

**Sermon :: 23-Mar-2025**  
**Lent 3, Year C**

“ God said to Moses, ‘I AM ↓ WHO I AM.’ ”

In my own defense: I was still pretty new at this whole ‘spirituality’ thing!

I’d been in seminary a couple of weeks, and I was excited to create a personal rule of life—my first, in fact. Now, *personal* rules of life are akin to *monastic* rules of *community* life ... which govern everything from the brothers’ or sisters’ mealtimes and chores ... worship and study ... and, of course, the ‘big three’: chastity, poverty and obedience. *Personal* rules—those we create *individually*—are not, of course, so grand in scope or scale ... but they *are* still means to create, for ourselves, patterns of living ... **regular**<sup>1</sup> activities, habits and choices ... that deepen our walk with Christ and attune our hearts to the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit within us.

Well, not having much—which is to say, *any*—experience with rules of life ... I went a bit overboard! To my first meeting with my new spiritual director, I brought a draft rule that appointed something different for me to do *every* morning, *every* afternoon and *every* evening of *every* day: write a letter to *this* person ... take a walk on *this* trail ... create a blog post about *this* topic ... read three poems in *this* book. On and on it went. “Why, I’ll be ‘all spiritual’ in no time,” I thought—“this’ll be *great!*”

Well, Francie, my spiritual director, glanced at what I’d written ... quietly put the paper down on her lap ... tapped a thoughtful finger on her lips several times, while gazing out the window ... and said ... , “Well.” (I immediately began to worry that maybe I’d **left out something!**) “Well,” she said again, “this certainly is ... *comprehensive* ... but I wonder if it isn’t a little too *much?*” She went on to explain, gently and affirmingly, that a personal rule of life isn’t a *challenge*, like a work-out regimen ... or a set of *resolutions*, **like New Year’s** ... or even a *to-do list*, like work. No, a ‘rule’ is a very *short* list of very *simple* practices ... that you ‘try on,’ for a while ... to see whether they speak to your heart and sing to your spirit ... whether they open (or widen) a pathway to Christ and bring you more deeply into the gift of His Love.

And in her great wisdom ... Francie didn’t tell me to pare *down* my list and bring it back *next* time ... but rather, suggested I set aside the whole *idea* of a rule of life, for now<sup>2</sup> ... and *instead* ... choose **one VERY SIMPLE** thing to do ... every day ... as often I could. For the hallmark of a *good* rule ... is *SIMPLICITY*.

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This Lent, I’ve been introducing us a poem by the nineteenth-century English priest and poet John Keble, a portion of which is set to music in our Hymn 10, [**8:00: which I’m inviting us to meditate on each Sunday in Lent, during communion, using the words printed in the bulletin // 10:15: which we’re singing each Sunday in Lent, at the end of communion**]. I find these six short stanzas to be a ‘roadmap,’ of sorts ... maybe even something of an informal *rule of life* (!) ... for Lenten introspection and reflection ... set within the framework of the unfolding of an ordinary day in our ordinary lives. Two weeks ago, we examined how the *first* two stanzas lift up the *renewal* and *refreshment* that God gives us every morning ... which can inspire in us *hope* and *gratitude*. And last

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<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, coming from the Latin name for a rule of life: REGULA.

<sup>2</sup> I rejoice that one did evolve over my years in seminary and continues to evolve to this day. It has served, and serves, my faith and my spirit well, I think.

week, we explored how the middle two stanzas call out the HOLY that exists all around us ... *and* how we may need to *change our minds ... let down our guard*, a bit ... open our hearts to some people and some things ... in order to *see* the HOLY.

Today, we come to the hymn's final two stanzas ... which brought to mind my dear spiritual director ... because *they*, like *she*, call us to the practice of *SIMPLICITY*. As I said two weeks ago, Keble was a man very much in touch with his times ... *and*, perhaps, with the universal human condition. For in these stanzas, I think he gently chides our innate tendency to *complicate* things ... to create more *process* and pile on more *stuff*—*more is better!*; to give ourselves, like a naïve seminarian I once knew, some twenty-one different things to do, *every week* ... thinking this would somehow bring him closer to Christ.

Like my Francie ... Keble counsels us to run *exactly counter* to all this “*more, more, more!*” ... and instead, let the unremarkable, common **routine and activity** of everyday life point the way to Jesus:

The *trivial* round, the *common* task,  
will furnish all we ought to ask:  
room to deny ourselves; a *road*  
to bring us *daily* ↓ *nearer* God.

*Before* we assign ourselves some tome of theology to read or a **seventeen-part YouTube series** on ethics to master ... *before* we make a plan to pray on our knees—*bare*, and preferably on a slab of *concrete!*—five times a day ... *before* we begin compiling daily lists of all the myriad ways we've sinned<sup>3</sup> and how we might atone ... *before* seeking to *learn* more ... *do* more ... or *repent* more ... **SIMPLY**, ↓ says Keble, look, in your daily life, for **SIMPLE** ways to *thank* God ... *serve* Jesus ... and *abide* in the Holy Spirit.

For **SIMPLE**, I think, is the way **to** God ... because **SIMPLE** is the way **of** God. When Moses ... seeking to evade God's call to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt ... demands to know what name to call God when speaking on God's behalf ... God gives him a startlingly **SIMPLE** answer: “Tell the people, ‘**I AM** ↓ **WHO I AM**’” (or in the translation I prefer, “**I AM THAT I AM.**”) ¶God doesn't tell Moses to give some lengthy account of God's creating the cosmos and then rescuing Adam and Eve from their succumbing to temptation in the garden. ¶God doesn't dwell on how close the world came to destruction in the Flood and how God mercifully saved Noah and two-of-each-kind. ¶God doesn't rehearse all the history of God's making a covenant with Abraham (and Sarah) and then populating the twelve tribes through Jacob and his four ‘wives.’<sup>4</sup> *All of that is true ... and all of that is wonderful ... but none of that is necessary ... for the People of God ... to know—to love—God. To be sure, God's teachings and expectations ... God's grace and mercy ... God's peace and justice ... God's endless patience and dogged persistence, with us ... will follow ... in due time. But for now, God says ... for this time ... for this season ... it is enough to know only that I AM ... always HAVE BEEN ... and forever WILL BE. SIMPLY this ... alone and without more ... will bring Israel (and us!) to our “perfect rest.”*

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<sup>3</sup> I do not denigrate the time-honored, often very meaningful Ignatian practice of the daily **EXAMEN**. I'm only suggesting that we not, in some frenzy of penitential energy, create a rigorous practice without, first, perhaps, begin with a simple “Forgive me, Lord” prayer each night at bedtime.

<sup>4</sup> He did, in fact, have two (and at the same time!), and two more were *like* wives to him.

As I mentioned last Sunday, I spent this past week on a silent, unplugged spiritual retreat at an Episcopal monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We gathered several times a day, on a regular schedule, for worship and meals. We put away all our devices and screens, in favor of *SIMPLE* things: walks and books, fires and naps. And, outside of worship ... *total and complete silence*: the inner stillness and increased spiritual attentiveness—*attunedness*—that come in the *SIMPLICITY* of being *with* others, in heart and in body ... without the need to heap up a mountain of words between us.<sup>5</sup>

While I'm sometimes wistful I can't spend *more* of my days in the beautiful, nourishing *SIMPLICITY* of 'in there' ... most of the time, I'm grateful for the wonder, love and joy of my life 'out here.' Still ... my retreats at SSJE ... like Keble's hymn ... *are* an invitation to pare back ... to un-complicate ... to essentialize. What *are* the "*common tasks*" that bring us "*nearer God*"? ¶ Maybe it's the practice of *savoring* meals, slowly and intentionally ... rather than gulping them, accompanied by the blare of the TV ... so we may tune our hearts to the *SIMPLE* bounty of God's creation. ¶ Perhaps it's the "trivial round" of our daily obligations ... doing laundry, carpooling kids, cleaning bathrooms ... volunteering at the food pantry, visiting someone who can't get out: When we slow down to be *in* these tasks ... rather than rushing to get *through* them ... they make us realize that in denying—*giving up; giving over*—a bit of ourselves for others ... we are modeling the very *SIMPLICITY* of Christ. ¶ Or maybe it's a conscious decision to stay in one evening each week, with no place to be or things to do, other than enjoying the *SIMPLE stillness* of being *home*; ~ or opting to darken all your screens one day ... or one afternoon ... or even *a couple hours* ... each week ... to enjoy the *SIMPLICITY* of **a YOU** that, for a nonce, isn't symbiotically *connected to*—*and* instantaneously *available to*—the *rest* of the world.

For when we embrace the *SIMPLER* way ... travel the *SIMPLER* path ... seek the *SIMPLER* existence ... we are, in fact, doing the *will* of God, because we're doing the *way* of God: the *SIMPLE I AM*.

And letting *our* **I AM rest**, more and more, **in God's** **I AM** ... will, to be sure ... "bring us daily **↓ nearer** God."

THE REV DOUGLAS S WORTHINGTON  
All Souls' Episcopal Church  
San Diego, CA

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<sup>5</sup> I guess it's a little like going off-the-grid, Episcopal style!