

Sermon for 18 October 2020 @ Bethesda UMC
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost/Laity Sunday
Scriptures: Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22 :15-22
« Special »

Although, since both Charles and Buck have ceased to exercise their roles as Licensed Lay Speakers among us, it's not been our custom to have members of the laity preach on Laity Sunday, we regularly are led in other parts of the service by lay members. So, without further ado, I will preach on this Laity Sunday ... but watch out! I will be addressing the minister as an equal member of the congregation, no more and no less.

The readings start out with the closest thing to divinity the Hebrews got. Moses says, “I’ve been working for you all this time. How about if I see you?” This isn’t the first time he’s approached the subject. You’ll remember that, when God told Moses to go and “lead my people out of slavery in Egypt,” he ... Moses, asked, “Who shall I say sent me? Tell me your name,” to which God classically replied, “Tell them ‘I am’ sent you,” or, as I learned it in Sunday School, “I am that I am,” in good King James English.

God comes close. “Stand here in this space between the rock as I pass by, and you will see my back.” That way, as Moses puts it, “...we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

Special.

That’s what we say we are, every Sunday.

The nerve of it!

WE know what the Creator of the Universe wants!

Not only that. WE DO what God wants.

Members of the other two Abrahamic religions ... the Muslims and the Jews ... have a hard time with our saying, as Christians, that we follow a human God; but that’s a topic for another Sunday. Today we’re focused on knowing God at all, which scripture insists on from the beginning, starting with the Hebrews and later on branching out into Christianity and Islam.

Special.

I can’t get over it.

Unless ... and here I can only speak from personal observation, and personal experience... unless the Bible means, you have to start one at a time. I can’t say this without crying, every time: It’s like getting married. Unless you make that pledge, unless you go that far, you don’t

comprehend. Or like holding a baby. My youngest son said he went along with the idea, but it was his wife's, not his, until they handed him this little bundle, and then things changed, and ... there he was, and there they've been, and now she's twenty. I say I'm speaking from personal experience. The rest of you can speak from yours. We are alive in relationship. Community brings our talents out, and enlarges our tenderness, uniquely.

Special.

We can only teach what we know; and on this Sunday, of all Sundays, it seems to me we're saying, and telling the world, that there's no high or low, no difference down deep, between people, or groups, families, or nations, presidents or homeless people. We ALL ... and here again, scripture says it, and yet doesn't explain it, except in stories and examples and songs and ... we all are images of our Creator. God wants company. God interacts. God comes alive up close. The Hebrew word for "Papa" or "Daddy" is what the translators have Jesus using, over and over. There is all kinds of mystery about it ... we never know the whole story ... but we have been given the hint, the privilege, the enticement, of being more alive than we ever can describe ... more a part of things than we ever completely realize... and that, like the rest of creation, as the Bible declares, that's good. Good in the sense of belonging. Good in the sense of responding, as one does when one takes a deep breath, and grows, and touches back, and makes something more out of what you've started with ...

Special.

This gets down to practice right quick. It says we don't come alive alone. We don't respond just in a corner. It says we don't know God ... we don't fill out the image ... unless we care for the rest of us equally. We really haven't explored that, either in this country or in the world. We won't know God until we do that a great deal more than now. That's why we are getting so inventive in this modern age. It's not because we want to go to the moon or eat ice cream every day, but because, God love us, we're creative creatures ourselves. If we can just learn to make things better for each other, who knows what heaven will be like!

Let us try, beloved in Jesus, to treat one another as special; not better, one from another, but special. Every one of us.

Special.

...through Jesus Christ,

Amen.