

Sermon: Being Second
Scripture: Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 12:9-21
14th Sunday after Pentecost
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Our Old Testament reading Exodus 3:1-15 takes us to a pivotal moment in the history of God's people. Moses encountering God via burning bush that leads to the remarkable journey of liberation and redemption of God's people. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ *Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up."* ⁴ *When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."* ⁵ *Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* ⁶ *The Lord said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

⁷ *Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."* ¹¹ *But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"* ¹² *He said, "I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."*

¹³ *But Moses said to God, "If I come 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 shall I say to them?"* ¹⁴ *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." God said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'* " ¹⁵ *God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD,^[a] 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,
and this my title for all generations.

Amen.

Our New Testament reading Romans 12:9-21, Paul imparts timeless wisdom on how Christians should live out their faith in daily life. He offers a profound reflection on the essence of Christian love and calls believers to genuine and selfless expressions of love. We will discover the transformative power of love in our relationships, both within the faith community and in our interactions with the world. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Romans 12:9-21

⁹ *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.*

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." 20 Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Being Second

The text: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"... "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?" Exodus 3:11, 13b

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, as we approach your throne on this morning, we are seeking a refuge for our souls; as we take a day from our labors, we find ourselves filling that rest with something else. Help us to look into our rearview mirror of our life's journey today and every day, that our lives are covered by your blessings and your callings for us that are renewed with new mercies each day. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Good morning. We all live in a world where everyone wants to be first. We're all familiar with the saying, "First come, first served." And in our competitive society, being first often seems like the ultimate goal. Imagine a world where everyone tried to be first in everything. You'd have folks racing down the street to be the first in line for their morning coffee, the first to get their hands on the latest gadgets, and even the first to finish their meals. It would be chaos! Yet, it doesn't sound too farfetched.

But today, I want to talk to you about the beauty of being second. Yes, you heard me right – being second. In a world that glorifies being first, we find a profound lesson in today's Scriptures about the value of being second to God.

Our journey begins in the book of Exodus, where we encounter Moses, a man who was anything but eager to be first. In fact, he was quite content with his life as a shepherd, tending to his father-in-law's flock in the wilderness. But God had other plans for Moses, and we read about this divine encounter in Exodus 3:1-15.

In this passage, we find Moses tending to the sheep when he notices a bush that is burning but not consumed by the flames. It's in this moment that God speaks to him from within the burning bush, calling him to a great mission – to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses, in his humility and fear, doesn't want to be first. He questions God, he doubts his own abilities, and he even tries to make excuses to get out of the call of God. Moses wasn't seeking greatness; he was content being second.

And yet, God chose him for this incredible task. Why? I ponder, because God was first in Moses' life. Moses placed God above himself, his doubts, and his insecurities. He recognized that God's plan was more significant than his own desires and fears. Moses was willing to be second because God was first in his heart.

In our New Testament reading, apostle Paul instructs us on how to live as followers of Christ, bearing the marks of Christ's love. He encourages us to love without hypocrisy and to be devoted to one another in brotherly and sisterly love. These words remind us of the importance of putting others before ourselves, of being second.

Paul continues by saying, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are." In other words, don't seek to be first in your own eyes. Instead, humble yourselves and consider others as more important than yourselves.

As if this was not enough of a challenge, Paul dares us to go the extra mile, and to give away our cloaks too by bless those who persecute us, to not repay evil for evil but overcome the evil with good through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us, and through such deed, we glorify the Lord. This is not the mindset of someone seeking to be first but rather someone willing to be second – to absorb insults and injuries for the sake of the gospel and Christ's love.

Now, I know it can be challenging to embrace this contradiction – the world tells us to be first, to compete, and to look out for ourselves. Yet, God's kingdom operates on a different principle. We serve unfair God – God who loved us so dearly that God who is holy and just tilted the scale of justice in favor of mercy for all of us. The joy of being second comes from understanding this principle, that in God's divine order, being second is a position of honor and service.

Therefore, let us choose to be second – to put God first in our lives and to reflect Christ's love to those around us. In a simple terms, let us live out our greatest commandment: to love the Lord, your God first, and than to love our neighbors as our own very selves. Let us embrace the contradiction of the world's values and God's divine order; seek the joy of being second, knowing that in serving others, we are being God's ambassador to the world and fulfilling God's purpose for our life.

Let me leave you with this prayer from Saint Francis of Assisi:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy."

May we all strive to be instruments of God's peace, seeking to be second in a world that often values being first. And as we do so, may Christ's love shine through us, touching the lives of those around us and bringing glory to God's holy name.

Amen.