

## Proper 17 Year A September 3, 2023

Our first reading is the familiar one of Moses and the burning bush. Moses is tending his fathers-in-laws' sheep. He sees a bush that is burning but is not consumed. He goes to take a closer look. Aha, now God has his attention. God calls him by name and tells him that the one speaking to him is the GOD of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

If I told someone that God spoke to me out of a burning bush that was not consumed, I could be pretty sure that I would be referred to a therapist.

God tells Moses that he has observed the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt and has come down to deliver them and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey Then He says that Moses must go to Pharoah and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

Moses answers God like I would: Who me? Moses feels inadequate to the task. We often don't think we have courage or faith abundant enough to do God's will. God counters "I will be with you". It's not enough for Moses. Moses is afraid that the Israelites will who sent him to them – what is this God's name? God answers him "I am who I am". Thus you shall say to the Israelites, I AM sent me to you". God has abundant resources in faith and courage for Moses. When we are faced with a difficult task we don't have to rely on the resources we have God has them in abundance. God will be with us. He will give us what we need to do what he asks of us.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he urges them to be abundant in virtues: zeal, patience, hope, perseverance. He wants them to treat one another with mutual affection. He encourages them to live in harmony with one another and live peaceable with all. Quite a challenge. As we grow in virtue, we have an abundance to share with others.

One example of this is contributing to the needs of the saints and extending hospitality to strangers. Just this past year when refugees were fleeing the war in Ukraine, the Polish people showed the abundance of their hospitality. They took refugees, who had left everything except their children and their pets into their own homes. I doubt that the people who did this had great wealth. What they had was abundant compassion. I will never forget how moved I was when I saw pictures of strollers left at train stations for the use of the refugees. We have more abundance that we thiink we do

Our Gospel reading from Matthew is about the cost of discipleship. Jesus tells his disciples that if they want to follow him it will be costly. He starts to tell them about what will happen to him in Jerusalem: that he will be betrayed to the religious authorities, turned over to the Romans, condemned to death on a cross and then be raised by God on the third day.

It is too much for Peter. He tells Jesus that this must not happen. Jesus tells Peter that he is only thinking in human terms and not God's. Jesus' life is one of sacrifice, it is not for his own ambitions, security or reputation. It is a life lived for the good of others. Jesus took on our humanity, our grief and sorrow, our fear of death, our self-defeating sins and defeated hem on the cross. What if he had chosen the easy path and left us to ourselves?

If we want to follow Jesus, we will also be living a life of sacrifice. We will probably not be martyred these days, but we may very well come into conflict with our culture if we follow Christ. Our culture is all

about self-fulfillment, money, power, accumulating stuff and taking care of number one. Our sacrifice may be more like taking a big pay cut to work for a Non-Profit rather than a job with a company exploiting the environment or their workers. Perhaps we speak up for the marginalized when we hear prejudiced remarks

It is the people who take risks for Christ, for the good of others, who make a mark on this world. I am reminded of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Sojourner Truth, Mother Theresa and so many others. Jesus said that those who risk their lives for his sake will actually gain a life worth living.

Many people spend their lives playing it safe, taking care of their own comfort and security. They have a safe existence. Many people in mid-life are ready to make a change. They have examined their lives and found them empty. With Peggy Lee they sing "is that all there is". It is never too late to take a risk and follow where Jesus leads you