

Our second reading today comes from the Hebrew scripture, the book of Exodus, chapter 3 verses 1-15 where we meet Moses. As you will recall Moses is Hebrew a minority group in Egypt that is enslaved. As their population was increasing the Egyptian Pharaoh insisted that all newborn boys be killed. Moses' mother sets him in a basket in the river where Pharaoh's daughter finds him and raises him as her own, an Egyptian. As an adult Moses kills an Egyptian he finds beating a Hebrew and ultimately flees Egypt. Today we meet up with him after he has married and is settled in the land outside of Egypt. Listen for God's word to you this day:

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ God said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the

Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² God said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

¹³ But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is God’s name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” God said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

This is the word of God, for the people of God, thanks be to God.

Where do you expect God to speak to you? Do you expect to hear from God when you are in the midst of weekly worship? Do you expect to hear from God when you are praying? What about when you are being intentionally quiet, silent even, listening very carefully? Do you expect for that to be the moment God speaks to you? I’m not sure

what Moses expected, he may not have expected anything, or at least anything from God. But, here he is, going about his business, tending to his father-in-law's sheep when out of nowhere God is appearing to speak to him. And, out of a burning bush none the less. It appears as though our readiness to receive God has nothing to do with God's timing.

God proves in this story with Moses that God does not need us to be in a physical place or even a mentally prepared place to receive God's voice, to receive God's wisdom, to be called by God into a life we didn't expect. The place does not make God ready for holy work the ground is not holy and **then** God appears, the ground is holy **because** God appears, the space is holy because God's spirit intervenes, the person is holy because God is alive and moving in and through them, through you, to bring to fruition all the things which we, God's creation, have been called to do. What is needed is our awareness in the everyday moments, to the world around us, the bushes that are being set ablaze, the voices that are ringing loudly calling us to hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, to love one another. Awareness that allows you to stop long enough to hear what is coming from the burning bush.

Moses does in fact stop to listen, and to see, but then Moses isn't sure about what he is hearing. Altogether, there are five objections that Moses raises. Each one pointing to a past reality. Each solution of God points to a new future.¹ Therefore, even as Moses tries to deny God's calling, God does not relent. A new future is on the horizon. The text says: God has observed the misery of the Israelites; God has heard

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *New Interpreter's Bible, v. 1*, p. 713.

their cry. God even claims to know their sufferings. God's solutions point to a new future, not to more of the past.

God gives Moses a mighty task, God tells Moses he is to go back to Pharaoh in whose house he was raised, and demand that he let the Israelites go, to be freed from enslavement, to be released from captivity, and freed to leave the land of Egypt. One man is tasked with freeing an entire people's group.

Moses again questioning God's decision-making skills and choice in him as the liberator of the Israelites wants to know how the people will know that God has in fact sent him to bring them from slavery. I am who I am, God's self, the very creator of all that is, and all that is within, and all that will be, says I will be who I will be. I will be present with you as I have been for your ancestors and will be journeying with you as I peer into the future with hope and promise for all my people. God promises to be with Moses, showing faithfulness to Moses as he sends him to the Israelites. Theologian Walter Brueggemann says this about God's naming and promise: "The formula,[of God's name] is enough to see that the formula bespeaks power, fidelity, and presence. This God is named as the power to create, the one who causes to be. This God is the one who will be present in faithful ways to make possible what is not otherwise possible."²

God calls us to tasks that seem beyond us and makes possible what is otherwise impossible.

² [Brueggemann](#), p. 714.

Just like Moses, just like Paul talking to the people in Rome, God doesn't usually give the faithful the simple tasks. God's kin-dom is about overcoming evil with good. And that often means putting those of us who live rather comfortable lives in situations that bring much discomfort. Hearing God's call often times feels like wrestling within yourself about what you want to do verses what you feel called to do, it means internal processing and external conversations where you are trying to justify not responding to that voice, but knowing that you should, and that at some point you will have no other choice. That feeling, I believe, resides in our being because the holy is found within us, we cannot escape it, we cannot escape God's image yearning, striving to be freed from our captivity. You can try to reject it but with any self-awareness at all it will burn, like a burning bush, until you say yes.

These texts we find in our holy scripture should guide and inspire us to lives that are beyond our desire to naval gaze. These texts compel us, and people across generations, to use the gifts we have, in the places we find ourselves, the ground upon which we occupy, to free the captives, to rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, to live in harmony with one another, to associate with the lowly, to extend hospitality and to live peaceably with all, to overcome evil with good. This is a call for life on earth to be as it is in heaven, and it is for each and every one of us.

I believe God longs for society to be lockstep with the church, for the ideals of the church to be the ideals embraced by our communities, but we know from history, since the beginning of humanity, that social order and moral order do not often agree and as an institution that espouses morality as it's guiding principle it seems crucial to examine that tension that we experience with the wider world and begin to speak to

that tension more intentionally, defining expectations of the world in terms of morality and rejecting an order determined by power and greed, rejecting the power and structures of today's Pharaohs and embracing God's call for a more living-giving future.

Rev. Dr. Eleazar Fernandez says this about the tension that is found between communities of faith and the surrounding world: "The greater the tension between a faith community and the surrounding world, the more sharply defined is the identity and character of the community. While no faith community is completely outside the mold of its surrounding society, the early Christian communities were actively self-aware of their identity and calling as "alternative societies" vis-à-vis the wider world, particularly the imperial Roman context. They wrestled not only with how to stand in contrast to the imperial Roman system of privilege, power, and social conformity, but also how to live differently as communities defined by the life and teachings of the crucified One."³

This is where we find ourselves today, it is where, if we are honest, we have found ourselves all along, but today is where we are now, and we, like Moses, are looking at the burning bush, they are all around, and God is saying our names, calling to us, telling us there is work to be done, there is honoring of others that we have long dishonored to be done, there is opportunity to overcome evil with good.

Today's gospel text which we did not read is Jesus' call for all who want to be his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. We are invited by God to bring radical freedom to the world, we are invited by Jesus to deny our comfort and

³ Eleazar Fernandez, *Feasting on the Word*, p.16.

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August 30, 2020

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risk death to bring God's love to the world, we are reminded by Paul that living into this embodiment includes drastic re-ordering, moving from power and dominance to service and love. We are invited to offer a community that looks different from the world around it.

Being a person of faith, being a Christian, rarely goes as we expect, so this is your warning: Be prepared, God will call you when you least expect it. It most likely will make you uncomfortable, you may, like Moses, even try to reject God's call to you, and it may seem impossible. But, with God who promises to be with you every step of the journey, a God who longs for a new future, it will be possible. All that remains is how you, child of God, will respond.