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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Sunday closest to August 31 |
| Year A Proper 17 RCL |

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| ***Track 1*** |  |  |
| Exodus 3:1-15 Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c Romans 12:9-21 Matthew 16:21-28 |  |  |

**The Collect**

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Dear Holy and loving God,

Thank you for giving us spiritual whiplash from last week’s Gospel to this week’s. You keep us on our toes and feet firmly planted on your holy ground. *Amen*.

In today’s Gospel of Matthew we hear Jesus likening Peter to Satan, which some of you may remember follows right on the heels of last week’s Gospel when Peter exclaims that Jesus is the son of the living God, is told that his revelation was from God, and then he was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Evidently God is just like this, …. Yes, Yes, Yes Peter, you got it!!!!, annnnd NO…. frankly I’m not sure that Ifind that a very comforting thought, how one can be so close and yet so far away. Yet, God is accompanying us, but not always comforting us.

Peter’s rebuke is not so much that Peter is a bad person, but that when God chooses to communicate, God is clear. God does not like to be put in a box. God’s purposes are God’s purposes, not ours. Jesus came into the world knowing he was going to suffer and chose that suffering. Any remarks such as “oh no Jesus, it can’t be that!”— well, Jesus was having none of it. Jesus walked the earth to be in the world with us. Much as we may love our churches and places of worship Jesus was more about being in the world. He wanted the temple revered, but not because God can’t handle the outside, but because there has to be time to listen and talk with God; there has to be time for worship. In order to be in the world well, we have to stay in communication with God. The world is complicated, the world is mean, the world is political in many many ways, but God in Jesus, the triune God from before time does not need protecting, not protecting from the complications, the meanness or the politics. All those things are part of our being the humans God made us to be, and God can handle us.

When Moses meets God in the burning bush. God does not say, build me a temple. God says take off your shoes. You are standing on holy ground. God says “I am” or as others translate “I am becoming.” God is about being in the world, ALL THE TIME. God is about being for us, ALL THE TIME! God is about making things right. God is about loving. So, needless to say, God wants Moses to know the ground, the holy ground that God made. Jesus wants to tell his disciples what to expect, to know it in their bones and the ground they walk on, so they anticipate the panic that comes with the suffering, the suffering that comes inevitably from walking the way of Jesus in a broken world, and so that they could be grounded. God wants them to keep doing God’s work in the world, getting dirty on that holy ground. Getting into the world loving it, not boxing God in and not boxing ourselves in.

Why do I know that? Paul’s letter to the Roman’s today explains in many commands (Like over 20 of them) what it means to be a living sacrifice. Paul says to do ALL the good things, and do more than is expected. Trust that God will take care of the judging, judging is not on you; it’s not your purview. Walk away from the judging. But love? yes, absolutely, love unabashedly. Hold fast to what is good, give until it hurts, and I mean hurts, love so much more than you think you can. And in this case, yes we are about to be in stewardship season, but that’s not my point, my point is to right your priorities, order your life. Know that if your enemy is hungry, he or she needs feeding. Worth thinking about what would it look like to feed North Koreans, white supremacists or Islamic terrorists? Something worth thinking about.

And I guess I should be clear, Paul isn’t just a good guy who converted to following Christ in name only. Paul, particularly in the writings that we are pretty sure were written by Paul, Paul got the message. Paul understands what Jesus was saying as written in this particular passage. “Then Jesus told his disciples, “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.” Those are words we may not want to hear. (Again, we live in fear when any of us hear the words “lose” and “life” in the same sentence. It just doesn’t sound like it can possibly be a good thing.)

But Jesus is serious! He is very serious. As one commentator puts it, “Because Jesus dies for our sin, we may now give ourselves to him and die to the powers that possess and control us. Atonement that is *for* us will *involve* us.” We are to be involved, giving our life over to God, and if that means losing our lives, then so be it.

And so when we welcome one into our midst as Christ, we are to welcome them truly as Christ. Getting dirty, sacrificially giving, we are to actually BE Christ.

So if you cling to anything, particularly your very precious life, then you actually risk losing it. When you give from your life for Jesus’ sake, then and only then you will find your life. Giving, loving— sacrificially giving and loving, this is being Christ. Because what do you have to lose? Only the life you want to save, which is too small for you, and not yet what God has in store for you! And what do you have to gain? A larger life - your true life, that God knows and gives and claims as you give yourself away – for nothing good is lost, nothing that is truly good slips through the fingers of God, but is magnified, and changed, and flourishes precisely as you give yourself over to God.