

**September 3, 2017 – Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**“Sensing the Sacred, Answering the Call”**

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**Exodus 2:23-3:15**

There are Bible word associations that are inescapable. I can't think about Adam without thinking about Eve. If I mention Noah, the first image that comes to mind is the ark. If I mention Judas, it's the 30 pieces of silver that come to mind. When I say Moses, my mind goes right to the burning bush. It's such a graphic image – there in the middle of the desert, a tree, shrub, bush – whatever – on fire but not burning up. How strange it must have been for Moses to encounter this scene. To put the story into context, Moses has run away from Egypt where he had lived in Pharaoh's household until he killed an Egyptian while he was trying to protect an Israelite slave. When another slave threatened to identify him as a murderer, he ran away and was eventually befriended by a priest in Midian. Moses married one of his daughters, had a child and was living a simple, quiet life as a shepherd in Midian. He was not worried about Egyptians, enslaved Israelites, or anything except his family and his sheep. Although he had put his enslaved fellow Israelites out of his mind, God had not. As God takes notice of Israel's suffering, God calls Moses and draws him into the story of God's justice. God continues to call us and we are given the opportunity to notice, hear, answer, and truly experience God's presence in our lives. As Moses will soon come to understand, God's presence creates a sacred space. It is within this sacred space of our lives that we are called to live out God's love and, like Moses, we must be ready to see God and hear what God is calling us to do even when that call changes the trajectory of our lives or the world around us.

Our text is from the Hebrew Scripture from Exodus, chapter 2 verse 23 through chapter 3 verse 15. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church:

*After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.*

*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. 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 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. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send 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 worship God on this mountain.”*

*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 his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” 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.*

*Here ends our reading from scripture.*

How many of us have had this Moses moment? That time in our lives when we are just moving along – keeping our heads down and doing our jobs, ‘minding our own business,’ until something happens and we look up – we have to – we are forced to notice – to really see – what is going on around us. We can no longer claim whatever excuse we used before for not helping because we can no longer say we ‘didn’t know what was going on.’ As Moses walked toward that tree that was filled with fire, a tree he had no doubt walked by many times with his sheep, he had to stop and see what was happening. *“I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”* As biblical scholar Terence Fretheim says, “Curiosity leads to call.”

Moses responds to God’s message in the flames and begins a dialogue with God that reveals a great deal not only about Moses but also about God. God’s call to Moses was not an easy sell – in this passage alone Moses resists God’s call three times. What is fascinating about his resistance is that it creates a more relavatory experience about God. Moses obtains a fuller, clearer picture of God as he enters this dialogue and hears that God ‘knows the suffering’ of the Israelites. ‘Knowing’ as it is used in this text translates to a more weighty meaning than simple ‘head knowledge.’ Here it means a deep sharing of an experience with another person. It goes beyond empathy in that the experience of the other becomes your own experience. God *knows* the suffering of the Israelites and will change the story because as we see in this text and throughout scripture, God is on the side of the oppressed. It is a truth offered over and over in the stories of God’s people – both the old and new covenant – God opposes slavery, injustice, and oppression.

God reveals something else very important to us in this text. As Moses enters into this conversation, God commands him to take off his shoes because he is standing on holy ground. The ground is holy *because* of God’s presence there. Where God exists, where God is making God’s presence known and felt – *that* is sacred ground. For Moses, the revelation of God’s call to him was a dramatic fire and as he embarked on his journey with God, it was with the assurance that God would remain with him. The ground Moses stands on continues to be holy because God continues to be present. For each of you, the revelation may not be as dramatic as a burning bush, but be assured, God is present in your life. But each of us must turn aside and see God. We have to stop walking past God. We must, like Moses, take off our shoes - remove the obstacles that come between us and God.

I have never been a barefoot kind of person. I like wearing shoes and socks. When we lived in Hawaii for 4 years, I was the one on Aloha Friday that wore socks and shoes to work instead of flip flops. I get it from my dad. When we were kids, he took us to the beach every week during summer break, but he never took off his tennis shoes and socks. He was the only guy walking around the beach in Corona del Mar wearing his bathing suit and tennis shoes and socks. Because I don’t like being barefoot, it makes my rare barefoot moments memorable. I do admit that I love the feeling of stepping

into wet sand and seeing my foot print before it gets washed away. You can feel each grain of sand on the bottom of your feet. Each poky rock and shell. With nothing between your feet and the earth's surface, there is a contact that is inescapable. A vulnerability. It's that closeness that God desires with each of us – nothing separating us from God's presence – and our slowing down enough to see and hear and even push back (like Moses did) brings us that closeness. We are standing on sacred ground because of God is present and active in our lives. Rob Bell, a pastor and writer, offers us this explanation:

*Your life matters.  
How you prepare your food,  
how you deal with your neighbor,  
how you handle conflict.  
You are on holy ground.  
This is not a random, accidental phenomenon we know to be you,  
but your entire life takes place under a wide horizon of holiness and sanctity.  
Respect the mundane and the everyday because it is there that the divine is found.<sup>1</sup>*

What is *your* call? Take off *your* shoes and notice and hear what God is calling you to be in this world. Maybe it is profound and life-changing in the way the world defines profound and life-changing – like Moses freeing the slaves; but maybe it is profound in the way God defines profound – remembering the name of the preschooler and her harried parent who live down the street and holding the door for them at the library when you see them; sitting with a sick friend; saying a kind word to a stranger, letting someone merge in front of you in this crazy construction traffic on Washington street, letting go of long-held anger and resentment.

God is present within us and around us - the space we occupy is sacred ground because of God's presence in our lives. Not just when we are sitting in a church sanctuary or some other place traditionally considered to be sacred space. When we leave here today, we carry that sacredness with us because God is with us. See, know, and question God and know that the ground you stand on is sacred because of God is present and active in your life – live out that sacredness and your call.

Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell, <http://thirtysecondsorless.net/leviticus-1/>