

### **Old Testament Lesson—Exodus 3:1-17**

*Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "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. Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, 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 name forever, and this my title for all generations. Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'*

### **New Testament Lesson—Philippians 2:1-11**

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

I'm going to toss a question out to you and I want you to take a moment and think about it. There's no right or wrong answer per se. But I'd like you to take it seriously.

Just mull it over silently in your head. Okay, here's the question: If you had to describe Jesus of Nazareth in one word, what would it be? If you had to describe Jesus of Nazareth in one word and one word only, what would it be? Tough to do, right? Just one word? Really?

It's tough because there's so many great possibilities to pick from! Of course, there isn't a single word in the English language (or any language) that could completely encapsulate who Jesus is—nothing that could possibly describe everything about the Son of God.

Human communication—imperfect and constantly changing as it is—could never even come close to an accurate picture of the divine.

But, I think it's fun to try anyway. I'll tell you my word in a minute. But first I'll throw out a few honorable mentions some of you might've chosen. By the way, if you thought of something just way out of left field, find me after worship. I'd be curious to know.

Okay, here's some good choices I could easily see being popular in a crowd. Maybe you were thinking of...Messiah? Christ? Word? How about Friend? Teacher? Healer? Perhaps something like...Prophet? Priest? Or King?

You know, maybe you went super theological on me and came up with Incarnation! Or, perhaps you're feeling a bit sentimental this morning and were thinking...Gift...or Love.

Who knows—maybe you're just a Gospel of John fanatic and some of these came to mind: words like Bread, Lamb, Shepherd, Gate, Vine, Resurrection, Way, Truth, and Life.

And you know what? I'll bet we have at least a couple of serial spoilers here this morning. You know the type—those annoyingly perceptive folks who can always tell where the plot of a movie is going before anyone else! You know what I mean?

Like, they feel the need to point out every possible clue or sign of foreshadowing. “Oh, I bet that's her long-lost son.” “Ten bucks says he's the one who's really in love with her.” “I'm calling it now: that's the killer!”

And when they're inevitably right (of course) it kind of feels like the whole experience has been just a wee bit soured—retroactively spoiled if you will—spoiled because I'm always rooting for them to be wrong—like they can't possibly have figured this out so easily...

And it's *these* people who know exactly where I'm going with this because they've had their eyes glued to the sermon title this whole time, right? They know the direction I'm headed in. They're waiting for me to ask the question—to get to those two familiar, comforting titles we often use to honor Jesus: Lord and Savior.

And, yes, that's what I want to focus on for the most part this morning—Jesus as Lord and Savior. Those words are rich with meaning and history and deserve special attention.

By now we're about a third of the way through this sermon series mirroring what our youth have been learning in Confirmation this Spring. Today's lesson is a crucial one for those students—crucial for anyone (in fact) who seeks to follow Jesus.

Trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior is fundamental. It is foundational to our faith. But (ah), yes, I haven't told y'all *my* word yet. So here it is. If I had to describe Jesus of Nazareth in one word and one word only, it would have to be...countercultural.

Jesus was and *is* countercultural. He goes against the grain—against the current. He takes the path less traveled by, which has (indeed) made all the difference.

Now I get that “countercultural” may not be an obvious choice. It probably wouldn't get in the top ten results of a survey. But, hear me out...

Considering the gospel stories we have, there's hardly anything about Jesus' life we might say goes “as expected” for his time and place in history. For that matter, there's nothing “typical” about his birth or death either!

I'll give you a quick rundown and try to summarize what I mean...

Jesus comes from a town nobody respected, born to a woman who got pregnant before she was married—who then placed him in a feeding trough as an infant—later forced to become a refugee along with his parents. Despite all that trauma, he shines as a teaching prodigy from a young age in the Temple—embarrassing those decades his senior with his understanding.

As an unmarried adult Jewish male with no children (weird on its face), Jesus is baptized by a rogue priest that ends up getting arrested and killed by the state. He, then, kicks off a travelling ministry by calling a bunch of fishermen and shady characters to join him.

Then, for three years or so, he wanders all over ancient Palestine breaking all the Jewish rules—preaching and performing works that his more experienced elders consider to be blasphemous (saying he can forgive sins, for example)—ruffling practically every feather he comes across—rousing every rabble—raising the eyebrows of liberals and conservatives alike!

He upsets so many of his *own* people that a conspiracy forms between them and the occupying Roman forces to get rid of him. That conspiracy on his life succeeds only with help from among his inner circle.

A peasant with no pedigree claiming to be the long-awaited Jewish messiah dies like a common criminal alongside two pathetic thieves. And this fledgling, Jewish reform movement he started was crushed by the powers that be—or so those in power thought...

You see: Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is a giant, ongoing, countercultural narrative. His words and deeds live on in us, the Church—an unstoppable force of love that is still aching to break the status quo and speak truth to power.

His actions...his teachings...the example he gives us—the example we're called to imitate by the way—is countercultural to the Nth degree! Think about it...

There isn't anything intuitive about loving your enemies—nothing "natural" about forgiving those putting you to death as it's happening—nothing logical about breaking bread with the person about to betray you for money...in fact welcoming them with kindness to your table.

It is stupidly unsafe to put your body on the line for someone your own religious laws have determined should be stoned to death—to put yourself between them and an angry mob of men who can't wait to heave their rocks!

And for God's sake: It's absolutely non-sensical to forgive somebody seventy-seven times! Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me; fool me seventy-seven times, then I must be a glutton for punishment! Right?

But, friends: that's what God's love is like! It's recklessly inclusive and extraordinarily gracious and wildly stubborn—so much so that, from our point of view, looks and feels a little bat guano! But that's who Jesus is: mercy and love literally personified.

So let me close by addressing today's Confirmation question—since I know the movie spoilers in the room are about to lose it: Who is your Lord and Savior?

Siblings in Christ: The oldest and perhaps most countercultural expression of the Christian faith is to claim Jesus as Lord. Understand this: to say that Jesus is Lord—Jesus—the son of a carpenter—a failed revolutionary publicly humiliated and killed—to say *he* is Lord above the king of Judea, above the local Roman governor, above the Emperor and ruler of the world...now *that* is a bold and dangerous and (yes) countercultural claim.

Jesus of Nazareth is Lord in the most counterintuitive and countercultural of ways. Jesus is Lord in the way Paul describes. Though Christ had the power and authority of God, he didn't

use that power with brute force like earthly kings and emperors. He never forced the people to submit to his will through fear, intimidation or the sword.

Instead, Jesus became vulnerable like us—a fragile human being of flesh and blood. Instead, Jesus shows us a different kind of power—a power rooted in sacrificial love. Our Lord is one who demonstrates strength through humility. His authority is built on compassion and his might on empathy. He rules and reigns by serving the lowest and washing their feet—by tenderly touching wounds others think too hideous to look at.

*That* is our Lord, Jesus Christ. He rules and reigns and yes, Jesus saves us, too. The name “Jesus” (of course) means “Savior.” He saves by silencing Death with his own death. As Paul writes: “becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

We are saved, my friends—saved by our Lord—saved from all selfish ambition and conceit—saved from the bondage of sin and cynicism—from all hopelessness and our ridiculous assumptions that say our differences matter more than what we share in common.

Our salvation isn’t a question. It’s a certainty—a foregone conclusion. Why? Because Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord.

Who is your Lord and Savior? I’ll give you a hint: His name is the name that is above every name; and *at [his] name every knee [will] bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue [will] confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Amen.