

Romans 12:9-21 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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." No, "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." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

How are we living out the marks of a true Christian as outlined there: Is our love genuine, are we outdoing one another in showing honour, where are we being ardent in spirit, rejoicing in hope, persistent in prayer and extending hospitality to strangers, even while distancing? Is it possible that, in our slowed down lives, we can focus more on how we exemplify what it is to be Christian?

Matthew 16:21-28 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But 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." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 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? "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. 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."

Jesus' teaching is counter cultural, turning things on their head: Jesus says that we must take up our cross, deny ourselves and follow him. How do those demands sound in a world where we're being forced to re-evaluate everything we thought was important in the light of a pandemic?

COCU 54A Readings

The story of the burning bush is a pivotal story at this time in history. How have events in 2020 enabled us to reconnect with the God who calls on us to turn aside and recognise holy ground? How has being forced to find alternative ways to worship enabled us to be reflexive - not simply to react to the challenges that confront us but to discern in the midst of those challenges how we might fulfil Christ's command to love God and our neighbour? And what have we learned about being church today rather than going through the motions of religious practices? How are we prepared to live as changed people, modelling for others the marks of a Christian?

Each of our Lectionary passages this Sunday invites us to look for the sacred in the ordinary and to look for the divine at work in common things. There's an expectation that our behaviour will be changed by what we see, by what we believe and by what we profess.

Exodus 3:1-15

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 Horeb, the mountain of God. 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. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 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." Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. 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.

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, and 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. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God 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." 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?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the

Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 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.

This encounter with God starts Moses and the Hebrew people on a new journey. It comes at a pivotal moment where circumstances (the death of a king), and ongoing suffering, combine with God's remembrance to start something new. It uses someone uniquely placed to engage with the Egyptian and Hebrew people, thanks to the courage of the women in his life. It begins with suffering, alienation, wilderness, and Moses' ordinary work, into all of which God calls.

Moses is called by name by God, from the bush that is burning but not destroyed, on ground that becomes holy. God initially identifies God's self in relation to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the liberation of God's people in relation to the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants. Throughout the ensuing dialogue, questions of identity are central. Moses is a Hebrew brought up as an Egyptian prince, but is now an alien residing in a foreign land (2:22). His first response to God's call is to say "Here I am," then his next words are "Who am I...?" In the first of many objections (in this passage and beyond), Moses cannot see how he can do what God asks of him. The next question raised is about God's identity – who are you? What shall I say about the one who calls? God then offers that most mysterious of answers, translated as: "I am who I am," or "I am what I am," or "I will be what I will be" (NRSV). God is "I am," and also "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Much has been written about the divine name, YHWH (from the Hebrew). It is a reminder that God cannot be known fully, we can't pin God down as we might want to. God is free to be Godself, thus free to act as God chooses. But God's identity is still relational – an "I" implies a relation to "you," and God is already in relationship with Moses' ancestors. There is also a promise going forward, that the God who made the covenant with Abraham is keeping that now, and "will be" into the future – with a future sign of worship on the mountain offered to assure Moses. God is mystery, but God is also faithful and in an ongoing relationship with people. This encounter marks a new stage in that engagement.

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

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing to him, sing praises to him;

tell of all his wonderful works.

Glory in his holy name;

let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Seek the Lord and his strength;

seek his presence continually.

Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,

O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham. And the Lord made his people very fruitful, and made them stronger than their foes, whose hearts he then turned to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants. He sent his servant Moses, and Aaron whom he had chosen.

Praise the Lord!

This Psalm begins with a strong summons to a congregation to praise their faithful God. It then narrates the salvation history of the Israelite people, from God's covenant with Abraham through to the occupation of land, to reaffirm why God is worthy of their worship. The shared recitation and remembering of story and journey builds up a gathered people as a community, particularly as people gathered in, and by, the presence of God.

The opening 6 verses are a series of imperatives, instructing or commanding people to give thanks; call on God's name; make God's deeds known; sing praises to God; remember and tell of God's wonderful works; glory in God's holy name; rejoice; seek the Lord and God's presence. The repetition of exhortation emphasises its importance – the people are to do all these things, focusing on God.

Identity, so key in today's Exodus passage, crops up again here. The people are identified in v. 6 as "offspring of God's servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen one". That gives the congregation a particular place in the narrative that is being retold. God is identified as YHWH, the Lord, who shapes the story from the Abrahamic covenant onwards. God's name, which encompasses that identity and faithful character of God, is called upon.

Today's reading touches only on the Egypt section of the narrative. The way that it is told emphasises God's sovereignty and control over all that happened, including a belief that God hardened the hearts of the people of Egypt. That applies throughout the Psalm, God is the object, it is always God who is acting. The story is of the deeds of God, whom the congregation are to worship. Thus the Psalm finishes, as it began, with Hallelujah - praise the Lord!