

Exodus 3:1-12 - *Moses at the Burning Bush*

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 Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. 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. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." 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." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He 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.

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, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He 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 serve God on this mountain."

I read an article this week with a clickbait kind of title: *Find your inner caveman: The secret of happiness*. So much of who we are and how our brain was formed has its origins in our history. As the article says: "Up until around 12,000 years ago – the blink of an evolutionary eye – everybody everywhere was a hunter-gatherer," says Professor Daniel Lieberman, chair of the department of human evolutionary biology at Harvard University. "We became efficient long-distance walkers and runners, which allowed us to range further and find a wider variety of foods."

<https://www.magzter.com/stories/lifestyle/BBC-Countryfile-Magazine/FIND-YOUR-INNER-CAVEMAN>, https://apple.news/Av8zKRiwPT_KR7cxn4ekAAA

For millennia we moved at walking or running pace. Humans sped up a little when horses were introduced, but the number of years that we've been able to move quickly in cars, trains, and now airplanes is a minuscule fraction of time when you take in the span of human history. From an evolutionary standpoint we were not shaped to move much more quickly than at a walking, running or paddling pace.

It's not just vehicles that have sped up our life. Today darting from here to there fills our lives with activities and responsibilities. I know my life is a little crazier than many people's (my brother used to call my family "chaos in a van") and I don't want to project

and assume that my crazy is also your crazy, but I know that many of you have very busy schedules. Heck, sometimes managing medical appointments can end up being like a full-time job. But even when there is less activity, we still manage to fill our lives with worries and with TV, the news, and social media.

We're pretty anxious people now. The author of that article suggests that if we do certain things that are more in line with how we used to live, like walking more, getting outside more, and connecting more to nature, we will be happier and far less anxious. It's hard to notice little things when life moves too fast. It's hard to be present when our lives are too full. It's hard to have a transforming experience with God when you don't notice God.

The baby in the basket, Moses, has grown up. He is tending sheep in the middle of nowhere, far from civilization, on a mountain. Imagine how simple and quiet his life is. Probably not easy. Life never is, and living off the land, protecting yourself and the flock from the elements and from predators brings challenges. Nevertheless, his life is simple and far less complicated than it was when he was living in Egypt—living with the expectations, protocols and rules of the court and the complication of his blood relatives' desperate situation.

Remember Moses was adopted and grew up in the king's palace, but never quite felt at home there. He knew he was related to those slaves—*those people* outside the palace and outside the boundaries of respectability. He was related, but he didn't fit in with the Hebrew slaves either. His education, accent and fine clothes betrayed him as not being one of them. This was driven home when one day he stepped in and stood up for a Hebrew slave who was being beaten. He ended up killing the Egyptian taskmaster. When it became clear that people knew about it and were talking about it, he fled to the wilderness to hide and to start life over.

Funny thing though — God has a way of running after us no matter where we go. There in the wilderness God encounters Moses in a powerful way, and his life is never the same again. "There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; [Moses] looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 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."

Do you see that? God doesn't speak to Moses until Moses notices God, or at least until Moses notices this strange sight. Moses might have missed it. I can't help but wonder if I would have noticed. Granted, a fire is not a subtle sign. But if I was walking with my nose in my phone because a kid has texted a question about what they should write on their resume or where the dog's leash is or whether they can go mini-golfing and if I will pay, —it's not impossible that I could miss even a remarkable sight. Or if I was super busy and late for a meeting or filled with worry about where we might live during a renovation. I might have seen the burning bush but been too filled with the things in my head to pay attention to it.

What are we missing because of our business, because of our distractions or worries? But Moses has no phone to distract him and maybe at this stage no big worries to distract him either. So he sees the fire and turns toward it to look more carefully at this strange bush that is not being destroyed by the fire. Moses had to give his attention to it. God doesn't call to him until Moses is present to the sight.

In that moment Moses ends up in a holy space, in the presence of God. God tells him it's holy ground and to take off his shoes. Interesting ... in that caveman article one of the seven suggestions was to *go barefoot more often*. We apparently have some ridiculous number of nerve endings on the soles of our feet – something like 20,000. Maybe God invited Moses to take off his shoes so that he would be even more present to experience God's presence in a physical way.

God still speaks to us in ordinary and marvelous ways – we just need to be aware. How do we do that? Find a spiritual practice and practice it. You are practicing one now by being here for worship. Reading scripture is another. Prayer and meditation are others. Our meditation group meets every Tuesday ... maybe you should consider trying it. But God speaks in all kinds of ways if we are present to them. Certainly, God speaks in nature. I loved the story that Rev. Wendy told in her sermon a few weeks ago about seeing a black rat snake in the St. Lawrence River, but then having a God moment where she felt in a deeper place than her fear that *the river was big enough for her and the snake. Presence.*

Being present to those Kairos moments — those God moments—changes us.

1. It's in those moments that we learn who God is. Moses learns that God is the great "I am." I am who I am, or I will be who I will be. The one who is and is becoming. Creator and Creating. The living one.
2. In those moments we learn who we are. Moses learns that he is chosen.

Of course, that sounds nice, but learning he is chosen is not good news to Moses at first. He wasn't just chosen — *he was chosen to go back to Egypt*. Back was the last place Moses wanted to go! Moses instantly in his mind imagines going back, and all of his old insecurities flood him. Moses gives God every *but* in the book. But, but... I can't go back. I don't even know your name! But, but.. I don't know what to say! But I have a speech impediment —I'm not even good at talking.

3. That's the other thing that Moses learns—after a fair bit of back and forth with God, Moses learns that he is enough. Or maybe I should say Moses learns that *God* is enough. To each of Moses' *buts*, God responds and assures Moses. Interestingly God doesn't assure Moses that Moses is capable enough, but that God is able, that God is good, and that God would be with him. He would not be alone.
4. Moses learns that he belongs. He doesn't belong in Egypt. He doesn't even belong in the wilderness. He belongs with God.
5. Finally, it's in these moments that our eyes are opened a little more to what and

who God cares about. We learn to have the heart of God, the love of God for others. If we have a spiritual practice and are attuned to God, it should lead to a *“heightened awareness of and response to the real suffering of real people.”*— (James Finley: Center for Action and Contemplation.) If your spiritual practice only leads inward, something is not right. Those moments in God’s presence transform us.

It’s a bummer that there are no burning bushes anymore. At least I haven’t heard anyone mention it on the “What’s going on in Brockville” Facebook group. But maybe they are still too busy wishing they could still recycle pizza boxes to notice.

God wants to speak with you. God wants to connect with you, be in a relationship with you, heal you, remind you that you are enough. To call you to care for others. You don’t have to be Moses on Mount Horeb to experience God. The caveman article I read reminded me that we were created to move at a slower pace and be more present to creation around us. It confirms that when we do, we are happier, less anxious and have more peace. Maybe because it’s how we connect to our Creator.

As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote in her poem *Aurora Leigh: Earth’s crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God: But only he who sees, takes off his shoes. The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries, And daub their natural faces unaware.*

It is so very true. Last night while I was talking my puppy Opal for a walk I went down to the river. The wind was high, so there was a fresh wildness to the night. And then as we were at the shore, suddenly fireworks were set off from one of the nearby islands. At the same moment dogs started barking and Canada geese madly took flight from all the neighbouring islands. Fortunately, my little pooch is ok with fireworks – doesn’t love them but not terrified as my last dog was. So, we stayed and experienced the fireworks and the wind and the waves and the geese. It went on for a fair bit of time. There was so much beauty and so much chaos. I simply brought God into the experience, and I asked if there was anything I should hear. What I heard was that I should surrender and find beauty in the chaos.

The context is that I have all 4 of my kids home plus my niece this weekend, so the house is full and that always brings chaos. But far more than that we are embarking on a renovation and getting ready to move out. The basement and the garage are a total disaster as we sort through what stays and what goes. I don’t love chaos, yet I seem to be called into a life of chaos, and the older I get I feel like I don’t tolerate it quite as well. But you can’t get through a renovation of a house, or a renovation of a life without some chaos. Things get shaken up. But there I was standing still with the wind and the waves and the geese and the fireworks, seeing the beauty and feeling God’s presence — with me there, with me as I return to my life of chaos.

May you be present to the sacred, to God’s holy presence with you each day, and may you allow those experiences to change you for good. Thanks be to God. ***