

“Great Words”

September 3, 2017

Communion Meditation

3:1 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 Horeb, the mountain of God. 3:2 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. 3:3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 3:4 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." 3:5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 3:6 He 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. 3:7 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, 3:8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3:9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 3:10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 3:12 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 worship God on this mountain." 3:13 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?" 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 3:15 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, and this my title for all generations.

Romans 12:9-21

12:9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 12:10 Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 12:11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12:12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 12:16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 12:18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 12:19 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." 12:20 No, "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." 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28

16:21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 16:22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." 16:23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 16:25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 16:26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 16:27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 16:28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

It's Labor day weekend which means the return of college football and the end of summertime days of beach going and cook-outs and the celebration of American labor by taking a day off. It used to be the day after which kids went back to school now it's their first day off and of course after which you aren't supposed to wear white. Every first Monday since 1894 there's been a labor day even in years when far too many people are without jobs. And every first Sunday in September preachers meet smaller crowds and try to make this secular observance relevant.

We preachers like to talk about vocation. At least that's a topic with some theological implications. The great reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin argued that work was a calling from God. For the most part they surmised that working kept people out of the kind of trouble that idleness brings on. But is our work our calling? Lots of people who labor are not convinced they are called to do the jobs they do. What the church says is that the work that we do enables our true vocation. Our true calling. And that is to work for God. To serve God. It is that part of our faith that is seen. It's how we take what we do, no matter what it is, whether we're paid for it or not and use it to fulfill the higher calling we all share as God's servants.

In today's scriptures we find calls and job descriptions which makes for pretty good stuff for a labor day Sunday. Moses had a pretty good job in Egypt but lost it when he made a poor career choice and finds himself on the run. What

he finds out while wandering around the base of Mt. Sinai that the work he had been doing then and the shepherding he was doing now had nothing to do with the work God was going to call him to do.

God's plan for Moses, heard from of all places a bush burning and not consumed is to go back to Egypt in spite of all the wanted posters and to gather God's people together, convince them that it's time to get out and then go to a land already promised to Abraham a while back. He sees in that bush a burning vision for what God has in store for him, and he will go, reluctantly maybe, but he will go.

Then in the Gospel Jesus defines vocation for his disciples. He tells them things are going to get rough and that he, the son of man, is going to have to suffer and die. Peter, blurts out before the paint is dry on the sign on his office door that says, "Moses the Rock," "God forbid!" And Jesus, probably wondering if he's made a mistake with Peter, says, "get behind me so I don't trip over you. Try not to think only in human terms." The Jesus, on the way to Jerusalem to fulfill his calling gives them their job description, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

What's it mean for you and for me? Is it about giving life up? Or is it about living as disciples whose intention in life, no matter what our job, is to heed the call of Christ. To be his followers, his servants, his workers in the world.

- There's a third scripture I didn't read earlier from Romans 12. Paul, who writes this letter is a tent maker by trade, but called by God to be an apostle and evangelist in vocation. Paul knows about the struggle to know what it is that God would have us be, that God would have us to do. So with God in his heart and Jesus ever before him as example and with the Holy Spirit guiding his pen he writes down for the church at Rome, and probably unknown to his for the church of Jesus Christ for all time the finest words ever written about what it is that we are called to be. What our true vocation is. What our work is. The burning bush and the job for Moses, the call of the disciples on the sea shore and their challenge to give up everything to follow Jesus bring us to these words. I'm going to read them slowly without comment or commentary. They, like the evidence of God's love and call to us to be God's own lying on this table of grace, are God's words for us if we want our vocation to be: Christian.
- "Let love be genuine;
- hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;
- Love one another with mutual affection;
- outdo one another in showing honor.
- Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
- Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
- Contribute to the needs of the saints;
- extend hospitality to strangers.
- Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with one another;
- do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;
- do not claim to be wiser than you are.

- Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
- If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- 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."
- {No,} "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."
- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

That's Romans 12:9-21. Write that down. In fact I wrote it down for you. Take it home and remember where it is. And when your children or your grandchildren and your friends talk about what they want to be, or you begin to wonder what it is that God wants you to be, when you feel like your job is just about a paycheck, or when you are wonderfully fulfilled in what you do, read it again. This is what all actions, all decisions, or opinions, all allegiances, all of life should be based upon. This is Christian vocation. Great words.