

Words Forming Witnesses

Letting God Be God

**Psalm 19 and Exodus 3:14
(280, 324, 96, 651)**

January 27, 2013

Letting God be God –
I'm constantly amazed at how difficult that is for human beings.

I can only really speak for myself,
and about what I observe in others.
But we human beings appear to me
to have very inventive minds
when it comes to creating God in our own image,
or at least in an image that gives us more comfort than challenge.

But that's got it the wrong way round, doesn't it?
Have we not just been memorizing and pondering
sections of the Scriptures
that affirm that we are created in the image of God, male and female,
and not the other way round?
I think yes.

The more I memorize and ponder these days,
the more I realize how important this affirmation
of being created in the image of God is.
It is an oft-ignored theme running through
the writings of John Calvin,
one of the formative theologians
of the Presbyterian ways of being disciples of Jesus Christ.
It is the true source of the dignity and worth of all human beings,
no matter what their circumstances or conditions.
It is a crucial truth to remember
when we think about what it means
to be met and called by God
in a world so often driven by self-indulgence and self-assertion.

Our passage this morning
focuses on the words of God
spoken to Moses
as he is called to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt.
This act of God is the central event and example of God's loving grace
throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition.

It is the central story line in the Scriptures.

The plot is simple but profound -
God frees us to flourish in God's service.

Obedience to the power of others,
or to our own self-loathing and lethargy,
is replaced by obedience to God's faith in us,
hope for us, and love to us.

Let me say that again.

The plot of the story
which we will be memorizing and pondering all year
is simple but profound.

It is this.

Obedience to the power of others,
or to our own self-loathing and lethargy,
is replaced by obedience to *God's* faith in us,
God's hope for us, and *God's* love to us.

It is letting *God* be *God* in defining who we are.
It is letting *God* free us to flourish in *God's* service.
It is letting *God* shape in us the mind of Christ.

That is our true nature and calling.

Accepting that kind of obedience is how we let God be God
and how we let ourselves be the flourishing human beings
God created us to be.

Just to reiterate once again,
flourishing in God's service
involves being vehicles for the gifts of the Holy Spirit –
being loving, joyful, peaceful,
patient, kind, generous,
faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.
(Galatians 5:22-23)

Ponder again the encounter with Moses
that surrounds the passage we have memorized this week.

Here's a shepherd tending his sheep.

From what I can gather,
it's a pretty boring task.

Have you ever watched sheep graze?

They do it hour after hour, and very slowly.

In the best light, it is a tranquil and predictable existence.

This tranquility is disturbed,
dare we say shattered,
by the sight of a burning bush –

burning but not being consumed.
Out of the bush comes a voice.
“Go down, Moses.
Set my people free.”

Stunned silence is followed by abject terror,
then a string of excuses.
More words from the bush –
“Fear not, I will be with you.”
But that’s it.
No army, no resources, no plans –
just the promise of the presence of the Creator of the universe.

Then Moses gets it together enough to ask a question.
“Who should I say sends me?”
I’m not sure the answer made him more confident at first,
but it was the only answer he got –

*God said to Moses,
“I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.”
He said further,
“Thus you will say to the Israelites,
‘I WILL BE has sent you.’”*

And off Moses went to initiate the Exodus.

What happened to Moses did not conform
to any of his expectations of who God was and would be.
This was something completely different.
The only way to pull it off
was to work with God and for God,
relying on that God’s guidance and support.
And together with the whole people of Israel,
they did it.

So, what’s the pattern of encounter here?
Is there anything we can learn about
how God likes to be God with us?

God begins with surprise in the midst of our daily lives.
God’s presence and call often generates fear
and we attempt to avoid or withdraw.
But we are strangely drawn to this challenge.
God promises nothing but his presence and power.
Deep within, we know that is enough
and we accept the call.

We let God be God in us, and for us, and through us.

But it does not end there.
If anything, that's only the beginning.
Our faith ebbs and flows.
God's faith is constant.
Our hope ebbs and flows.
God's hope is constant.
Our love ebbs and flows.
God's love is constant.

And throughout our own journeys,
throughout our own wanderings through the wildernesses
of our lives,
in our own enterings of our own promised lands,
we are constantly tempted to create God in our own images,
images that keep us enslaved by comfort and complacency.

In those moments, God surprises us afresh
with God's faith, God's hope, and God's love,
calling us afresh into the full and abundant life
that comes from genuine obedience and service
to the God who frees us flourish.
He is patient with our fears,
listens to our excuses,
understands our panic,
but stays faithful and firm.

"I will be who I will be.
And your best bet
is to be there with me,
growing into the dignity and worth
I sowed in your creation."

Obeying that faithfulness and firmness
does lead us into authentic flourishing.

*Be confident that the Holy Spirit will use these words
to form us to flourish in our witness to the grace of Jesus Christ.*

Preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church