



First United Church of Oak Park

Mystery

Exodus 3:1-15

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Without the sun's heat and light, life on earth would not exist. There is no question about the grave importance of the sun. If our planet did not rotate around the sun, we would not exist. With something as vitally important as the sun, you might think we should tend to the sun. It seems like we ought to do something... maybe at least look at it from time to time. But that wouldn't be a good idea. Staring directly at the sun can cause permanent eye damage in less than a minute. Some of you may remember the cool glasses you could get a few years ago to help you watch the total eclipse. I took a very disappointing road trip to watch that eclipse only to have clouds roll in right as the eclipse reached totality. Soon I'll get to try again because we have another total eclipse coming in April! We were advised with the last one about the damage we could do to our eyes if we looked directly at the eclipse without eye protection, so we all went out and found ourselves protective eye wear. There is a now infamous picture of the then president at the White House looking directly at the sun. We know that's something you just don't do.

My fiancée works nights at Rush University Medical Center downtown, and I had to pick her up from work the other day. Driving east at 7am means driving directly into the sun. The sun visor in my car is broken, so all I had to protect me was sunglasses and they were not cutting it. The other drivers and I were taking it slow and doing a lot of squinting. Driving home on the other hand was delightful! The warm sun was at our back and lighting our way west toward home. I was talking with my niece the other day about how I am a little like a lizard with the sun. I love to sit and enjoy the warm sun on me. It relaxes me.

How is it that something so good, so warm, so life giving, could be impossible to look at? It seems like a contradiction. It feels like a mystery.

Moses noticed a bush that was burning but wasn't being consumed by the flames. These flames were not destructive. He was amazed and wanted to get a closer look, but when Moses realized it was God there in the bush, he "hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." When God called Moses, the shepherd tending his father-in-

law's sheep, to go free the people from slavery in Egypt, Moses wanted to know more about this God who was calling him. "What do I tell them your name is?" Because Moses knew they were not going to trust him! And God said, "I am who I am." I am who I am? That's not a name!

We could compare the unknowability and the impossibility of looking directly at God to that of the sun. Both God and the sun are life sources, vital, and warm. Just as we need the sun, but cannot look directly at it, we need the divine presence but we can only know and understand so much. God is both intimate and ineffable. It seems like a contradiction. It feels like a mystery.

Where the sun and God diverge is in the sun's "thingness." The sun is an object. It can be defined and broken down to its parts. God on the other hand does not have "thingness." God only has "is-ness." God just is. I am who I am. God's existence cannot be fully known and defined. God cannot be broken down into nameable parts. God has no name. God just is. It's far simpler and far more mysterious than anything we can give a name. The love of God is as intimate and near to us as the warmth of the sun or of that burning bush, but it is also beyond us.

Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite."

We do not have an untouchable sky man for a God that we can never know intimately. We have a God whose name is holy, who dwells in high places but whose warmth is felt most when we are at our lowest point. It sounds like a contradiction. It feels like a mystery. But why is that good news?

If you are in a low place right now, if you are looking around at our world and wondering, where is God? Who is God? Is our God some man in the sky who has forgotten us? The good news is, we serve the God who is both great enough to be up there and loving enough to be down here. Our God is the one who cannot be named and yet who "is" more than anything else in the world "is." Our God is so great that they cannot be looked at directly, but so near that right here, in the depth of your despair, you will feel that warmth holding you until you can get up and continue the journey. May that warmth touch you today.

Amen.

