

Sermon for 3 September 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Exodus 3:1-14; Psalter (*Insert: Alternate leader and people*) Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

As if we didn't have enough confusion going on in the world and locally during this season of "Mercury retrograde," the ecumenical set of Bible readings we follow gives us VERY diverse scriptures today.

First, there's one of the most powerful scenes in all scripture: Moses and the burning bush, or more precisely, Moses called by God. Every person here has some version of this scene in your life, if you take your religion seriously. What's your purpose? How's it going? Tough? True? More trouble than it's ever been, or just keeps changing? Please let this reading work on you, again and again, as long as you're alive and aware. Amen.

Then, there's a selection of one of the chants Hebrews and Christians have produced and used together and in private as long as they've ... we've ... been a movement, to help us stick together, and stay with the work of believing God and learning, always learning, how to live redeemed. Please, God. Come and help us. Thanks ... and here's how we feel and what we think we need. Amen.

Now that great organization-man, the Apostle Paul, goes after all the things that need watching as a group ... because you know this is a group thing we're into ... This getting along together is real.. Start @ verse 14 and read aloud a little with me: How much can you give? Where does it end? With THIS bunch? I don't even know you that well! Is that a gospel? Good news, really?

And finally, the promise. I've never understood it. How could people believe such a story? I remember in seminary one day, I said something to a classmate, I don't know what, but it must have been some kind of challenge to what he'd said ... and he looked at me with the closest thing to hate I could imagine ... real mad ... and I thought, "What have I gotten into here? Aren't we Christians?" What are we doing, partners in grace? Are we up to it? Is this character, this force, this ancient bit of history that promised never to leave us, or if it seemed like he left us, he keeps coming back ... and it's not important how long we've been hanging back, but whether we get started now... That shouting match between Jesus and Peter brings it alive: "This must never happen to you!" and Jesus feels the presence of all that tempts giving up just as he did in the wilderness..."Get thee behind me, Satan!"

That's where we are. Will we go forward ... or fall back? Please God, will we see that it doesn't matter how long we have held back. It only matters that we go ahead ...be open, now, to this closeness, these friends in the Spirit, this work God is already doing here among us, which we are doing already, and can do going forward.

Let us pray: God, you are asking us to volunteer. We know it. You gave Ben a beautiful funeral this week. You comforted his son and daughter through the friends and family who filled the room with love last Thursday. You brought Bethesda and Mount Calvary Star together through our two pastors working together. Help us beautify this service as we greet one another and share Communion this Labor Day week-end. Bless the good things that are going on in Baltimore these days. God, there is so much to do, in the city, in the county, all across the state, and all over the world. Thank you that we know so much and lift it up in prayer so many times a day. Help Carole Mason, and Elisabeth Hughes, and so many others within our circle ... Bring us alive in Jesus, the living presence of you in our midst. Amen.