

# “God’s Way”

Exodus 3:1-15 & Matthew 16:21-26

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July 25, 2021

**Prayer for Understanding** Your ways are wonderful, O God. The unfolding of your words gives light. As we turn to your Word read and proclaimed, let that light radiate into even the darkest shadows. Make your face to shine upon us, and teach us, your servants. We long for your good news. Amen.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “If a person has not discovered something that they will die for, they are not fit to live.” What or who would you die for?

The call of Moses. **Exodus 3:1-15 NLT** “One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. Moses led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn’t burn up. “This is amazing,” Moses said to himself. “Why isn’t that bush burning up? I must go see it.” When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!” “Here I am!” Moses replied. “Do not come any closer,” the Lord warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your parents—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So, I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.” But Moses protested to God, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?” God answered, “I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.” But Moses protested, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?” God replied to Moses, “I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel: I am has sent me to you.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, 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 eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.”

A call for the disciples and us. **Matthew 16:21-25** “From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. Jesus would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” Peter said. “This will never happen to you!” Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.”

God’s call involves sacrifice. Moses fled Egypt with Pharaoh determined to execute Moses. Now God is calling Moses to go back, confront Pharaoh and to liberate his free workforce. Moses has a fulfilling and safe life as a shepherd and is enjoying time with his family. Moses understands immediately that God’s call is a threat to his life and that he is inadequate for the task. Moses’ excuses reveal that he understands the sacrifices of following God. God does not answer or refute Moses excuses; rather, God overrides them with a more vigorous assertion that God is with Moses and that if he sacrifices, he will have resources he does not yet know he has. The catch is Moses will not realize these resources until he risks everything in answering God’s call.

Peter was called to change his perspective from seeing things from a human viewpoint to seeing things from God’s viewpoint. Jesus was showing him how the world was supposed to be which is a radical transformation of the way the world was then and is today. Jesus knew that those who answer God’s call to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth will need to sacrifice.

Are you like Peter wanting to enjoy the glory of God without the sacrifice, service, and persistence to partner with God in transforming the world? Are you like Moses hesitant to partner with God in establishing a world where no one is oppressed, where everyone enjoys freedom in a land where all share because you tried to do this when you were younger, failed, and now it is someone's else turn?

It is easy to believe a distorted view, that if we are striving to be a faithful disciple then life should go well for us. Jesus is clear from the start. Discipleship involves sacrifice, pain, and struggle. Jesus describes true discipleship as one who denies themselves, takes up their cross, and follows. When Jesus originally said these words, it meant having the courage to face the Roman Empire's culture of oppression and injustice. It meant civic protests, political activism to right wrongs, and service so all are equally loved. It meant confronting institutional religion that gave power to a few, told others how to live and excluded many. The penalty for this bold loving service which threatened the power of the elite was crucifixion.

Our notion of call is often trivialized, safe, and rendered innocuously bland. We are called to follow the radical, disruptive, love of Jesus. Connecting prosperity to discipleship is a distortion of God's call. The message translates Jesus words as, **Matthew 16:24-26 MSG "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You are not in the driver's seat; I am. Do not run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I will show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself?"**

Failure to fully follow Jesus results in an autonomous, selfish existence in which there is no intrusion, disruption, reorientation, or redefinition therefore little incarnation of the Holy. This person imagines they are unknown and uncalled. Our scripture makes it crystal clear God knows us and calls us by name.

God said to Moses, **"I have observed the misery of my people; I have heard their cry. I know their sufferings."** God uses first person I see, I hear, I know my name is I am. God is with everyone. God is I am. I am being, I am existence, I am reality. I am in the groan of an oppressed person. I am in the tears of a grieving person. God is I am. I am here with you, suffering with you, rejoicing with you, praying for you. I am seeing what you see. I am hearing what you hear. I am feeling what you feel. I am tasting what you are tasting. I am smelling what you are smelling. If you cannot sense God, it is not because God is far off, rather it is because you are oblivious to God who is all around you and in you. I am is in the ordinary. I am is in our daily life.

God will liberate all people by partnering with broken people, who are willing to sacrifice for others. God is personal holy, and ablaze with brilliance. So much so that Moses had to remove his sandals for even the dirt around God was illumined with holiness. God's fire purifies and does not consume. God's fire fascinates and transforms. The entire scene is poetic, metaphoric, as God's voice reveals much and at the same time raises many unanswered questions. The Bible is like the burning bush—we hear God speak through scripture, calling us and filling us with questions, assuring us of God's presence and asking us to sacrifice, equipping us and transforming us.

God's revelation of "I am" reveals that God cannot be named, defined, limited, constrained, controlled, or put in a box. Jesus called Peter Satan when Peter was sure he knew God's will and tried to control God to do what he thought God should do. Most, if not all of us, are like Peter at times we do not want Jesus to be who Jesus is, rather we want Jesus to be who we want Jesus to be. We are excited for the love, joy, peace, and glory, but we want it all without any sacrifice. For example, if it is God's will that we care for the earth, enjoying all the benefits of a healthy creation, then we need to make personal sacrifices. It is easy to point a finger at businesses, or certain people, it is hard for each of us to make additional sacrifices for the good of the planet and everyone.

Peter just seconds earlier was praised by Jesus for declaring Jesus is the Messiah the Son of the living God. Jesus declared that Peter was blessed and will be the rock upon which Jesus builds the church and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. Jesus said he would give the keys of heaven to Peter. Peter was sky high envisioning all this glory and success. Peter was proud thinking I figured out my faith. I know God's will for me and for others. Peter thought he fully knew God and could name God and could tell others how God wants them to live. When Jesus foretold his passion and the suffering of his followers, Jesus burst Peter's bubble. Peter immediately pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Jesus. How do you rebuke Jesus? Do you think you fully know God? Do you tell other people what you think God's will is for their life? Do you sometimes avoid making sacrifices for others? Do you rebuke Jesus when bad things happen? Peter is chastised as a stumbling block for perceiving from a human perspective rather than God's perspective. This is a dilemma. We are to boldly follow God's will, to sacrifice for God's will, yet we are able to fully perceive God's will and often misinterpret God's will. We are to perceive from God's perspective, yet we are incapable of fully perceiving from God's perspective. Young Moses correctly perceived that God's will was to liberate the Israelites from oppression, yet he got the how wrong. Moses tried to make the transformation happen his way with violence which resulted in Moses fleeing for his life. Decades later Moses more fully perceived his call to

liberate people God's way. Be extremely cautious in proclaiming you know God's will for anyone other than yourself. Sacrifice, grow in love, strive to see from God's perspective and keep perceive God's will for your life.

Perhaps Jesus' harsh response to Peter reveals the seductiveness of the temptation, to have it our way and to avoid sacrifice. Peter wanted Jesus to bring resurrection without the cross. Some athletes want victory without the sacrifice of practice, so they dope. Some students want an A without the sacrifice of study, so they cheat. Many want the world to be like heaven without sacrificing their comfort, so they stay relatively uninvolved and indifferent to suffering. The English translation of "stumbling block" is a timid translation. The Greek depicts an unavoidable obstacle, a temptation that somehow becomes more attractive each time we face it. Scripture describes Jesus' temptation to avoid sacrifice, to do things the human way, three times. At the beginning of Jesus ministry after God declared that Jesus was God's son. Satan showed Jesus the glory of the world and said, "If you worship me, I will give it all to you now." Jesus replied, "Worship and serve only God." The second illustration of this temptation is Peter's pleading with Jesus, you do not need to suffer, carry a cross or sacrifice to usher in the glory of God. The third temptation was in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus sweated blood as he prayed for the cup of sacrifice, for his passion, to pass from him yet Jesus resisted this temptation as he ended his prayer not my will, rather God's will be done.

Our scripture is challenging and uncomfortable--Peter speaking harshly to Jesus and Jesus speaking harshly to Peter, moments after they were blessing each other. Peter said you are Christ. Jesus said you are the rock. Then temptation entered in and immediately the blessing turned to rebuke. Too often we view life from our perspective instead of God's perspective. We struggle to love, to give all people freedom, to share, to sacrifice giving away some of what we have so all people have enough. Too often we want others to sacrifice, to live like we live, to see things from our point of view. Too often we presume we fully know God and God's will for others and ourselves. Too often we think God wants things a certain way, so we look for stories, evidence, and scripture that support our idea, instead of listening to others, looking at the full situation from multiple vantage points, and striving to live the themes that emerge when we read the entire Bible.

This past week, I celebrated the Milwaukee Bucks winning the NBA finals. Giannis was asked how he is able to play hard on every play. Giannis replied, "If you think about the great things you have done in the past that is your ego. If you think of the great things you will do in the future that is your pride. Humility is staying in the present moment and doing all you can in the present moment." God calls us to live the most excellent way of love every moment of our lives. God did not give up on Moses or Peter. God does not give up on any of us. God is continually calling, teaching, correcting, and showing us the way. Abundant life is lived when we live God's way instead of our way, when we strive to love every moment of our life.

Barbra Brown Taylor puts it this way, "Like every believer I know my search for real life has led me through at least three distinct seasons of faith, not once or twice but over and over again. Jesus called them finding life, losing life, and finding life again...You do not have to die in order to discover the truth of this teaching, in other words. You only need to lose track of who you are or who you thought you were supposed to be so that you end up lying flat on the dirt floor basement of your heart. Do this Jesus says, and you will live. As hard as preachers may work to clarify this, I don't believe that it can be done. The promise contains truth that can only be experienced and even when it is I do not know anyone who readily volunteers for loss again. Yet loss is how we come to surrender our lives...to God. Losing helps us find our way again."

Martin Luther insisted that this struggle is a normal aspect of the Christian life. As Christians we are simultaneously saints and sinners—that we are at the same time justified, made righteous and forgiven by God and also still sinners, still a part of the human race and its fallenness, brokenness, and tendency to wander. We are tempted to go in the wrong direction, to set our minds our earthly things rather than Divine things, to want comfort and glory right now without sacrifice and perseverance. We are tempted to live life our way rather than God's way. God, the great I am, never gives up on any of us and keeps inviting us to follow Jesus through self-denial and sacrifice into abundant life. Amen