

**Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost Year A** (30 August 2020)

(Baptism of Hannah Marion Margaret Grimes)

**Lectionary Readings:** Exodus 3:1-15, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

Today's story from the Book of Exodus is all about new beginnings. A new beginning for Moses that leads to a new beginning for God's People, Israel, in a new land and with a new freedom. And it starts with God speaking.

Moses was going about his work, looking after his father-in-law's sheep, not looking for a change, not searching for adventure, not trying to figure out what his next big mission should be. But God speaks to him, and everything changes.

God gets his attention with a burning bush, calls him by name, and then explains that God has a task for him to do... to go to the Pharaoh, and bring God's People out of slavery in Egypt.

God speaks to others too. The Apostle Paul comes to mind, back before his name was changed, and he was Saul. He was travelling along the road to Damascus when it happened. God got Saul's attention by blinding him with a bright light. And then he heard Jesus' voice asking him, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Or how about those fishermen that Jesus met by the Sea of Galilee? Simon & Andrew, James & John. In some telling's of the story, Jesus got their attention by providing a miraculously huge catch of fish. And then he said, "Follow me, and we will fish for people together."

I wonder if God is trying to get our attention now. It likely won't be through a burning bush, a blinding light, or Jesus literally standing in front of us. But God does still get our attention, and God does still speak.

As you've heard me share on previous occasions, God got my attention over a few years ago now. Like Moses, I was contentedly going about my work, when my attention was drawn in a new direction, a new direction I had neither foreseen, nor desired, a new direction that would ultimately bring me here to St Christopher's.

I think I'll always remember the places I was standing when I began to hear God calling me, when it started to become clear to me that it was time for a new beginning. I'll remember those places as "Holy Ground."

*(Later)* This morning, we have the joy of welcoming little Hannah and her parents, Justina and David, to be a part of our community here at St Christopher's – part of the worldwide family of God, as they bring Hannah to the waters of baptism and promise to raise her in Christ. And if there is anything that marks a new beginning in a Christian's life, it has to be baptism!

Christian baptism has layers of meaning and significance.

Baptism is the beginning of a very important – indeed, ..... THE MOST IMPORTANT..... relationship in our lives. It is the sign or symbol of our new relationship with God.

Baptism is a sacred symbol - a symbol of God's affirmation of those whom he loves. When Jesus came up from the waters of his baptism, Mark's gospel reports that a voice from heaven said, You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Through the water of our Baptism, we are proclaimed as God's own. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are cleansed from our sin, and received into the family of God.

It is a time of celebration, of wonder and a time of discovery as a whole new way of life opens before us – we forsake the old and with eyes being opened – we start to look forward to new beginnings, to new possibilities.

Although these new beginnings are overflowing with joy and wonder, we all know that responding to God's call comes with plenty of challenges and hardships as well.

This morning we heard the Apostle Paul's description of the Christian life as he presented it to the new Christians in Rome. He said, *"Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."*

He said, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them... Do not repay anyone evil for evil... live peaceably with all..."*

And, *"If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Or perhaps we should remember how Jesus described the life of discipleship. He said, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."* Being a Christian is a serious commitment to a radical new way of life.

In baptism, we believe that we die to ourselves and rise again with Christ. We give up our lives (or at least we give up the idea that we are the sole directors and decision-makers for our lives) and we invite God to get our attention, to speak to us, and to guide us on our journey through life.

God's promise for Hannah, and for each one of us, is that in losing our lives for Jesus' sake, we will indeed find new life and joy. Even when we face challenges, hardships, and struggles with evil all around... we will have the

power to overcome evil with good. And most important, as God promised Moses when he sent him back to Egypt, God says to us, "I will be with you." "I will be with you."

As we stand together on this "Holy Ground," in the presence of God who is with us now, I invite you to let this moment be a new beginning for you also. Allow God to get your attention through Word and Sacraments this morning. Listen for what God might be saying directly to you. And open your heart to the possibility of something new.

And let us pray especially for Hannah and her parents this morning.

The Lord be with you.