

Sunday, September 3, 2023 – Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the incurable wound of his suffering yet finds in God's words the delight of his heart. When Peter doesn't grasp Jesus' words about suffering, Jesus tells the disciples they will find their lives in losing them. Such sacrificial love is described by Paul when he urges us to associate with the lowly and not repay evil with evil. In worship we gather as a community that we might offer ourselves for the sake of our suffering world

Prayer of the Day

O God, we thank you for your Son, who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow your commands, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Exodus 3:1-15

Moses experienced the call of God when God appeared to him in a bush that burned but was not consumed. When Moses expressed his unworthiness, God promised to be with him. When Moses objected that people would demand to know God's name, God revealed his personal name, Yahweh (I AM WHO I AM), or the LORD. Israel discovered God's true identity when God took them out of Egypt.

¹Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There 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. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When 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." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He 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.

⁷Then 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, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹²He 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 worship God on this mountain."

¹³But 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?" ¹⁴God 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.'" ¹⁵God 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."

Psalm: Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b

Make known the deeds of the LORD among the peoples. Hallelujah! (Ps. 105:1, 45)

¹Give thanks to the LORD and call up- | on God's name;
make known the deeds of the LORD a- | mong the peoples.

²**Sing to the | LORD, sing praises,
and speak of all God's | marvelous works.**

³Glory in God's | holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the | LORD rejoice.

⁴**Search for the strength | of the LORD;
continually | seek God's face.**

⁵Remember the marvels | God has done,
the wonders and the judgments | of God's mouth,

⁶**O offspring of Abra- | ham, God's servant,
O children of Jacob, God's | chosen ones.**

²³Israel came | into Egypt,
and Jacob became a sojourner in the | land of Ham.

²⁴**The LORD made the people of Israel | very fruitful,
more numerous | than their enemies,**

²⁵whose hearts God turned, so that they hat- | ed God's people,
and dealt unjustly with the ser- | vants of God.

²⁶**O LORD, you sent Mo- | ses your servant,
and Aaron, your chosen one. ^{45b} | Hallelujah!**

Second Reading: Romans 12:9-21

Paul presents benchmarks for faithful relationships with Christians and non-Christians. Love is the unflagging standard of our behavior. When we encounter evil, we do not resort to its tactics but seek to overcome it with good. While Christians cannot control the actions and attitudes of others, we seek to live at peace with all people.

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

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰No, "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." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

After Peter confesses that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16), Jesus reveals the ultimate purpose of his ministry. These words prove hard to accept, even for a disciple whom Jesus has called a "rock."

²¹From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] 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. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For 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?

²⁷"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. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Prayers of Intercession

Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

A brief silence.

God of life, your words are the joy at the heart of your church. Draw the seeker to you, place messages of hope and healing in the mouths of your witnesses, and open your children to your truth when we stumble. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of steadfast love, renew the earth by your Spirit, that lands and oceans reveal the beauty of your creation. Challenge us to live humbly and peaceably as part of your world. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of patience, lead those who govern to hold fast to what is good. Guide them to show honor to the people in their care. Overcome evil in all nations and grant peace to peoples and places mired in conflict (*especially*). Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of deliverance, remember all who are suffering, lonely, and in pain. Liberate your people being insulted, persecuted, or in the grasp of the ruthless. Give endurance to workers who persevere on this Labor Day and insure fair wages and safe working environments. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of justice, equip this congregation to boldly follow you in uncertain times and to remain faithful in prayer when facing challenges. Show us how best to love and care for one another and our communities. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of glory, we give thanks for the saints who now dwell with you in splendor (*especially*). Nurture us in faith until the day we join their heavenly song. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

A reflection for this Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

There Must Be Another Way

Peter may be the “rock” on which Christ will build the church (Matt. 16:18), but when Jesus reveals the suffering that will come first, Peter becomes a tempter and “stumbling block.” Assuming God must have a different way to save the world, Peter protests Jesus’ suffering and death. Jesus explains to Peter and all his disciples that, in fact, this is the way to life—losing one’s life in order to find it.

By tempting Jesus to an easier way than his journey through suffering to resurrection, Peter personifies a temptation common to all generations of Jesus’ disciples: seeking a way to avoid “losing oneself,” instead of surrendering all to and with the one we follow. Rather than losing our lives—our selves, possessions, and time—we hold on more tightly, afraid of what will happen to our comfort, success, and identity if we let go. Those things we hold onto then become, like Peter, stumbling blocks along the way of self-giving love.

But while “saving one’s life” sounds sensible, those things also stand in the way of the new life into which Jesus beckons us to follow him. Perhaps Peter’s problem is that he sees only the suffering and death, without grasping the new life that comes through it. In times when we too are tempted by worldly ways of comfort and success, convinced that *surely* God must have an easier way than the way of self-giving love, this gospel reminds us that resurrection and life await on the other side of suffering and death.

This is the way of our God who becomes human in Jesus: emptying himself of power and dignity, losing his very own life for the sake of the world’s life. Seen through the lens of resurrection just ahead on the journey, what other way could there be?

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