget to pray and to ask others to pray for you. Being part of the Body of Christ means

that, when one part of the Body struggles, we all struggle together until the Body is healed again.

Also in today's reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions baptism, but in the context of the Israelites as they escape Egypt and enter into The Exodus.

Our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.

Paul attempts to parallel what the Israelites did with the Christian ceremonies of the Early Church – which are those of the Church today. Under the cloud and through the Red Sea, they were 'baptized into Moses'. They ate the manna from Heaven, like the Bread is the Body of Christ, and they drank from the rock in the desert, like the wine is the Blood of Christ. It was their 'spiritual food and drink'.

Despite this, the Israelites still suffered God's punishment when they went astray. The Israelites – and the Christians in Corinth – had faith and they performed the rituals, so what could go wrong? Well, they didn't have the right attitude.

Again, context is everything. Paul is telling the Corinthians: *Don't take your Baptism for granted!* In their highly multicultural context, the Corinthians took pride in their Baptism. Unlike the other religions around them, their Baptism in Christ ensured their salvation. Their participation in the Eucharist spiritually fortified them. So, they believed themselves to be better than the non-Christians in Corinth – the vast majority of Corinth's residents, for the Christians were few. Their participation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion ensured their immortality...so they wanted to believe!

So, it looks like the Corinthians were:

continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers.

It was a struggle for them to

persevere in resisting evil,

and needed to be reminded that

whenever they fell into sin, they needed to repent and return to the Lord.

They were clearly not

proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

And it appears that their attitude toward

seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving their neighbors as themselves

was more about claiming to follow Christ while wanting to *fit in* with their neighbors and thus engaging in activities that were contrary to a life in Christ.

So Paul reminds them that their ancestors were just as diligent in their rituals, and they still perished. Faith comes with right actions *and* right attitudes.

In the end, all 3 readings point to the end of the presentation of the catechumenate:

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior?

*Do you put your whole trust in His grace and love? **I do.***

That is your faith, your works and your attitude in a life in Jesus Christ, a life in which you do not walk alone, but with all those who have gone before and all those who will come after and all those who, [*later this morning*] in a moment, will acclaim their support of Ikenna and his life in Christ with a robust **WE WILL!**

My final point is about humility. As a Member of the Body of Christ – what we are bringing Ikenna into – your faith, your works, your attitude in your life in Jesus Christ must come with humility.

*Remove the sandals from your feet,
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*

We are here by the grace of God. We present ourselves in humility and love. Throughout the Bible, humility is what God – what Jesus – is looking for:

- Among the crowds gathered around Him, Jesus acknowledged the mingled blood of the sacrifices, He acknowledged the unnecessary of those killed by the falling tower, He told the parable of the fig tree ... so that all may be *humble* in their faith.
- Paul rebukes the Christians in Corinth for their arrogance, and he gives evidence of their need for humility.
- The Psalm *is* the humility before and deference to God: *O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you...I will bless you as long as I live.*

And the OT lesson reminds us that our deference is at the same time our confidence – it is our faith, our works, and our attitude:

*Remove the sandals from your feet,
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*

Today we bring Ikenna into the Body of Christ. It is what the Church has always been tasked with doing. And it is with joy that Moses and the Israelites, Jesus of Nazareth and His followers, Paul and the recipients of his letters, and the countless followers of Jesus before us, with us and after us will – as our full selves, in repentance, as practitioners of the faith, with right intention, and with humility, at the request to support Ikenna in his life in Christ, we will boldly acclaim: **WE WILL!**