

**Sermon: 2020/08/30 (13th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A) -
*Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6,23-26,45c; Romans 12:9-21;
Matthew 16:21-28_BTR***

[Ask for children to come forward. Read verses 21 and 22 again from the gospel. Then, without explanation, begin "typing" a text-message on a cell-phone, but have it turned backwards (so that the screen faces the floor). Look perplexed; unhappy.]

Oh dear.

There seems to be something wrong with my cellphone:

I've been trying to send a text and make some calls but it just won't work.

And it doesn't seem to matter where I press on the screen, it doesn't respond.

[Tap hard.]

Help!

I think it's broken.

[Wait for response.]

Wait.

What?

"It's backwards"?

What's "backwards"?

My phone?

My phone is "backwards"?

Oh!

Now I see.

Silly me.

Well this morning Peter gets something backwards too.

He tells Jesus - *His teacher*; His rabbi - God Himself in human flesh - what to do.

But Peter is just a fisherman.

A human being.

Flawed and limited, and easily confused, like you and me.

He should have listened to Jesus, and trusted Him even if it wasn't what he expected or wanted to hear.

(Like not "lagging" 'in zeal', or being 'patient in suffering', or "blessing" (and being

kind) to 'those who persecute [and hurt] you', etcetera: [See Rm. 12:11-14].)

Let's pray:

Lord God, ... , amen.

[Ask children to return to their places.]

Imagine a world without the Bible.
Imagine the world without the Church.
Imagine a world...without *Jesus*.

Imagine a world without democratically elected government.
Without police or FBI.
Without running water or electricity.
Without modern medicine or NGOs.
A brutal and savage place.
Full of murder.
And corruption.
A place where kings - Pharaohs in particular - were (supposedly) divine.
Unaccountable and above criticism.
A place of hardship and suffering.
Of short lives and an *extremely* hot sun.

A place of *very* limited life-choices, and *vast* desert-sands.
A place of slaves and masters.
A place of pyramids, crocodiles and lions.
Of gangs of cut-throats, camel-spice-caravans and craggy, stony mountains.
A place of genocide; of the slaughter of babies.
A place that was largely lawless and cruel.

This was *Moses'* world.
The "world" of north-eastern Africa, about four thousand years ago.
This was the "world" of the Israelites, oppressed and held captive (against their will) for *centuries* in a foreign land.
A land that didn't know "Yahweh," the universe-maker.

In such a "world" (as that) what sort of God would you believe in?
What *natural* religion would emerge?
In reflection of *those* circumstances, that is.
Well, we know don't we?
Enough archaeology remains.
And what people worshipped - what they *invented* for themselves - was not one

God, but *many* "gods." (With a small "g.")
Demons, really.
Hybrids of animal and human body-parts.
"Gods" who were not just beastly to look at but beastly in their manner and behavior.
Greedy and vain.
Untrustworthy and callous.
Back-stabbers, aloof from human suffering and uncharitable.
These imaginary "gods" had to be bribed and pleaded with to lift a claw or talon of aid.
With sacrifices:
If you wanted a plentiful harvest, you killed something.
If you wanted a pretty girl to notice you, you killed something.
If you wanted riches, you killed something.
(Nothing was given freely.)
"Quid pro quo," as the Romans would later say.

But these sacrificial exchanges, of course, were hollow.
"Hit or miss."
Because the deals being struck on the bloody altars of Egypt were one-sided.
There was no one really on the other end of them, right?
So the "gods" multiplied.
New religions emerged, supposedly more effective; more true.
And around and around it went.
And we inherit this situation today:
we're so accustomed to the variety - to choosing between different cults or denominations.
So perhaps we miss the significance of Moses' question at the "burning bush,"
and are confused by God's answer.

It's a simple question, no?
(I'll repeat it.)
""What is His name?"" - This God who speaks by a miraculous fire.
We think to ourselves: "Who else *could* it be?"
For us *Christians* there aren't any alternatives; no other options or possibilities.
But that's because we don't share Moses' world.
He *honestly* didn't know.
It was all so confusing.
Was this God speaking to Him from the bush, Seth or, or...Horus?
Anubis, perhaps?
Or Osiris?
Was it the one with a jackal's head or that other like a hippo but with wings?
Or maybe one of the long-dead pharaohs from an earlier dynasty?

One suspected they were liars, of course.
They got sick and died like the rest of us.
But perhaps the priests of Egypt had it right?
After all, without the revelation of the resurrection of the Savior, which was far in the future, and without the gospels and the many books of the two Testaments - the Holy Scriptures - to consult and cross-check against, who was there to ask? To *verify*.

But God refuses to provide Moses with a name, because a name is for distinguishing, one thing from another.
To single out an individual from a group.
But there is no "group."
There aren't *actually* any other gods, so Yahweh has no need for a label.
Hence His reply: Yahweh, meaning "I am...who I am."
There is, in fact, no one else ("up there") to confuse Him with.
And not only does He surprise Moses in this way (disabusing him of the pretense of polytheism), He surprises Him in another way - He shows *concern*.
And no one had had to bribe God for it.
No gift was brought.
Moses had *nothing* to offer.
His goats had run away.
Indeed, his only possession - mentioned in the text - are 'sandals': [Ex. 3:5].
And these aren't asked for by God but the reverse - to be "removed."
Rather than Moses making an offering, God is the one who offers; who *gives* a gift: He reveals to Moses His desire to alleviate the condition of injustice being suffered by the Hebrews.
He gave the gift of His "concern" without it being asked for.
He gave His "concern"; His *love* because it was who He was and who He *is*.
It was the most *natural* thing for this *super*-natural deity to do.
It "sprung" from His *character*.
A character that *surprised* Moses.
And would *surprise* Pharaoh and everyone else too.
(We're going to see that next week.)

So I wonder, who needs surprising too?
In McMinnville.
Who has forgotten God's concern for them?
You, perhaps?
Your spouse?
A friend or a neighbour?
Do they know that they have God's *concern*?
His *interest*; His *attention*.
Remind them.

Surprise them.

Be the bush.

That's our challenge.

To *blaze* with the concern of Christ this week to those around us.