

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*August 30, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Matthew 16:21–28** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Scholars believe Matthew signals the pivot of his remembrance of Jesus heading toward the cross in Jerusalem by saying "From this time on". There is, however, no clear break between the previous passage and this passage. After commanding them to be silent about Jesus being the Messiah, he then goes on to try and explain who the "Messiah" is meant to be and do. Rather than the Moses like deliverer or the slayer of giants like David, Jesus' description of the Messiah is more in line with Isaiah's "suffering servant" (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). It should be noted that the Hebrew and Greek texts differ significantly concerning this passage. Hebrew scribes translate a key word as sickness rather than the Greek transgressions. In one, the suffering servant is the great healer and in the other he is the great redeemer. Neither one of these, however, were associated with the "Messiah" in the writings during the time of Jesus. Peter's reaction, therefore is understandable. Peter's statement pointed not only to his misplaced faith but also made the rock upon which the church is built into the rock that is a stumbling block. What is this misplaced faith? Peter revealed more faith in Jesus than in God the Father. For Matthew, this is a major stumbling block since Jesus is the Messiah *because* he always does the will of the Father. The cross is symbolic of God's plan for each person's life. It is a cross because it means sacrificing our will for God's will.

Matthew 16:23 "you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

If you were Peter, how would you have reacted to Jesus' prediction of his death?

If the most important person to you suddenly started talking about their upcoming death, how would you react?

If you were Peter, how would you have reacted to Jesus' rebuke especially after his previous praise?

What is the way of the cross God is calling you to walk? What is your human response?

## **Commentary on Exodus 3:1–15** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In Exodus, chapter 2, Moses is quickly introduced through his birth (2:1-10), his crime (11-14), and his life with the priest of Midian (15-25). Linking Moses back to the patriarchs in Genesis, Moses meets his future wife Zipporah at a well (see Rebekah 24:15 and Rachel 29:9). Like Jacob, Moses is given charge over his father-in-law's flock which is when he encounters the "God who dwells on the mountain". Continuing this parallel to Jacob, Moses also encounters a "messenger of God" not to wrestle but in a burning bush. While the exact nature of the bush has been the subject of both speculation and contemplation, the purpose of the bush was to draw Moses' attention to God. Moses' response to God, "Here I am" is repeated throughout the Old Testament but has particular meaning given the name that God gives. The statement "Here I am" can refer both to Moses and to God. The purpose of going without shoes has been attributed both to the fact that shoes were made out of dead animal skins and that there should be nothing man-made between humanity and God. God then gives both the divine name "I am" and the title "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" which is repeated later (14-15). For the purpose of this brief description, this is a good stopping point. Entire books have been written on the deep symbolism behind the rest of this passage.

Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."

What does it mean that God's name is an unpronounceable verb?

When you stop to focus on your breathing, what changes when your breath becomes the name of God?

How is God's name reflected in Paul's statement, "In Him I live and move and have my being"?

Does this name draw you closer to God or is it too abstract?

### **Commentary on Romans 12:9–21** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This passage should be read as a continuation of the previous text in Romans 12 especially verse 2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect." While the list in this section begins with a fairly easy sayings, "hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good", it soon turns to more difficult sayings "be patient in suffering" and "Bless those who persecute you". The further down the list, the clearer it becomes that this is not the way of the world. Only by the "renewing of your minds" by the Holy Spirit do these sayings come into focus. They demand a complete trust in God and the call to love others as Jesus loved us. Doing good, however, is not a passive response but can be an act of self sacrifice and bravery. Standing up for what is good while only using the tools of love can prove deadly as in the cross of Christ. And yet, it is through the cross that so much good has come into the world and so much that is evil has been revealed. Doing good means shining the light of truth upon hate and darkness. This is why good can feel like burning coals on those who thrive off of evil.

Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

In English, evil is the reverse spelling of live. How does evil rob us of life?

Is avoiding evil the same as doing good? Is it enough to simply be good?

If evil exists when good people do nothing then what are you doing or not doing?

How is it difficult to love in the face of other's hate especially when it is directed towards you?

Do you find strength by participating in a community based on love rather than fear?

### **Sermon "Be on Fire"** (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

The greatest advantage that evil has is if the people of God stay distracted. Like Peter, we are distracted by human things. Our fear of death helps us to survive but it also cripples us when that fear becomes embodied by evil. That same fear directs us to what seems like safer paths and places of comfort and prosperity. This illusion is supported by the world and encouraged by books and mass media. The problem is that this path of self fulfillment tempts us away from the path that God designed us to follow. Each person with their unique gifts and grace has their own path to walk in God's plan. For Jesus, that path led to Jerusalem while Peter would eventually go to Rome. Jesus' announcement of his path including his death along with his acceptance of this path caused Peter to react based on a fear of death. Peter, like us, grew up following the illusion of the world but Jesus was calling him to place his mind on divine things instead. Jesus calls all of us to leave the distractions and false promises of the world and find life in following God. It is only when we place our egos on the cross and let our selfishness die that we find the life we were designed to live.

For Moses, he had to leave the comfort of Pharaoh's house and the distractions of Egypt before he would be ready to hear God's call. Even in the desert, however, it is easy to become distracted by the daily routine of life even if it is the life of a shepherd. To grab Moses' attention, God used a burning bush and for Elijah it was a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). Before we can hear God's call, we need to turn our attention away from the distractions of the world and turn our minds toward God. It is only then that our path begins to be revealed and we find our true selves along with the life we were meant to live. This path for Moses led him back to face his greatest fears – Pharaoh and the rejection of his own people. But Moses would not walk this path alone because God would be with

him. This is the god of mythology who represents some human or animal characteristics. This is not the god of power, money, prestige, or longevity. This is the God of all. The God who IS. The great I AM. For all who ask, "God, are you with me?" - I AM. "God, am I loved?" - I AM! This is God who is greater than any human imagination. God's very name is unpronounceable. It is the sound of your very breath. It is the sound of the wind through the trees. It is the sound the stones make when they cry out as the wind whistles through the canyon. It is the sound of creation. It is the sound of reality and truth. God's name is as close as our breath and surrounds us even in the midst of a hurricane. This is the God that blows away all distractions like fallen leaves on an Autumn day. It is only when these distractions are gone that our minds can be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

When God begins to transform our minds, we begin to see past the anger and the fear. We behold the brokenness of the world and the pain of the people. Evil loses its power of distraction and we can find love for those who know only hate. We weep with those who weep and we rejoice with those who rejoice. It is with the Great I AM that we find the strength to overcome evil with good and leave vengeance to the LORD. It is when we know our God and our place in God's plan that sense and goodness return to our lives. But there are others who are still living in their distracted illusions. We are now the burning bush. The goodness of God flows through us but does not consume us. We draw people not to ourselves or our church but to the I AM. Like the burning bush, we draw people to God not through worldly power but through the goodness of God. That goodness spreads as more people hear that tender voice saying I AM. This is the power that frees the captives and brings life abundantly. All we are called to do is to let Jesus take our distractions and follow our Lord. May the Holy Spirit burn in our lives so that the world may know the Great I AM.