

"Holy & Courageous Ground"
September 27, 2020; 10:00 am
Exodus 3:1-15
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Exodus 3:1-15 The Message (MSG)

3 ¹⁻² Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up.

³ Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

⁴ God **saw** that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

He said, "Yes? I'm right here!"

⁵ God said, "Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground."

⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face, **afraid** to look at God.

⁷⁻⁸ God said, "I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

⁹⁻¹⁰ "The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I've seen for myself how cruelly they're being treated by the Egyptians. It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."

¹¹ Moses answered God, "But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹² "I'll be with you," God said. "And this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain."

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the People of Israel and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What do I tell them?"

¹⁴God said to Moses, "I-AM-WHO-I-AM. Tell the People of Israel, 'I-AM sent me to you.'"

¹⁵God continued with Moses: "This is what you're to say to the Israelites: 'God, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This has always been my name, and this is how I always will be known.

I. JOURNEY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD

We have been on a journey. With Jacob and Esau—twins with relational challenges from the get-go. With Jacob's son Joseph and his many brothers (oh, and his colorful coat!)—in all the ups and downs of family life and dynamics. We traveled with Joseph from the pit in the desert where he'd been left to die, and then, on second thought, sold down the river to some traders passing by.

We dreamed with Joseph and wondered about those dreams. Wondered how the message of them would be received or heeded, then watched in amazement as he was released from the prison life had landed him in and elevated to a place of high importance and esteemed and powerful leadership.

We rejoiced with Joseph, as he reunited with his brothers and Father, as reconciliation and forgiveness won the day. Then, we journeyed into a new chapter for the Children of Israel, and wondered what would happen to them as more challenges and wilderness moments ensued.

I encourage you to watch the September 20th worship on You Tube if you haven't, to fill in the puzzle pieces that bring us to this week's story. You might love that "Moses in the Bulrushes" story from your childhood.

You might want to know how we've gotten from Joseph overseeing the Kingdom of Pharaoh and caring for his family, to Moses the Shepherd getting called up to help God liberate the Children of Israel from Egypt. How did we get *here*? How did things go so far south after the famine?

And now, here, today, we find ourselves with Moses, for: "The Rest of the Story."

Now, he is long grown—long after being born into troubled times and drawn out of the river by the most unlikely daughter of a king. Now, he is called out and called up by God—given a profound purpose in life.

II. PAYING ATTENTION EVERY DAY?

Bruce Epperly calls this story of Moses' call, a joining of "mysticism and mission." A story that unites surprise with vocation.

"Having fled in fear and disgrace from Egypt and now living *comfortably* in Midian, Moses doesn't anticipate a divine call, but it comes to him on an **ordinary** day on his way to work. Our most 'secular' activities are **chockfull** of the 'sacred.' God is **always** calling and *sometimes* we notice!"

We might also describe it as: our contemplation coming together with our action at the Burning Bush.

When are we just minding our own business, tending our sheep as it were, going about our daily endeavors, when we are caught up short by a surprise happening, phenomenon, voice, or a roaring tap on the shoulder?

III. BURNING BUSH of the WORLD

Could this be *us* right now? Could we be in a “Moses Moment” ourselves?

The world is on fire—literally—not unlike the burning bush. How does God call out to us in *this* moment?

What is a faithful response to the fire?

To the call, to the tap on the shoulder?

To the invitation bordering on command, coming from the Holy Other? To bring a message that may or may not be well-received? To liberate the captives?

That’s the million dollar question: when we go to convey the message we’ve been given, how will we and the message be received? Will the messenger be shot? To put it colloquially!

The God of our fathers and mothers, may be calling *us* in this moment. Yes, the God we *think* we had an inkling of, but weren’t really sure who this God was. “I Am Who I Am.”

It might be our calling, and it might all be a little frightening!

Remember Joseph’s message from his dreams? How they were at first highly suspect and almost incited violence? (Or not even “*almost!*”)

And then, only later, with a different audience, the dream is taken seriously, heeded and the advice from the dream followed through on; responded to in a life-changing way. Only later does that message become a saving grace—a world-changing plan of action!

So, then, fast forward: What do the people *do* with Moses’ tide-turning message? Are they willing to be dragged out of their Comfort Zone that really is not so comfortable at all?

They are living in slavery! They are stuck, trapped, forced into heavy labor. Not free to live their own lives and raise their families in good neighborhoods. Not free to practice their own religion and live as a beloved community.

Yet, they are *not* jumping at the chance to leave all that fun and games behind! And, then, after Moses does help liberate them, they still long for the “fleshpots of Egypt”—the “good old days” of slavery and bondage. Moses does *not* have an easy road ahead! His call is not to a well-outlined and promised-to-be-successful-or-your-money-back Business Plan!

But, I’m getting ahead of the story. Just some foreshadowing of what is to come—hoping to make you curious enough to read *The Rest of the Story*.

IV. CONGREGATIONAL MEETING & CALL

A new season begins today in our church. With the voting on the 2020 budget and looking ahead to our 2021 Budget; considering our Team Structure and

how we will lead and Be the Church in the coming year in *all* ways—not to mention, how we will Be the Church in COVID Season in the winter—faithfully and safely.

With all of that before us, we are not unlike Moses standing beside the Burning Bush.

The *first* thing we must do is *recognize* where we are, and that the Bush is talking to us! Realize that God can be found *anywhere*—even in the mostly unlikely of places! And, that the Holy One shows up and makes Holy Ground happen anywhere and everywhere.

The *second* thing we must do is take off our shoes! Whether literally or figuratively—doesn't matter. Take off your shoes right now if you like! Wiggle your toes in the grass (or if you're worshiping at home right now—take off your slippers and wiggle your toes in the carpet, or—if your house is like my house—in the warm fur of a dog who has placed herself under your feet!)

Take off your shoes and stop walking, stop moving ever-forward for a moment. “Cease striving, be still and know that I am God,” says the Holy One to us, when we encounter Holy Ground and Holy Moments.

The *third* thing we must do is *recognize* Who it is that is talking to us.

⁴ God **saw** that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

He said, “Yes? I'm right here!”

⁵ God said, “Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground.”

⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your fathers: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”

“I am the God of your fathers and mothers. Of this congregation for 140 faithful years! The God of Carrie Wright, Art Williams, Mary Kelly, John Dorfmeister, Verona Taggart, Joe Bohe, Shirley Rawlins, Beth Dwyer, Steve Helm, Hugh Neas (to name *just* a few!)”

“The God of your fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers in the faith –past, present and future – I Am Who I Am – and I AM here –*with* you. In *this* Holy Time. In this Momentous Moment of being the Church together.

And I have a message for you—to hear, to take in—to take out into the world.”

“Don't be afraid! Don't hide your face like Moses did. Be brave and courageous. Listen to my heart. For I have heard the cries of my people. I have seen how they are oppressed, ostracized and traumatized.

I have heard their pain and want to release the captives from all the powers that bind and keep them down. The systems of racism and inequality; the policies that keep the playing field anything *but* level. I want to bring my people—ALL the beloved children

of God—to *shalom*—to wholeness; to a place of milk and honey in abundance for *all*.”

So, in this moment, Breathe Deep. Breathe in the Presence. Even amidst the flames and smoky air. Breathe in and take in God’s message to you—individually and collectively. What is God saying to all of us? At this time? In this place and space—together?

The bush was blazing away but it didn’t burn up.

What are *we* blazing away about? On fire for? Does it show? Does it consume us, burn us up? Or does it keep us “on fire,” alight *with* the Light?

The bush being enflamed but not being consumed means **Hope!** It’s *not* too late! The world might be on fire around us, but we still keep responding and don’t give up. We keep tending the flock; being faithful, putting one leap of faith in front of another.

V. HOLY AND COURAGEOUS GROUND.

Each of us has a Moses moment, or several, in life. We as a human race are at such a moment. Will we notice the Burning Bush? Recognize God’s sacred presence in our midst? Take off our shoes? Stop running around frantically long enough to Listen to the Voice? Ask God for the message we are sent to share?

That’s where we find ourselves today as a human race. This moment in time. This week, this month, this year, this season. That’s where we find ourselves as faithful followers of the One who calls us up and into the journey.

¹¹ Moses answered God, “But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

¹² “I’ll be with you,” God said. “And this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain.”

God goes with us! *Even* in COVID Times. Even in our homes, while sheltering in place. Even in winter—or *whatever* season we’re in!

God keeps calling out and calling forth “*the small, intimidated humans that God loves*” (Jill Duffey)—men, women, youth and children—Congregations and communities, to *be* God’s change agents. Light-bringers. Channels of peace and justice; bearers of mercy and compassion, stirrers and disturbers of Good Trouble. Working toward healthy and wholeness—*shalom!*—for all God’s children.

Will we answer the call? Amen.