

The Rev. Michael J. BRidge
Sermon- Exodus 34:1-8
Sunday, January 1, 2012

1. Who is God?
 - a. It is often suggested that we are becoming a less and less religious culture. This isn't actually true. And it isn't necessarily even true that it is becoming a less Christian culture. But we are saturated more and more, from within Christianity and without, with images and ideas of who God is that don't seem to go with what the bible actually teaches.
 - b. From outside the church you have Oprah who has such New Age gurus as Eckhart Tolle and Rhonda Byrne who teach that we are God and we have the power to manipulate the forces of the universe.
 - c. From within the church you often get one of two pictures.
 - i. God is an angry being who is going to punish you if you drink, smoke, dance, or listen to rock and roll.
 - ii. God is love. When people say this, they don't mean that God is love and he is other things. Like Fr. Mike is rector of New Life Anglican Church. Fr. Mike is also husband to Bonnie and father to Mickey and Josh. The God is love view generally teaches that God is only love and nothing else.
 - d. Each of these two views that are often taught within the church are true to an extent. You can find bible passages that back them up. but they both sacrifice other essential qualities of God in order to strengthen their own points. For example, the apostle John is who says that God is love. We don't want to go against John. But the same apostle, in his vision in Revelation, tells us that God himself will pour out his wrath on the ungodly.
 - e. Likewise, some would focus on God pouring out his wrath. Paul says that we are born children of wrath, and this is true. We only become children of God by adoption through our faith in Christ. And it is also Paul he teaches that it is only by God's great mercy and grace that we are forgiven in Christ and that he personally calls us back to himself through his Holy Spirit.
 - f. So we have to be careful about how we read the scriptures in order to find out who they really say that our God is.
2. Who does God say that he is?
 - a. One of the best places to find a fuller view of God is in our OT passage from Exodus 34. This passage is set in the context of Moses having already given the Law but having found the people of Israel engaging in idolatry when he came down from the mountain to reveal the Law. Just from the setting of this passage we already see God's mercy. We see Moses going back up the mountain to receive the Law again. God is showing his mercy by ultimately giving Israel a mulligan.
 - i. There had been consequences to their idolatry. But God didn't turn his face from them forever. Instead, he reaffirmed his position as their God and gave them another chance.
 - b. In preparing Moses for the writing of the Law, God appeared before Moses and it says that he proclaimed the name "The Lord." This is important because when

Moses first met God, God refused to give him his name. But now he is revealing his name to Moses, and listen to the name that God himself gives for himself:

- i. "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."
 - c. What do we hear in this description? We hear both sides of the above debate. God describes himself as both merciful AND as wrathful. Some would say that is a contradiction, but there is no reason to believe it is so. Is it a contradiction when you punish your children one day and say you love them another day? Is it a contradiction when you forgive your child for a single act of defiance but refuse to tolerate a pattern of rejection and rebellion?
 - d. God is merciful and gracious. His desire is not to punish and destroy. His desire is to have a people set aside for himself who will love him. He abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness. Even when we have ignored him or strayed, he has remained faithful and true.
 - e. Most importantly, he has set in place a means for the forgiveness of sins and transgression. By coming under the blood of Christ, we find the forgiveness and mercy of a steadfast God. But by rejecting the free gift of forgiveness in Christ, God does not clear the guilty. Instead, they will face punishment for their sins, both in this world and the next.
 - i. For example, when God says he will visit iniquity on the children and children's children to the third and fourth generation, we might think of things like alcoholism. These are the kinds of things that tend to be generational and pass on to the next generation.
3. Jesus, God with us
- a. So God has set in motion his plan of salvation; his way of faithfulness to his people. That means was by sending his Son Jesus into the world. Remember, when Mary first heard that she would have a son, she was told that he would be called Emmanuel, which means God with us. And then she was told to name him Jesus, which means God saves or God rescues.
 - b. The name of God is then reflected in the name of his Son, who is also God. The title Emmanuel given by the angel was to make clear that this act of mercy was the act of God coming to earth himself. And the name Jesus was to show that God rescues or saves his people from their sins.
 - c. So we see that God is both merciful by sending his son Jesus, and he is wrathful in punishing those who reject this last ultimate act of mercy. We shouldn't see this as any contradiction, because in rejecting Jesus, a person is rejecting the God of the universe himself, and his plan of mercy.
 - d. If you were drowning out in Lake Michigan in the middle of February and a person jumped in to save you, would that be loving and merciful? If you thrashed against them and refused the rescue so the person swam to their boat as you sank beneath the water, would that person be unloving? Would there be any contradiction in that person's character?

- e. God is indeed merciful and yet willing to punish. There is nothing unjust about this. His names say it all.
 - i. "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."
 - ii. Jesus- God saves.
 - iii. God took it upon himself to come and save us from his wrath. He truly is a God who is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. It is his desire and it is my prayer that each of you will know that love and receive that mercy in Christ.