

**August 30, 2020**  
**The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 17—Year A**  
**The Rev. Keri T. Aubert**  
**St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT**

**[Morning Prayer]**  
**Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c**  
**Exodus 3:1-15**  
**Matthew 16:21-28**

This Sunday, and next Sunday, too, we'll follow the pattern of the last two weeks. I'll offer a few thoughts and then invite you all to comment on the Bible readings for today.

Over the summer our Hebrew Scripture and Gospel readings have been sequential courses through Genesis-then-Exodus and Matthew. During other parts of the church year, the lectionary thematically matches the readings from the two testaments. That's not the case this time of year, but today's readings happen to bear similarities. In both cases, God is speaking: first as a burning bush to Moses; then as Jesus to the disciples. In both cases, God is asking for something, something hard. In both cases, there is resistance—resistance that generates little sympathy from God.

First, consider Moses. In response to God's request, Moses first asks, "Who am I to do this?" and then follows up with, "Who are you?" Moses seems to consider himself the dubious hero of a dubious mission described by a dubious source. As is so often the case, time will tell. We heard last week that, while the other Hebrew boys were being killed, baby Moses was saved by the covert actions of several women. Maybe God selected Moses for this task from the beginning, and then made sure he was around to complete it. On the other hand, maybe, because he's the lone survivor, Moses is the only person available, and God works with what God has.

Second, consider Simon a.k.a. Peter. Simon's experiences as a disciple continues to be "rocky," and today we hear further evidence that he earned the nickname Jesus gave him last week: last week it was "Blessed are you," and this week it's "Get behind me, Satan!"; last week Peter was the rock supporting the church, and this week he's a tripping hazard, which is to say, a "tempter." Maybe God selected Simon Peter from the beginning, or maybe God works with what God has.

In the Gospels, it is often Peter who says what everyone else is thinking. "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" No one wants to hear that. Of course, these words were written down after Jesus was martyred, after Peter was martyred, after Paul was martyred, after many others were martyred.

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" So it is with Peter, so it is with the other disciples, and so it is with the rest of us. I don't know about all the prior planning, but I do think that God works with what God has. And what God has seems to work out pretty well in the end. Right now, among those God has, God has us. Thank goodness, God is not asking us for martyrdom, at least, not in a literal sense. But I think God is asking us to offer up our lives in other ways. We might not be walking to Golgotha, but I think we ought to be carrying a cross, and we ought to be clear about where we aim to go.

If you can bear to consume the news right now, you know that this week brought the fall of Jerry Falwell, Jr. Falwell was heir to his father's conservative evangelical empire, including the mantles of leadership of Liberty University and the Moral Majority. His leadership further mixed conservative evangelical Christianity with conservative politics, and helped fuel the right-wing Christian nationalism that was violently on display last week in Kenosha and last night in Portland.

Thought it sometimes feels like it, the Moral Majority doesn't own Christianity. If it sometimes seems as if they do, maybe that's because we have too often let them. The news about Falwell made me angry, because too many of my LGBTQ siblings have been devastated by his actions. But Moral Majority does set an example for us of passion and perseverance. And as we consider what it means to carry our crosses, we turn to the words and actions of Jesus.