

13th Sunday after Pentecost, yr. a, 8/30/2020

Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 12: 9-21

... so far as it depends on you – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

I am continually astonished at the ways God gets my attention. It may not be a bush burning but not consumed, but there's always something. According to the teachings of the Rabbis the "Bush burned and was not consumed so that Moses would notice it someday."

God's ways, God's revelations and reminders are all around us all the time – and then someday, once in awhile we notice. It's why I like preaching from the lectionary – there is a givenness in receiving what I did not choose as the scripture texts for worship. It is a way for God to get my attention. It helps me to get out of the way and listen for God ... because for me, if I chose the scripture, I would preach only what I like, only what I am comfortable and sure of, only what I already think I know. I would preach and teach my agenda, not what God might be speaking to us, where God may be leading us, calling us as God's church, signs of God's presence in this world. Now this doesn't mean my favorite, comfortable agendas and ideas, and beliefs don't come creeping in ... its that the givenness of the scripture

readings help me to be aware ... and the givenness challenges my comfort zone, my complacency and assumptions and expectations. The givenness challenges my conviction that my perspective is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Which brings me to our scripture reading from Romans 12 – given for this Sunday, not chosen. Here’s what’s gotten my attention: the givenness of Romans 12 and how it seems to speak to get my attention especially in context of the hostility and rancor and divisiveness of our political and cultural environment; the challenges and unknowns facing you, the First Congregational Church of Blue Hill as you prepare to call a new pastor. What is God calling on us to do, to be, as God’s “beloved community”?

Listen to some of Paul’s words again from last week and this week. What gets your attention?:

I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (your selves) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God ... For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many,

are one body in Christ ... Let love be genuine, ... hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ... Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

The thing that gets my attention – the burning bush for me that causes me to pause and look and consider – is this: “Let love be genuine ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ...If it is possible, so far as it depends on you live peaceably with all ...”

How often do I, do we, hang our peace, our feelings of well-being, our sense of rightness, on the actions and behavior of others? Its odd, since I know neither I, nor others can ever perfectly live up to the myriad of expectations and judgments and assumptions I have or

others have. I catch myself doing it – in a global sense and personal sense. My feelings can get translated into actions that in turn magnify my feelings.

“Let love be genuine ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ... If it is possible, so far as it depends on you live peaceably with all ...”

My brother Chris reminded me of a saying in AA: “Fake it till you make it.” What if we start with our actions and not our feeling? Since we cannot much control our feelings, and they really are too shifting and changeable to govern our actions with any consistency. We can choose our actions – what we do, how we respond. We can pause in the depths of our souls and realign what we are about to do: Let love be genuine ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ... so far as it depends on you ... and then perhaps slowly and fitfully but inevitably our feelings begin to align with God’s love and mercy and peace.

For me as a pastor, the stole, placed on my neck, is the reminder, one of the burning bushes that gets my attention at some

point. The stole is said to represent 2 things associated with Jesus: the towel & the yoke; the towel a reminder of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, and the yoke that eases the burden and joins our strength to God's. For me, it is a reminder, a burning bush, that gets my attention, to:

- Not to let my actions hurt or harm another.
- As a pastor be careful not to let my knowledge or understanding of another's pain or vulnerability be used as a means to an end.
- Be willing to sacrifice – give of myself, yet not expect or compel anyone else to do the same.

So far as it depends upon me ... not someone else, and let my actions reflect God's love not my feelings.

The words of Romans 12 provides us all a list of actions, a way to act "as if" we are God's beloved community. So far as it depends on us this is what we can do: seek good, support one another, forgive, provide comfort to vulnerable people, live humbly and in harmony and provide hospitality to friends and strangers.

The reminders – like bushes burning yet not consumed – are all around us so that we can notice, so God can get our attention. What are the burning bushes getting your attention? And as we act let us be a burning bush for the world. Amen.