

Second Sunday of Lent – Year C  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Holy Family Catholic Church  
Kirkland, Washington  
24 March 2019

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15  
Psalm 103  
1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12  
(Matthew 4:17) Luke 13:1-9

*The Lord Is Kind and Merciful*

I think most of us have had the experience of hearing a song on the radio, but not quite understanding all its lyrics. And so, we just make a guess at what the lyrics are, even if they don't quite make sense. But we go along with it, singing those misunderstood lyrics until, sometime later, we learn the correct lyrics. Maybe we hear a friend singing the correct lyrics. Or maybe someone hears us singing the wrong lyrics and corrects us. And it's a moment of revelation. It changes our whole understanding of the song's meaning. "Ohhhh...*that's* what they're singing?! I always thought they were singing these other words that didn't quite make sense. But *now* the song makes so much more sense!"

I came across a little story like that about today's Psalm. A cantor was preparing to sing the Psalm for Mass and, just like our cantor sang so beautifully this evening, she was singing the refrain: "The Lord is kind and merciful."<sup>1</sup> The cantor was practicing with her young daughter, and when she gave her daughter the chance to sing, she had apparently understood the words just a *little bit* differently. Instead of: "The Lord is kind *and* merciful." Her daughter sang: "The Lord is *kind of* merciful."<sup>2</sup>

What a big difference one little word makes, right? Either the Lord is kind *and* merciful. Or He's *kind of* merciful. Which one is it? Just as we can misunderstand a few lyrics, and have a completely different understanding of a song. We can also misunderstand God, and have a completely different understanding of who God is.

We humans have all kinds of understandings and misunderstandings of who God is, don't we? Some see God as kind *and* merciful. Some see God as *kind of* merciful. Some see God as strict, angry, and controlling. Some aren't quite sure who God is. And all kinds of understandings and misunderstandings in between. A couple important questions for each of us to consider this evening: *Who do I understand God to be? Is there something about God that I've been misunderstanding?*

+++

Today, we hear of the moment when God revealed Himself – “reintroduced” Himself, so to speak – to the people of Israel. And He did so in a way that was both ordinary and extraordinary; humble and remarkable. He revealed Himself in an ordinary, humble bush, caught on fire, in the middle of the desert wilderness; to a lone shepherd who had run away from his people and started a whole new life. But He also revealed Himself in an extraordinary, remarkable burning bush that caught the shepherd's attention; because it was not consumed by the fire, and even more remarkable because it called out to him:<sup>3</sup>

“I am the God of your fathers...the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. ... I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry...I know well what they are suffering. ...I have come down to rescue them...and lead them out of that land into...a land flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>4</sup>

After that “reintroduction,” and a little bit of resistance, Moses agreed to go back to his people.<sup>5</sup> But what he said next was very revealing of his and his people's understanding – or misunderstanding – of who God is. Moses said:

“if I go 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 do I tell them?”<sup>6</sup>

What does this question say about his and his people's current relationship with God? Their understanding of who God is? Their understanding of who they are?

+++

The Israelites have spent the past four hundred years in Egypt. They have been immersed in a foreign land with other strange and false gods. Perhaps, after all these years in Exile, the God of their ancestors has become, in their view, just one of many gods. They've forgotten who the God of their ancestors is and what He is like. Their experience of sin and death that come from these false gods, has caused them to project their misunderstandings onto our True God. Not only have they felt the weight of Pharaoh's oppression, even worse, they have lost familiarity with and understanding of who God is, and who they are.

So, when Moses asked that question to God: "*What is your name?*" It was kind of like that awkward moment when you run into someone. And you know that you've met them before. You *kind of* remember their face, but can't remember their name or how you know them. You know what that's like: "Oh...*hello!* So good to see you again! I'm sorry...I remember your face, but I'm so bad with names. Can you please remind me your name again? God? Oh, yes, of course! *God!* The God of our ancestors! I-am-who-am! So good to see you again!"

+++

After God made this slightly awkward – but also profound and personal – reintroduction to Moses and to His people, He started the forty-year process of correcting their misunderstandings of who He is, and who they are. By way of leading them out of Egypt, through the desert, and into the Promised Land, all along, God taught them and reminded them who He is to them – and who they are to Him.

Our forty-day journey through Lent serves the same purpose for us. God wants to reintroduce Himself to us this Lent. He wants us to remind us and teach us who He is to us – and who we are to Him.<sup>7</sup>

Just as it was for the Israelites, it can be a painful process and it can be a struggle to let go of the things we've become attached to: our possessions, our comforts, our sins, even our misunderstandings. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, which are the pillars of Lent, God will strip us of the false gods that keep us separated from Him.<sup>8</sup> That lead us to sin and death and make us feel empty. That give us a wrong understanding of who God is and who we are.

+++

So, we're getting closer to the halfway point of Lent. How are things going? How is your commitment to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving? These three pillars of Lent are the ways that God is going to reintroduce Himself to us. To remind us, teach us, and lead us to the Promised Land.

Are we giving Him the chance to do so? Or do we still let the little false gods control our relationships and outlook on life? Do we let the little false gods give us a negative and harmful misunderstanding of who God is and who we are?

During Lent, we are called:

To *pray*: allow God time to reintroduce Himself to us.

To *fast*: allow God to replace our fleeting pleasures with His eternal joy.

To *give*: offer up our worldly treasures that decay, one, so that others have the chance to live and, two, so that we store up lasting treasures in Heaven.<sup>9</sup>

+++

If we ever have a sense that God distant, strict, demanding, angry, or only *kind of* merciful – please know that is not who God is. To some degree, all of us are prone to see God in those ways from time to time.

But, that's not who God is. That is a *misunderstanding* of who God is. It's a misunderstanding that comes from the false gods that want to keep us from a real relationship with God.<sup>10</sup> That want to keep us from understanding who God really is – and who we really

are. God came to Moses and the people of Israel – God comes to us today – to set us free from those false gods that keep us enslaved and lead us to sin and death.

This Lent, let's all give God a chance to reintroduce Himself to us. Give Him the benefit of the doubt. Trust that if you spend time with Him in prayer, if you make room for Him by clearing out fleeting pleasures and decaying treasures, He is going to reintroduce Himself to you in a new way.<sup>11</sup> He is going to teach and remind you who He is and who you are.

He is going to show you that He is not distant or angry or *kind of* merciful. God is always close to us, patiently waiting, loving. And He is always kind *and* merciful.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 103:8a

<sup>2</sup> Laurie Brink, O.P. and Paul Colloton, OSFS. "February 28, 2016: Third Sunday of Lent/Year C: Reflecting on the Word" in *Living the Word: Scripture Reflections and Commentaries for Sundays and Holy Days*, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3:1-5

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 3:6-8

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 3:11

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 3:13

<sup>7</sup> Who God Is: see *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 203ff, esp. 205: "God calls Moses from the midst of a bush that burns without being consumed: 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' God is the God of the fathers, the One who had called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is the faithful and compassionate God who remembers them and his promises; he comes to free their descendants from slavery. He is the God who, from beyond space and time, can do this and wills to do it, the God who will put his almighty power to work for this plan."

Who We Are: see CCC 355ff, esp. 356: "Of all visible creatures only man is 'able to know and love his creator'. He is 'the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake', and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity:

'What made you establish man in so great a dignity? Certainly the incalculable love by which you have looked on your creature in yourself! You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her, by love you have given her a being capable of tasting your eternal Good (St. Catherine of Siena).'"

<sup>8</sup> See Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18: Jesus' teaching on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving from the *Sermon on the Mount*.

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

<sup>10</sup> See CCC 2851: "The devil (*dia-bolos*) is the one who 'throws himself across' God's plan and his work of salvation accomplished in Christ."

<sup>11</sup> See CCC 2577: "From this intimacy with the faithful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, Moses drew strength and determination..."

<sup>12</sup> Also consider commentary on today's Gospel from Adrien Nocent, "14. Third and Fourth Sundays of Lent (Year C): Be Converted and Reconciled in Order to Rise New with Christ" in *The Liturgical Year, Volume Two: Lent, the Sacred Paschal Triduum, Easter Time*, 145: "Nonetheless, toward sin and sinner God is patient in a way that deeply moves us and stimulates us not to procrastinate but to begin our conversion today and to put all our energies into it. In the last analysis, this patient mercy of God seems to be the most important point made in this passage from Luke's gospel."