

Written Copy: Exodus 3:6-10 “The Great I AM Comes to Seek and Save”

Midweek Advent #3

Wednesday, December 20, 2023

Text: Exodus 3:6-8a

⁶ And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ^{8a} and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey

Exegetical Statement

Moses was shepherding his fathers-in-law’s flock as a fugitive from Pharaoh, after killing an Egyptian who was abusing one of his countrymen. Mose went from adopted son of Pharaoh to wanted man, afraid to return to his people. It’s to this fugitive that the LORD comes to call into service. He comes to be really and truly present in the miraculous sight of a bush that is on fire yet not being consumed. The LORD comes because He has heard the cries of His people as they bear under the yoke of slavery. He comes to a people who have forgotten His promise to Abraham that while his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, He would come and rescue them, bringing them back to the land of Promise. He is the God who made that Covenant with each of the Patriarchs, and He’s come in fulfillment of that promise. He comes to call a most unlikely leader, who doesn’t deserve the honor and who feels totally inadequate, and on his own truly is. But the LORD will be with him and through His work rescue His people as promised. To a people who had lost hope, and some had turned to the Egyptian gods, the I AM WHO I AM, the One and Only God who created all things, gives life to all things, the Only God who exists, in whom all reality finds its meaning and purpose; this God has come to seek and to save the lost.

Focus Statement:

Our God is the Great I AM in whom Creation and all reality finds its source, meaning, and purpose. He comes to be really and truly present and save His people even though they are most undeserving. He came to save Israel from slavery in Egypt. He came on Christmas morning to be the Savior of the human race from sin, death, and the devil even though none of us deserve it. His Spirit comes to protect, lead, guide, and keep us in faith throughout any and all suffering. He comes to seek and save the lost. He always keeps His promises. And He will come again to welcome us into the Promised Land of eternal life.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Just as the months of winter after the holidays can seem bleak and despairing, so too our lives as we struggle with life in this fallen world. When we cry out for help, and it doesn’t seem to come we can begin to despair and lose hope.

What the hearer should do as a result:

As we suffer through life’s issues keep a prayer journal to look back and see how the LORD has come to help and save us. Continue to work with the Spirit in the means of grace, ever watchful for His presence now, knowing He is the God who comes to save, and will come again on the Last Day.

Subject Sentence: In Christ, I AM Has come to save you.

Introduction

Well, it's almost Christmas, and I'm sure many of you, like me, are looking forward to a wonderful Christmas celebration with family, and friends, and presents, and food. And this year we have something that has been missing for so many years, we can hope for a Detroit Lions victory on Christmas Eve, and a possible chance to make the playoffs! Well, maybe, that it is. There is always some uncertainty when it comes to the Lions.

One thing that is sure is that the holiday season will come to an end. When January hits, if not before, all the celebrations and parties will come to an end. That leaves us with the cold and dreary January that is typical in Michigan. It will be filled with cleaning up after the holidays, taking down and storing decorations until next year, and the ever pleasant paying off of the credit card bills from what we overspent on for Christmas. There is the hope involved with New Years Resolutions, but for most of us, our resolution fades away quicker than the ever-elusive sun in Michigan winters. We are left to survive the cold and snow until spring comes, which can seem like a long time coming.

As I preached about last Sunday, Christmas and all its pomp and circumstance can only go so far in being the source of dispelling the darkness and the depression that hits our lives from time to time, especially after the holidays and the good times come to an end. We all have things in our life that we, or loved ones are going through; unpleasant and worrisome things that we pray would come to an end and be resolved, but instead just keep hanging on. All I have to do is look down at this offloading shoe I'm wearing to see an example of that in my life.

I AM Comes to Save Israel as Promised

Imagine how the people of Israel felt. They had been suffering through slavery in Egypt for 400 years. Their ancestors had originally gone down to escape a famine in the land of Canaan only to discover their long-lost brother, Joseph, was second in command of Egypt. He gave them a place to live and made sure that they had plenty of food and were protected from any and all enemies. Joseph was the hand of the LORD who had come to provide for Jacob, his family, and their offspring to come.

But time passed, and those rulers of Egypt forgot Joseph and the way he saved their nation and their people. They looked and saw Israel as a group of dangerous foreigners occupying their land. They were growing more numerous year by year. They kept sheep, which was an odious profession to Egyptians. The Pharaohs had a yearning to build things, and here were these expendable people. So, they decided to enslave them as a cheap workforce, and in doing so keep them down and under the Pharaoh's thumb.

400 years is a long time to be enslaved. The people of Israel began to lose hope and to forget. They forgot God's word and promise made to Abraham that although His people would become slaves in Egypt, He would rescue them. They lost hope in His power and might to save. Some forgot about Him entirely and turned to the Egyptian gods. It is to these oppressed, dejected, and unfaithful people that the LORD God came to.

And who exactly did He appear to? A very unlikely candidate. Moses was shepherding his father-in-law's sheep across the Red Sea on Mt. Horeb because he was a fugitive, on the run from Pharaoh. Moses had it all once upon a time. He lived in Pharaoh's palace as an adopted son, and became the brother to the ruler of Egypt. But he never forgot who his people were. He saw the way one of them was being mistreated by a slave master. And when he thought no one was looking he took that Egyptian slave master out of action, killing him. But his own people saw it. And when he tried to stop an altercation between two Israelites, one said to him, "What are you going to do? Kill us as you killed that Egyptian?" That was enough to send Moses running away from home and into hiding.

This is the man who stumbles across a truly miraculous sight. A bush that is clearly on fire, yet it is not being consumed. And Moses stumbles across this not by accident. This is the LORD God who has come. He comes to be truly and really present, so much so that the ground where Moses is standing is declared holy. This is the God who had made great promises to Israel's patriarch Abraham. He promised 600 years earlier that He would come to save His people, and He is the God who keeps His promises.

He introduces Himself to Moses and through Him to Israel as "I AM WHO I AM". He is the One and Only God who exists, all others are worthless idols that cannot help. He is the One who brought all things into Creation and maintains all things. All reality finds its source, its meaning, and purpose in this One True God. And He is more than just a force in the universe, He is the Personal God who takes great interest in His Creation.

He is the Great I AM who comes to seek and save the lost, the unwanted, the undeserving. Israel had lost hope and lost faith. They had broken the Covenant that the Patriarchs had made with Him. Neither they nor Moses deserved any kind of favor or help from Him. Yet He had come to do what they were powerless to do. He came to keep His promises made long ago to save them from slavery and bring them back to the land He promised to Abraham and all his descendants that came after him.

Jesus is “The Great I AM” Who Has Come to Save You

1400 years later the Great I AM came again. He came to perform an even greater mission. He came not in some extraordinary vision like a burning bush. He came in the most unlikely way, as a human baby born to a virgin. He didn't look like much, a helpless child. Yet His coming is the most extraordinary thing that has ever happened. This child, born in a stable and laid in a animal's feeding trough, is the Great I AM. He comes in this way to be united with humanity in a way that God has never been before. The God in whom all reality finds its source and meaning enters the created world and joins Himself intimately with it. Jesus Christ is The Great I AM who has come to seek and save the lost.

In our Gospel Lesson, we see him coming to a most unlikely candidate: Zacchaeus. He is called a chief tax collector. He was rich and successful at what he did, which was earn a living collecting taxes from his fellow countrymen for the occupying power, Rome. He made more than a living, he becoming rich off their backs. Of all the people Jesus might meet this day, Zacchaeus was certainly not deserving of God's favor. Yet God incarnate seeks him out. Zacchaeus is up in a tree in order to see Jesus better. He seems curious about this Rabbi. Perhaps he's heard of the miracles Jesus has done. But he's curious as a spectator, not as someone who wants to meet Jesus in person. So, he's there in the tree, like a spectator in the stands to watch a football game, wanting to see it but not to become part of it.

But Jesus has a different agenda. He's come to Jerusalem and is walking down this road for a purpose. He could've just kept walking by. But He stops and looks up. He sees Zacchaeus there in that tree. And He calls out to him, **(Luke 19:5) “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”** Jesus had come and looked up and found this little tax collector, for this very purpose. The crowd can't believe that this celebrated Rabbi would bother with such a man. **Luke 19:7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”** But Jesus had come this way and this day for a purpose. **Luke 19:9-10⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”**

In Jesus, the Great I AM had come for that very purpose, to see and save the lost. And not just tax collectors, not just a nation of people caught up in slavery who couldn't save themselves, but for all people. He is God incarnate who came for you and for me. We are enslaved to sin. We cry out and ask for help with our problems and worries and concerns, expecting God to answer in the time and way we think is best. And when He doesn't, we can grow angry with Him, begin to despair, begin to doubt. We are no more worthy of His help than was Zacchaeus or Israel. Yet He is the Great I AM who has come to seek and save the lost, to seek and save you.

God the Son incarnate, took on human flesh, to be our atoning sacrifice to save us from our slavery to sin, death, and the devil. He came to suffer and die and to rise again, proving that His sacrifice for you was accepted by the Father. He is the Great I AM who sent His Spirit into your heart and mind in baptism to reach out and save you, making you what you could never be on your own, a precious child of the Heavenly Father.

Jesus: The Great I AM Who Continues to Come and Save

He came as a baby on Christmas Day to seek and save the lost. He came on your baptism day to seek and save you. And He continues to come through Word and Sacrament to keep doing that saving work on your behalf. He comes in answer to your prayers for help and comfort. He comes and is present with you even when it doesn't look or feel like it. He comes even before you ask Him or know you have a need. He comes through unexpected times and in unexpected ways.

There was a young lady with children who was struggling as many single mothers are at Christmas time. She was having issues with her ex-husband and especially with his new girlfriend. She was recovering from abdominal surgery. And being off work, she was worried about how she could afford Christmas gifts for her kids. She was out driving and was talking on her phone when she got pulled over by the Sheriff's Department. She was almost in tears, expected to receive a ticket with a hefty fine, and a dressing down by the officer. She thinks, "This is the last thing I need!" But this turned out to be no ordinary traffic stop. And the officer pulling her over was none other than Genesee County Sheriff Swanson. He asked her what was going on and she told him her life situation to date. He responded by giving her something, but it was not a ticket. It was a \$250 Kroger Gift Card. He also provided some Christmas gifts for her children. And when he saw that her gas tank was almost empty, he gave her \$100 cash for gas. This was all part of a Christmas initiative by Sheriff Swanson called "Santa on Patrol" where people who are pulled over for minor traffic violations are given needed gifts instead of a ticket. But who was really behind all this? It was the LORD, coming down in answer to something she had not prayed about, and blessing her with gracious undeserving gifts. And the greatest gift she received that day was the gift of renewed and strengthened faith in Jesus, the Great I AM in the flesh.

How many times and ways has He come to stand with you and help you without your realizing it? How many times has He come and answered your prayers in ways that you never expected, or has helped with problems you never prayed about. A good practice for you and I is to keep a prayer journal. Write down those things you are praying and seeking help for. Then after a few months go by, or even a year later, look back and see if those things are still troubling you. Look back and see how the LORD in surprising ways has come to walk with you in answer to those prayers.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the Great I AM who comes to seek and save. He doesn't always come to solve all our problems or lift all of the burdens. He doesn't always come in ways or according to the timetable that we expect Him to. But He is always there to walk with you through whatever comes up you in your life. He is the personable God who desires more than anything to have a relationship with you now that continues on for the rest of your life. He wants you to know Him as the saving God, who has come to save you and to keep you in that saving faith until He comes again in glory on the Last Day.

I pray that you enjoy a wonderful Christmas Eve and Christmas Day celebration. I pray that the joy of being with family and friends helps lift the problems and burdens that we all share. But I pray that part of your celebration of Christmas includes joining us here at Christmas Eve to worship with your brothers and sisters in Christ at one of our Christmas Eve Worship Services. I pray that all of our members, and their families might gather with us in His name around Word and Sacrament, so that we all know and are refreshed in the faith that He is really and truly present. He is the God who comes to seek and save all men. He is the God who has come to seek and to save you and keep you in steadfast faith unto life everlasting.