



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. CANON JENNIFER KING DAUGHERTY, CANON FOR ENGAGEMENT & CONNECTION

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 20, 2022

EXODUS 3:1-15; PSALM 63: 1-8; 1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13; LUKE 13:1-9

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

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 he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He 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. 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?" He 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." He said further, "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."]

Over the last several weeks, as Russia's assault on Ukraine has intensified, as we've seen photographs of the destruction of a theater clearly marked as sheltering children, and as we've learned of the growing exodus of

refugees from all parts of Ukraine; many of the people in this community have been learning about blood memory and spiritual inheritance from our theologian in residence, the Rev. Dr. Hillary Raining.

The past two Wednesday evenings, Dr. Raining described how traumatic events can impact a person's psyche and how those wounds can be passed down generation to generation if they are not acknowledged and cared for. These wounds may be known or well hidden, but they can cause emotional, physical or spiritual distress.

Dr. Raining also described how a person can experience healing for themselves, with God's help, through spiritual practices like mindfulness and gratitude. This can then transmit healing and wholeness to the generations that follow them, but also – and here's where indigenous wisdom has something to teach us – it sends healing back through their lineage, to the great cloud of saints around us and within us. You can learn more from the videos of the series on Saint Mark's website.¹

Also, two Fridays ago, through the first offering of the Mideast Focus Film Series, many in this community watched the film "Blind Trust" and learned about Dr. Vamik Volkan's work on the psychology of large groups bonded by religion or nationality, and how their identity is impacted by shared trauma.

He says in the film, "How and what a group mourns defines large group identity." If the trauma is too great to be mourned, like genocide or the suffering and obliteration of

war, its impact is passed on for other generations to hold. Trauma can stay lodged in distinct ethnic or religious communities for generations, even centuries, and if unhealed, can be re-activated by charismatic leaders as justification for the destruction of the other. But it can be healed; read about Dr. Volkan's work to learn more.²

So, this is what we've been learning as we watch the destruction of Ukraine and the exodus of almost 3 million refugees. And we're reminded of the exodus of the more than 26 million refugees in our world – from Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan, not to mention climate change refugees. What will be the blood memory of such displaced people? What will be the spiritual inheritance of their children and their children's children?

Our first reading today is from the Book of Exodus – the beginning of one of the most foundational stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition: God's summons of Moses to liberate the Israelites.

When Moses encounters God on Mount Horeb, he is in exile himself. Born to Hebrew parents enslaved in Egypt, he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter as an Egyptian. You might remember the story: Pharaoh orders all male Jewish babies to be killed. So, Moses' mother puts him in a basket and leaves him on the banks of the Nile, where Pharaoh's

¹ <https://saintmarks.org/2022/03/blood-memory-and-spiritual-inheritance-a-forum-with-the-rev-dr-hillary-raining/>

² For example: Vamik Volkan, *Large-Group Psychology: Racism, Societal Divisions, Narcissistic Leaders and Who We Are Now*, Phoenix Publishing House, 2020.

daughter finds him and takes him into her home.

After he is grown, Moses is outraged by the harsh treatment of the Hebrews, and in a fit of anger, kills an Egyptian overseer who abuses a worker. To escape punishment, he flees Egypt and settles in Midian, marrying Zipporah and tending sheep for his father-in-law. Many years pass and still the Israelites suffer in slavery.

Today's story of Moses' encounter with God is rich with symbols and signs. The burning bush that gets his attention and marks holy ground in the wilderness. The voice of God that calls to Moses, invoking the names of the Jewish patriarchs and pledging to deliver the Israelites from slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey. And God sends Moses to make it happen.

But Moses resists. He knows he is not a leader, but a hot-headed, inarticulate alien in a foreign land. He pleads, "Who am I to do this?" God replies, "I will be with you." In other words, it's not your qualifications that got you this job, Moses. Perhaps you don't need qualifications. God doesn't call you because of who *you* are. God calls you because of who *God* is. Still, Moses presses, "But who shall I say sent me? What is your name?"

God's reply is one of the most mysterious, powerful verses in scripture. "*Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*"³ translated today as "I am who I am."

"*I AM*" sends Moses to liberate the Israelites. The divine One who is fully, uniquely, and unalterably present.

Many Biblical scholars believe this isn't the most accurate translation, though. They translate God's self-identification as "I will be who I will be," as in, "I am the One who endures, who brings all into being." There is a sense of cosmic solidity and persistence. Time may flow and creation may evolve, but God's presence is unchanging and eternal.

Moses' story continues in Exodus, where the audible, divine presence transforms and empowers him to lead the Israelites out of slavery, through 40 years in the wilderness, and finally to a new homeland.

This story – of Moses meeting God face to face, where he is fully known just as he is and summoned beyond himself to bring God's desire for the world into reality – this story is blood memory for the ancient Israelites and for us, too. A spiritual inheritance that grounds us in the certainty that God was, is, and will be, unlimited and unconditional.

When I read this story against the backdrop of the news this week, I find myself praying for burning bushes along the refugee path out of Ukraine, at the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, at the wall between the US and Mexico. And burning bushes in Seattle, in the midst of refugees from homelessness, mental health crisis, or addiction.

³ Many thanks to Noah Friedman, who helped with the translation and pronunciation.

I pray for unquenchable fire from which God calls the liberators of our time, answering their reluctance and fear with, “I will be with you. I have heard the outcry and pain of my people. Tell them, “*I AM*” has sent me to you.””

It is fitting that prayer is our first response to the heartbreaking violence and misery of war. We are a community bound together and sustained by our common prayer and we know that prayer changes us and the world in ways we can’t quantify.

First, we pray. And then we must support the liberators and comforters to the best of our ability, like Episcopal Relief and Development and its ecumenical partners. On the diocesan website, the bishop has offered suggestions and links to several organizations on the ground, providing aid in Ukraine and many places of suffering.⁴

And -- we are also summoned to put into practice what we have learned over the last several weeks. To take to heart our spiritual inheritance: the knowledge of God’s unchanging, persistent, powerful presence. This Lent we are invited to reflect on our own blood memories and begin the spiritual work of uncovering and revealing the gifts and wounds you have inherited and allowing God to heal them.

Because that healing can extend to mend and strengthen your relationships, which are part of the great web of connection, spreading God’s grace through time and space, through generations that were, are, and will be. *I AM* has sent you.

⁴<https://ecww.org/the-crisis-in-ukraine-and-ways-to-help/>

