

HOMILY FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 30TH, 2026

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For me there are three pivotal passages in the Bible. One of them is our passage from Exodus this morning. In describing these passages as pivotal, I am in no way dismissing the rest of Bible, but these passages create a vital lens with which to read the rest of the Bible. You will know each of them. The first is from Genesis:

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

The second passage is from the 1st Chapter of the Gospel of John:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. The 1st chapter is known as the prologue.

The third passage is from Exodus – our passage this morning both in the story of the burning bush and especially: *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.’”*

I'd like to tell you why each of them is so important. In Genesis it is immediately clear that God was before creation and before time. It is clear in that there cannot be time without the passage of days, so if God created the first day, God existed before time. But God created much more than time. As the creative force behind the cosmos, in what the King James Bible describes as void, God set in train a process some 13.8 billion years ago that has been expanding throughout all of history and continues to expand today. That process has been called by those who study it most closely, cosmogenesis. Our Book of Genesis is how ancients approached the mystery. In some ways, we understand much more than our forebears, but they understood spiritual truth and their indebtedness to God while we are prone to reduce the process of cosmological expansion to scientific equations when it is, in fact, that and so much more. The God initiated process of cosmological expansion continues today as mystery well beyond our complete comprehension. Another comment on the passage from Genesis: The New Revised Standard edition of the Bible we use says *a wind from God swept over the face of the waters*. Other translations including the King James say *the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*. Wind, the breath of God, and the Holy Spirit are used interchangeably in the Bible. In Hebrew, the word was Ruach and it meant all three. By the way it is also a feminine noun which is why many of us say, *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son, She is worshiped and glorified. She has spoken through the prophets*. Finally on the passage from Genesis, please note that throughout the creation story things came into being because

God said *Let there be light...he called the light day and the darkness he called night.* God's creation was very much a consequence of God naming something, and it became.

The passage from the beginning of the Prologue of John is very similar to the passage from Genesis especially in its emphasis on the Word. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* Again the emphasis on the naming of things that brings them into being. John a few verses later connects the *Word that was with God and was God* with Jesus, *The word became flesh and lived among us.* He then further connects Jesus with the Spirit of God quoting John the Baptist, *I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.* Everything in the Gospel of John is written to illustrate the truth of the Prologue.

I now turn to the passage from Exodus. God appears to Moses in a bush that blazes but is not consumed. There is a striking parallel between the bush that burns but is not consumed with what we know of the big bang. It immediately generated heat of 10 to the 32nd power Kelvin which is the highest temperature that contemporary physics can imagine. As cooling continued over millions of years all manner of material from subatomic particles to whole galaxies and eventually all that we know of matter today including ourselves came into being. I think it useful to think of the power of God as fire that creates but does not consume.

Our passage this morning concludes with Moses asking God for God's name. God responds *I AM WHO I AM.* Again the NRSV offers a footnote to that name. The footnote suggests that it could be

translated as *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*. I am is of course the first-person singular conjugation of the verb “to be”. The interesting thing about the being verb is that it is most comprehensive when a complement is not added. If I say I am, I am asserting existence. If I say I am a preacher, I am limiting that existence because surely I am much more than an occasional preacher. This becomes even more of a problem when we switch to the third person singular and speak of God. The most comprehensive thing I can say about God is, “God is”. As soon I add a complement: healer, teacher saviour, judge, or father, I have not only limited who God is, but I have brought favour on humans who occupy one of those roles. I have limited God and aggrandized mortals.

But even the statement *I am who I am* limits God to a particular state which is why I very much like *I will be who I will be*. Who are we to say that God does not continue to become? There are at least 5 examples in the Hebrew Scripture where God relented or regretted an action or changed his mind. Perhaps the most notable change is after the flood in Genesis 9: *I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.*” Theologians like Augustine certainly emphasized that God’s eternal character and ultimate will will not change, but his relational response shifts to show mercy when human behaviour changes. Some modern theologians believe that God enters into a dynamic, responsive relationship with humans and does change his course of action. If that were not so, what would be the point of prayer?

Do not imagine for a moment that I am suggesting that God is capricious or fickle. I am suggesting that it is blasphemous in the extreme to attempt to constrain and contain the Divine Creator who set in train the creation of everything we know and much we do not know throughout the entire cosmos – the Divine Creator who set in train a creative process that continues for 13.8 billion years and counting. We regularly speak of the living God. What or who do we know that is living that is not developing. Even many of us who are much closer to the end of our lives than the beginning are still developing and will continue so to do until we draw our last breath because even in decline there is growth and expansion of understanding. If that is true of us mere mortals why would it not be true in orders of magnitude greater for the Divine Creator.

If all I had were these three passages of Holy Scripture and I were asked to say what I believe. This would be my creed:

I believe in God who existed before time and brought time and all Creation across the Cosmos into being. I believe in God who is light. I believe in God who became incarnate in Jesus to bring Gentiles into covenant. I believe in God whose spirit indwells all Creation. I believe in God who is becoming and leads all Creation in its becoming. I believe in God whose name is *I will be what I will be*.

I can't think that I need anything more than that to guide me on my faith journey. Thanks be to God, Amen.