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Exodus 3:1-22
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The Word, The Whisper, and The Way

Have you ever been out in the wilderness or on a walk through the neighborhood and encountered a burning bush? I would say that you have. In fact every time you walk or drive onto our property, you are literally greeted by not just one, but five burning bushes at the entrance of our parking lot.

Euonomus alatus. That is its scientific name. Here is a picture of them so that you can be prepared next time as you come here to meet with God. What if every time we came to church we were ready to hear from God in some special way? And it began with “Good morning, I am so glad you’ve come!” That’s God speaking to you through those bushes.

Now we have just gone through the most spectacular season where the leaves turn bright red. Hence the name.

God is here and ready to speak to us.

Are we ready to receive God’s word?

Our scripture story today is of Moses’ encounter with God through a burning bush in the desert. Moses was shepherding his father-in-law’s sheep near Mt. Horeb also known as Mt. Sinai in the Desert of Sin just at the tip of the Sinai Peninsula near the Red Sea.

Moses certainly wasn’t expecting to have an encounter with God, but God had a very important calling for Moses to consider.

And I think it’s safe to say that God wants to have an encounter with us today.

This morning I invite us to listen to and engage the scripture with our imaginations. Imagine yourself walking along with Moses in the early morning hours. You’re out in the wilderness. Alone. When a word or a phrase captures your attention. Like the burning bush, you are curious because you may not know why or what it means. That’s ok. Just hold on to it for a moment. And then we will be guided through an exercise of listening to God speak.

Exodus 3:1-22

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. **3** So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” **6** Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. **8** So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. **9** And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. **10** So now, go. I am sending 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 And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

15 God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’”

“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.

16 “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. **17** And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

18 “The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the

Lord our God.’ **19** But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. **20** So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

21 “And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. **22** Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination

There are several things that I’d like to do this morning as we dwell within this story. First, we will compare Moses’ actions with that of the Lord. Next, we will expound upon the importance of God’s self proclaimed name YHWH. Then we will consider how God is speaking to us today. And finally we will take a moment to listen to God ourselves.

So first, what does this text tell us about Moses and God? To answer that question, we will look at what both Moses and God do it in.

Moses was faithful in doing what he had always done, attending to the affairs of his father-in-law’s sheep. Nothing extraordinary. Nothing unusual. It was a job. Still Moses faithfully attended to the sheep day in and day out.

Amidst Moses’ faithfulness, God was likewise at work behind the scenes even through the ordinary, mundane and routine tasks of shepherding. In fact, God was at work long before Moses was even born to bring him to this point.

Moses wasn’t expecting God.

But God expected Moses.

Moses was curious. He saw something that caught his attention and so he went over to check it out.

God responded to Moses’ curiosity and orchestrated this personal meeting with Moses.

As Moses was rationalizing the truth that bush was burning but it wasn’t being consumed, God called Moses by name, twice. “Moses, Moses.” As I mentioned last week with young Samuel, that is a very common way that a theophany or encounter with the living God unfolds. God calls us by name. It’s as if God was really trying to get Moses’ attention.

Moses responded with “Here I am!” Heneini. A surprised, yet full offering of one’s self. “I am here. I am yours. You’ve got my attention.” Notice that it is the same response that young Samuel gave to the Lord when he was called.

God sets the terms for this meeting, not Moses. “Remove your shoes for the ground you are walking on is holy.” Essentially what God did was to invite Moses

into a time of worship symbolized by removing his shoes and preparing his heart to receive God's Word. In the same way, we are invited to confess our sins as we walk into worship and prepare our hearts to receive God's Word.

Moses responded to God with humility and timidity. Moses hid his face.

Even still, God confirmed that he listened to his people's cry. Not a single prayer is ignored. Like little raindrops collected in a reservoir in heaven, at just the right time, God unleashes those prayers onto whatever and whomever we've prayed. God says, "I have heard your cries and seen the oppression of my people."

Next, I want to expound a bit on God's name that we hear in this text. When Moses said to God, "Supposed I go to the Israelites and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I say to them?'"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

In other words, I just am and I don't have to explain my self to anyone. It's a testimony to God's self existence. Before anything was, God was.

In the Hebrew this is represented by letters YHWH which show up over 6,000 times in scripture. To the Jewish people God's name was so holy that even uttering it by human lips was considered blasphemy. And so to prevent people from sinning by saying God's holy name, scribes substituted the word LORD in the text for the name. Thus in Hebrew, we would read Adoni. In Greek we would read Kurios. When we see LORD in our scriptures today, it is assumed that it is God that we are speaking of.

And yet despite this existential difference between God and Moses, the creator and the created, the holy and the profane, notice the conversational nature between the two. They spoke as friends would. Face to face.

Theologian Dallas Willard in *Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, wrote, "This union with God consists chiefly in a conversational relationship with God while we are consistently and deeply engaged as his friend and co-laborer in the affairs of the kingdom of heaven."¹

So how does this lead us to better understand how God speaks to us today?

First and foremost, we must understand that God is free to speak to us however, whenever, and whatever God so chooses. God meets with us on God's terms, not ours. We cannot control it. We can only respond to it.

Second, God will find us, wherever we are and may even bring us out of hiding or obscurity. Sometimes God calls us to brand new endeavors. Other times

¹Dallas Willard, *Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 75

God calls us to a continuation of what we have already been doing. Either way, we walk forward in faith, knowing that God is leading us onward and will be with us.

Third, we see how God speaks may vary. It could be through a word or phrase that pops in our heads. It could be a scripture we've just read. It could be through some life experience. It could be through a trusted friend or counselor. It could be as we are faithfully working throughout our day. It could be a word prophetically spoken. It could be a loud voice or a gentle whisper. It could be in prayer. Either way, we know that it is God when:

A it is Affirming.

B it is Biblical.

C it is Christlike.

Fourth, God will tell us exactly what to do and what to say, even though we may have lots of excuses for why we shouldn't go and do what we are been told. We can also trust the Holy Spirit that lives within us to guide and direct us as well.

Fifth, God promises to equip us and prepare us to do even more than we ever thought was possible. Not only that but God paves the way before us and promises to go with us.

And Sixth, if the word is from us to someone else, God will even prepare the hearts of those we are called to speak to. Just as God did with the Israelites and Moses.

What burning bushes have we encountered lately?

Again Dallas Willard wrote, "Why we don't hear God? Are we in tune? We are showered with messages that simply go right through or past us. We are not attuned to God's voice. Are we ready vessels? It may also be that [we] could make no good use of a word from God because of how [we] are living. Are we ready to do business with God? Perhaps we don't hear the voice because we do not expect to hear it."²

If that is true, what might be getting in the way of us hearing God?

Is there some sin that might be blocking our hearing?

Are we just too busy to pay attention?

Or did we just discount it and go on our way?

What if God were inviting us today to slow down enough so that we could really attend to what God is trying to say to us through it?

Remember that image I asked you to keep in mind as you listened to Moses' story? Hold that openly before the Lord and quietly in our hearts as I lead us through a time of guided meditation. Please close your eyes if you feel comfortable, and open your hands in a posture that says, I am open to you today, Lord. Speak Lord for your servant is listening.

² Willard, *Hearing God*, 91.

Seven times in scripture Jesus refers to himself as “I am” in the same way that God introduced God’s self to Moses at Mt. Sinai. In essence, Jesus was putting himself on equal footing with God.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”³ If that is true, how do we need God to provide for us today?

Lord, please give us this day, our daily bread. Not tomorrow or next years. But this day.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the World.”⁴ If that is true, what areas of darkness are we walking through right now? Perhaps we fell like we are walking through a dark tunnel with no light at the end.

Lord, please be a lamp unto our paths and help us to take one step at a time.

Jesus said, “I am the door.”⁵ If that is true, what opportunities do we need God to open up for us? What new callings might you have for us?

Lord, we open ourselves unto to you and any opportunities you place in our paths. Would you give us courage to walk through them? Would you give us the right words to say? And would you open the hearts of our hearers to receive your message?

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd.”⁶ If that is true, where do we sense that God is leading us? Can we trust that our shepherd has only good things in store for us, even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death in order to get to those good things?

Lord, we are tired and weary from our journey. Please lead us to greener pastures and more still waters, where you can restore our soul.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.”⁷ If that is true, how do we need to be made new again? Do we need to be reminded that whether in life or in death, we belong to you?

Lord, restore unto us the joy of our salvation and the certainty that there is nothing that can ever snatch us from your hands.

Jesus said, “I am the way the truth and the life.”⁸ If that is true, what lies have we bought into that feel like we have been disqualified from ever hearing God? Could we believe that Jesus’ forgiveness covers a multitude of sins, even

³ John 6:35

⁴ John 8:12

⁵ John 10:9

⁶ John 10:11

⁷ John 11:25-26

⁸ John 14:6

ours? The Apostle Paul spoke plainly, “There is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ Jesus.”⁹

Lord, we believe that is true. Help our unbelief.

Jesus said, “I am the true vine.”¹⁰ If that is true, are we connected to the vine of the church in such a way that we would regularly receive from God whatever God wants to say to us?

Lord, help us to connect and remain connected to the church come what may and help our children and our grandchildren rediscover or find their connections in your body once again.

This morning as we take our offering, we will invite you to come forward with your green planned giving cards for this year’s Stewardship Campaign. As you come forward please place your green planned giving card in the basket up front and take with you a red leaf from our burning bush. If you need to remain seated, an usher will come around and help you.

Keep this leaf as a reminder of just good God has been to you over the years and how we can trust God, come what may. And may it also be a reminder of when we met God, how God spoke to us through gift of a burning bush, and how God is working even now, behind the scenes, on answering the prayers that we offered earlier.

Amen.

⁹ Romans 8:1

¹⁰ John 15:1a