

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

The Rev. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector
All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

Our theme this Lent regarding our self-examination is found in asking the prayer question "Lord, show me in my life where or how I am resisting you." One major facet, as we talked about in last week's sermon, is resisting the very Love that God has for us. The Psalm today, 103, especially those first 11 verses, is a prescription to counteract such resistance simply by reading them each day. I commend that to you. My focus today, however, will be on the evidence that God does Love us, and we can see it manifested in the calling of Moses. So, turn in your liturgy booklets to the Old Testament reading, and follow along.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

So, where is the Love of God somewhere in the lessons for today?
Everywhere. But no less right here in Exodus.

As we will see, there are two stories illuminated from this account in the Book of Exodus, and they are intimately intertwined. One is of Moses alone. And the other is of God's Chosen People living in Egypt, but having become slaves of Pharaoh, and Moses' job description.

We know from last week's Gospel as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, that God loves his people. Today we are going to look even deeper into the Heart of God our Father. If you walk away with only one thing, let it be that God Loves You, no ifs ands or buts.

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As we look closely, we will see in this reading That God shows his love in watching, observing us, not letting a single part of our lives out of his sight and his heart.

Chuck Smith, who founded what is now known as the association of Calvary Chapels, tells the little story about one of his grandsons who, when they got home from church one Sunday, asked his dad if God was watching him. His father replied, "Why do you ask me that question?" to which Chuck's grandson replied, "My teacher told me that God was watching me." " Why did your Sunday School teacher tell you that God was watching you?" (sigh) "Because I pulled the hair of the girl in front of me. [Pause!] But is that really true that God is watching me?" To which his father wisely replied, "Yes, that is true. God is watching you because He loves you so much, He cannot take His eyes off of you."

Let us consider first, Moses, alone, just as the reading from Exodus does. It has been said that the life of Moses can be divided into three equal segments. Forty years in the Pharaoh's court becoming somebody, forty years in the wilderness discovering that he is nobody, forty years finding out how God can take a nobody and make somebody out of him. Moses is coming to the end of the second stage of his life, his forty years watching his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness. One day he is fascinated by a burning bush. the unusual thing about this burning bush is that it keeps burning, yet it is not consumed. Moses made the effort to trek on over to find out the mystery and as he approached the bush, He heard the voice of God speaking to him, telling him to remove his sandals for he was standing on holy ground.

What an amazing turn of events for Moses.

Earlier in his life in Egypt Moses had seen the suffering of his people and he knew that he was to be the deliverer, but he was too impulsive. The end result was that he murdered an Egyptian taskmaster and was forced to flee

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for his life. He has now spent the last forty years in The Desert." Moses after his life-altering impulsive and reckless failure, and all those years of complete obscurity in the desert, must have felt completely unusable by God, or that anything was going to change. But that process is called getting it wrong, because you didn't include God's reckoning!

So now this new event-- that God has invited Moses to stand on holy ground. Not get off it, not move back, not be reprimanded for spiritual ignorance, as if he himself was an eternal failure. (anybody here ever feel like that?) No, he gets to stay, in fact he's been called to it. So Just take your shoes off, and realize where you now are. Wow.

Yes, Moses had some rough edges in his life which had to be dealt with – such as arrogance and a quick temper. But God was ready to move in Moses life – just as he may well be in your lives; he certainly is ready to move in this parish's life – ready to move to prepare us for some new area of service and efficacy. We have all been guilty of some tragic blunders. It is good to know that people are more important to God than programs. In fact, he's picked Moses up right where he left off with him, and put him back into his original place he had for him, with some adjustments. God's love does the same for you, for us, and for this parish. He will not leave us alone.

The second story is about the people of God whom Moses would go to in order to be God's deliverer. God has very clearly seen and heard the lamenting of his People, and for righteous reasons: they are being unrighteously oppressed in slavery. This was not God's plan for his people. We can see four things that God told Moses that He loved his people, and Moses and Aaron are called to go tell those Hebrew People, the children of Israel, this message of His love with these words.

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First, tell them that, "**I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt**" That is to say, God's people were in great distress in Egypt, and God saw their sorrow and distress. If that is true for them, then also for you. God knows even trivia about you, such as the number of hairs on your head.

You remember the sermon from the First Sunday in Lent. So here, too, I think that Satan often seeks to deceive us by making us think that God doesn't see. And that is a lie. That God sees me can be of great comfort, or it can also be of great concern; what he sees all depends on me. If I am in great need, I am thankful that God sees me. If I am stepping out of line, like the grandson in the Sunday school story, I am terrified that God sees me. Either way, it is God's love that's watching.

Second, Moses is to repeat God's word that, "**I have heard your cry**" GOD NOT ONLY SEES, BUT HE ALSO HEARS. This is true for them as their lives had become intolerable. It is also true when life is actually tolerable. David said the same in various Psalms, both the joys and the distresses, as in Psalm 4: you have opened your ear to me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. AS well David says, And I give thanks to the Lord for his mighty works.

There is Good news about crying out to God: John said that we know that if we ask anything according to His will that He hears us, and if He hears us then we have the petition that we have desired of Him.

It is just so tremendously comforting a thought to me that God hears me when I call unto Him. And It is amazing to think that I can actually talk to God. Clothed in Christ, though, I can approach the throne of Grace.

Third, they are to hear God saying, "**Indeed, I know your sufferings,**" "GOD UNDERSTANDS YOUR Suffering and your SORROWS. HE SEES THE FALLING TEAR, AND WHISPERS, "I AM is WITH you, SO do not SORROW

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and do not FEAR." Moses was to say that emphatically. And Jesus will say the same to all of us, God sees your broken heart, He knows all about those things that disturb you today; God knows the weariness that you feel. And God knows your fear of the future. There is not a single thing that God does not know about you.

This kind of suffering is full of tears, isn't it. There is something about tears that touches my heart. I am especially susceptible to images and stories of evil deceptive people who tell a boy or a girl that their father no longer loves them, and I can shed a tear as well as the images and stories of when those children hear their father or mother finally say, "I love you."

Well, just as someone's tears touch your heart, your tears touch the heart of God. That's because God loves you.

And for that reason, and fourth, God has told Moses and Aaron to say, "**and I, the Lord, who is the I AM, I have come down to deliver you from the Egyptians, AND lead you into the land of milk and honey.**"

Of course, this deliverance was an indication of the New Covenant, and our redemption by Christ, in which the eternal Word did indeed come down from heaven to deliver us: that was HIS mission into the world, and to deliver those who will believe in Him to a New Jerusalem, an eternal "good and broad land" unto all the ages. Moses came to the people. Jesus came to us all.

You know, it is nice when people say, I have been watching the sorrow that you have been going through, and I know all of the pressures that you are facing." Because it is good to know that someone sees. As well, it is nice when people say, "Just call me any time, and I will listen." It is nice to know that someone will listen to me. And it can help when someone says, "I don't know all of your sorrow, but I can see you are going through something difficult with a good deal of pain." But it can be the best remedy when someone says, "I have come to help you."

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God does not just have simple understanding of your needs, He desires to deliver you from your distress. WHY? Because He loves you. And because He loves you, he is paying attention to you.

There's a lovely Twila Paris song, which also speaks to this.

[spoken] For the young abandoned husband left alone without a reason
For the pilgrim in the city where there is no home
For the son without a father, for his solitary mother
I have a message
He sees you, He knows you He loves you, He loves you

[sung] Every heart that is breaking tonight Is the heart of a child that He
holds in His sight
And oh, how He longs to hold in His arms
Every heart that is breaking tonight

God is saying in Exodus, and throughout the Word of God, and into your hearts, "Because I love you, I have come to rescue you. So, lay down your resistance to My love; Receive the Love of rescue that I have for you today."

And so 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."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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