

“Do Not Get Stuck on Your Sin”

Exodus 33:12–23

November 26, 2017

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Please do not be confused by my sermon title. I am not saying “*Do* get stuck on your sin”—I am saying “*Do not* get stuck on your sin.” The good news of Jesus Christ and the essentials of Christian faith are not based on your “sin” but on your “liberation from your sin.” This morning, I seriously encourage you to “get out of your sin” after you hear my sermon, and I hope that you will be able to “re-set” your Christian faith today!

A couple of Sundays ago, I introduced St. Augustine’s spiritual understanding of human nature using the Latin phrase *incurvatus in se*, which means “curved inward on oneself.” St. Augustine reminds us how seriously “the gravity of sin” dominates our souls and how powerfully it affects us in our relationships with God and others. Even though we human beings are “me-centered creations,” St. Augustine’s real point is not focused on the end of sin but on God’s powerful deliverance and His extreme generosity and hospitality in His love and grace! As Rev. Adam Hamilton emphasizes in his book *The Apostle’s Creed*, Christians do not confess that “we human beings are sinners.” Rather, we believe in “the forgiveness of sin.” The incarnation of Jesus Christ was to prove God’s unconditional love and proclamation of the forgiveness of our sins. And we can become children of God if we accept this good news that was given in Jesus Christ! We did not initiate this event; God did it for us because God loves us! Simply speaking, Jesus’ good news for all of us is this: “God loves you. There is nothing you can do about this!”

Last Sunday, Rev. Don Fado gave us a powerful message on our Fair Oaks church’s progressive spirit and mission. He encouraged us not to give up but to keep on spreading the good news for all! Friends, we are a Reconciling Congregation and we are Methodists! It is important to remember that the Methodist church is not a confessional church, which means that we do not judge others by our own doctrines and theology. Rather, we are called to proclaim that God’s love is given to us all in Jesus, the Son of God, our Christ and Savior. And this wonderful news is for all. All means all! Literally, love is the absence of judgment! The church is a unique way for God’s gifted community to embrace everyone as brothers and sisters, believing in God’s forgiveness of our sins, and to proclaim that everyone is a child of God no matter who they are regardless of their status! This is the church’s mission and purpose!

In today's Scripture reading, we find an interesting conversation between God and Moses. Even though we often say that God is with us, we definitely strive to find specific, concrete, and tangible ways that God is revealed in our lives. Sometimes we seek miracles that will help us feel God's powerful presence. In the same manner, Moses, in our Scripture reading, wanted to have the assurance that God would not leave him alone. He made a special plea to see God's face so that he could give his full trust and confidence in God's presence. In verse 14, God promises Moses, "My presence will go with you. I'll see the journey to the end." But Moses still asks God in verse 18, "Show me your glory, I pray." And God responds, "You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." *What does this conversation mean to you? What lessons does God want us to learn?*

God's answer is simple and clear. God simply says to Moses, "Hey, Moses, you don't need to see me. It's not necessary. Do you know why? Because I am already in you and around you! And you are already in me. Open your spiritual eyes, look around, and find my signs of grace for you!" Moses was striving to see the visible and tangible proof of God's face in person, but he had forgotten that he was already surrounded by God's presence. He belongs to God! We only see God with our own perspective and desire, but God wants us to see life from God's perspective. Friends, in this conversation, God wants us to know that God is with us everywhere as "hidden meanings." Faith is like a pair of glasses because it enables us to find God and discover the moments of grace.

The Baptist minister Rev. Dr. Bret Younger in his sermon "Longing to See God," highlights Moses' excuse:

Moses wants God to be his guide through the wilderness, to give explicit directions for every stop that's to be taken, exact marching orders twittered from on high. Moses receives no such orders. God promises only God's presence. Even in this story in which God is palpably present, God is hidden. This simple story speaks a profound truth that God is merciful and gracious, but God is not knowable.¹

Pastor Brett invites us to think of this perspective when we strive to see God's presence. He says,

¹Brett Younger, "Longing to See God: Exodus 33:12-23," Oct. 16, 2011, *Day1*, http://day1.org/3240-longing_to_see_god, accessed Nov.24 2017.

Maybe the signs of God's presence are all around us, but we've forgotten how to see. Abraham Maslow wrote, "The great lesson from the true mystics is that the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found in one's daily life, in one's neighbors, friends, and family, in one's back yard." God's graciousness passes before us each day.²

Two Sundays ago, we found that the Israelites wanted to make the golden calf into a tangible and invisible sign of God's presence when they were anxious and fearful of God and worried about Moses' absence. God lamented the Israelites' lack of faith! God wanted to tell the Israelites that God is not in the golden calf icon but that God's love, grace, and presence are always with them. If you open your eyes, you will see God's presence in every moment and in every place of life! However, without faith, you cannot see God! How can you have faith? It comes to you from your love of God!

The Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley are great examples of great Christian faith conviction. What they found and experienced was that God's liberation grace is not found in the church structure, doctrines, and tradition; it is only found in our hearts, and only by faith in Christ! And, they also found that God is not a stern God who is angry because of our sin. Rather, God is a forgiving and accepting God. If your image of God is of a God who is rigid, judgmental, and the one who punishes your breaking of the law, you are still stuck in your sin. In our Christian faith, we confess and believe that God is love. And love is not an abstract and philosophical concept. Rather, it is a dynamic concept of a community that welcomes and accepts you no matter who you are! In our theology, the triune God is not a solitary God who created this world and us in solitude; it is a community of the triune God who created this world and us out of overflowing love and joy. God loves His son Jesus, Jesus loves His Father God, and the Holy Spirit loves God and God's son Jesus! And they are an inseparable single entity that does different works! The Orthodox Christian church beautifully describes the triune God as "the divine dance of love" (the Greek word for this is *perichoresis*³) or "into the dance". This God invites us to come and join the dance in joy! This is what we believe in our Christian faith, and it is an experience of liberation from our bondage and sins!

² Ibid.

³Perichoresis (from the Greek word for "rotation") is a term referring to the relationship of the three persons of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to one another, *Wikipedia*, <https://www.google.com/search?q=perichoresis&oq=perichoresis&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.1108j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>, accessed Nov. 25, 2017.

We don't have to desperately seek God's face because God is already in us and around us and clearly revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ as solid proof of God's redemptive and accepting love! Truly, our God is an ever-loving, welcoming, caring, and forgiving God, and we can find His love everywhere. Imagine you are a fish in the water. You don't feel that you belong to the water. Think of your breathing. In the Bible, *ruah* means "breath of life" and also symbolizes the Holy Spirit and the wind and God's presence in us. In this sense, our life is itself miraculous proof of God's presence!

Karl Rahner, a German Catholic theologian, claims God's presence in his book *Encounter with Silence*:

Only in love can I find you, my God. In love the gates of my soul spring open, allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom and forget my own petty self. . . . In love all the powers of my soul flow out toward you, wanting never more to return, but to lose themselves completely in you, since by your love you are the inmost center of my heart, closer to me than I am to myself.⁴

As we live out our lives, sometimes we want to double check whether God is really with us or whether God has left us all alone. God still speaks to us and wants us to remember one important message in His dialogue with Moses. God already has clearly spoken to Moses in verse 14 even before Moses asked God to show him God's face. "*GOD said, "My presence will go with you. I'll see the journey to the end."*" My Fair Oaks friends, this promise is good enough for us! I hope that you will take this with you as God's tangible and visible sign of God's presence wherever you go. Amen.

⁴ Karl Rahner, S.J. *Encounters With Silence* (Maryland: The Newman Press, Westminster, 1966) p.8