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"I Will Be With You" The Rev. Garrett Lane (9/3/2023, Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

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The words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever said yes. And then immediately regretted that decision to say yes, maybe to preach? I don't know.

The propensity to say yes, before considering the consequences, this is something that I find myself doing very frequently.

Why did I agree to do this is a question that I will ask myself, perhaps you're like me in this regard, over committing, and then under delivering, or you fear under delivering, and within that fear, maybe you're like me, like an oldest child who likes to please everyone. You get into this nice little cycle of overwhelming yourself, because you fear letting people down, then they might call my mother and tell them what a bad son I am. And then she's going to tell all of my employers, and then they'll know and so on, and so on and so on. It just cycles.

Maybe you're like that. I think that Moses was like that a little bit in that state of mind when we find him responding to God at the beginning of our Old Testament reading today. God calls Moses by name, Moses, Moses, and Moses responds, I'm right here, here I am, and then immediately starts speaking to the fire to the burning bush. Classic overcommitting right there.

He should have let that one go to voicemail,

screen that call if he wanted to keep the life that he had set up tending his father in law, Jethro sheep, and generally not being a wanted man in Egypt, he should have done that turned away. And as I was preparing to give my first sermon here at St. Albans, as your curate, I reflected on Moses responding to this invitation from God. Because that's what this story is, and what so many stories like it

are in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, when people interact with God, it's an invitation.

If God calls someone out by name, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Saul, Moses, even Zacchaeus and has some type of invitation to offer them.

Moses and the trip up the mountain to the burning bush, Moses, who was drawn from water in a fertile land in Egypt, finds himself taking sheep in desert

up at to find grass and other fodder, he finds a fire here, though an endless flame and is transfixed on it. And two things that Moses does in this interaction, stand out how he hides his face from God. And his big existential question to God, who am I?

I think that Moses realizes his over commitment, even in the words, here I am. He says, After God has told Moses who God is, Moses hides his face for fear that he was afraid to look upon God.

And I think that this face hiding is connected to his later litany of excuses on why he really is not the best candidate to lead God's people out of Egypt. It's almost as if his recognition of God is related to his fear and his attempt to get out of the job. Once he knows who he's talking to, his priorities start to shift around a little bit.

And I think I've found, I don't think I know, I've found that we do exactly the same thing that Moses does in important and unimportant ways. For a time I was a teacher and a chaplain at an Episcopal School in East Texas. And I know for those of you that are in education, or if you've ever been in a classroom, what happens when a question just gets floated out to the classroom full of students, and the teacher waits for our response. Students get to fidgeting, looking at their shoelaces, looking at anything other than the teacher in the room. If I don't make eye contact with Mr. Lane, he can't call on me.

This worked for a month, and then I learned their names.

That's the pedagogical kind of gem here learning people's names works. Yeah. But it isn't just children who shrink away who hide their faces. In my own ministry experience with adults, I've learned that all kinds of people do this exact same thing.

Sometimes it's everyone sitting down together at a meal, maybe in public, and people have gotten their food at different times and you're waiting, like, are we going to pray before the meal or are we not going to pray and people have started eating but they haven't. And it's like this little awkward silence that no one wants to talk about. And if we just don't look at it, it'll go away. And that's usually what happens.

But other times, it's more important. Like what we read it a little bit in Romans here. When we

Know the good that we should do, but we hide our faces from it, hoping that we can avoid it.

Remaining patient with a parent who can't remember if they've taken their morning medications. If I just forget or not look at this big sign saying remember patients,

I won't have to be patient,

extending hospitality to your in laws that always seem to criticize your parenting methods. I don't need to make them feel welcome.

I just don't look at it.

And I know that this is a part of our human condition, our shared human condition for my own experience, I tend to be much more willing to be on the receiving end of what St. Paul in Romans calls genuine, selfless love. When others show me honor, when they show hospitality to me, I'm there for it. Yet when I and perhaps some of you, we hide our faces, when my name is called to do some of these things.

But back to Moses for his big question, Who am I?

Looking at Moses, we have the benefit of hindsight, we can see that his self doubts are unfounded, as he will eventually lead God's people out of Egypt.

But that feeling of self doubt, even when you know you are where you need to be, I think that's relatable. There is a term in psychology called impostor syndrome, where people doubt their successes, their abilities, and their talents, and they live in fear that they will be shown as a fraud. Even if you're very good at what you do, even if you've had years of training for what you do.

The teacher that comes home after a long day asking did these kids get anything that I was trying to teach them? The attorney waist deep and paperwork wondering Is anyone else at this firm struggling as much as I am?

That couples seeking a marriage counselor? What is wrong with us? Are other people doing as poorly as we seem to be doing?

Perhaps you know, this feeling this feeling that you're some kind of fraud? And I get that from Moses his question to God, he doesn't know who he is. And the response to this question is, in my mind, so interesting, who am I Moses asks, and this is not this is an

existential who am I? This is not the Who am I that I have asked myself standing at my kitchen counter at 1152 at night over half eaten gallon of Bluebell. Who am I? What kind of monster would do this?

Why would a good and loving God let me eat so much ice cream?

No, it's not that.

God responds to Moses with a statement I will be with you. To his who am I? A strange answer at first. Moses was unsure of his own abilities. Wouldn't there be a better person? Someone other than a murderer? Someone other than Moses who was mocked by his own people? Who am I? Have you found yourself at a crossroads in your life? And ask yourself the same very question. Who am I? As you learn to live with an illness? Who am I? As you begin a new job in a new town and nobody that you know who am I?

Or perhaps like me, you are preparing for the first child, rapidly approaching in October I am asking myself Who am I nearly every day and if you have suggestions I'll be out in the courtyard

would love to hear it.

God's response to our inevitable feeling of utter unworthiness and unpreparedness is to tell us and remember that God has called us by name,

that God is with us.

God's response grounds our own identities, and what God has set in motion in us in you cannot be stopped by our own self doubts or uncertainties in our fierce Moses experience in the desert mirrors our own experience when we gather for Holy Sacraments. The story of invitation of God's faithful presence is heard time and time again.

The type of the story resides in this knave when we gather and when we celebrate the Eucharist. Remember Christ is Emmanuel, God with us. When we are baptized, God's Holy Spirit is sealed upon us marking us as Christ's own forever.

I will be with you. God meets us where we are. Christ meets us where we are. And this promise is peppered throughout Jesus his own words in the gospels. And Matthew, I will be with you until the end of the age. And in John abide in Me and I in new

St. Augustine of Hippo has this line that I love so much that he says that when a person is seeking perfection when a person is finding themselves hungering and thirsting after righteousness, doing the things that we read in Romans today from St. Paul, when a person is trying to do this, that this

person will discover God wherever they go. Christ meets them wherever they go. I think that's a beautiful image. This generous invitation that St. Paul gives us. The ability to overcome evil with good is because God has said, I will be with you.

What we're about to do in a few minutes when we gather for Holy Communion, is both the fulfillment of the promise that God is with us, and nourishment that our love will be genuine when we leave this building.

The call from Moses, the call that God gave to Moses, and that others have heard is a call that we hear in Jesus Christ. Christ invites us to participation in the life of God, what God is doing in the world. And when we gather at this table, we meet Christ, the invitation is renewed.

Our saints are matriarchs and patriarchs in our own community at St. Albans, but in the church worldwide are remembered because they heard God calling them and their response to this invitation

to trust God to join and God's ongoing work is a hearty Yes.

And thankfully, we hear that same invitation that they all heard God calling us by name. And you might be thinking,

if I always say yes, isn't that over committing, like we talked about earlier? And in some ways it is. And in some ways, the Christian life is the biggest over commitment that we can make. You'll ask yourself, if you read through your baptismal vows in that red book in front of you, did I really vow to do all these things? Did I really, it seems like a lot. And it is. Because the church and the other humans sitting alongside us here, though they have made those vows as well, to support each other, to uphold each other, and to call us into greater community in Christ.

So often, this invitation is to what we might consider mundane tasks, taking care of an aging parent, being patient with a sibling that is in the throes of addiction, holding a friend's hand during chemotherapy.

All of these normal, yet messy parts of life can feel like heavy, difficult tasks, when we are facing them, or hiding our face from them.

The word we have today is that God meets us and stays with us. God is with us so we know who we are. The YES to God's invitation is that you cannot go it alone.

That this Christian life requires we lean on one another and that we

see reflections of the light of Christ on the people around us. Thanks
be to God.

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