

July 2, 2017

Lesson 5: Moses and the Burning Bush

Exodus 3: 1-12

Context:

The scripture lesson today is the call story of Moses, perhaps one of the most famous call stories in all of scripture. The early lessons we have looked at have included some of the more obscure call stories in scripture. The stories of Deborah, Gideon, Jephath, and Samson are all important, but relatively short in the scheme of the Old Testament. Each of them has a call and each of them responds in some way.

The call story of Moses is perhaps the most famous because of Moses' position as the leader of the Israelites. And this one is more famous because land is a part of the call story. The burning bush is incredible to imagine because it is so spellbinding and defiant of physical reality. One can almost imagine the brilliant colors of orange, red, yellow, and even a hazy blue engulfing a beautiful bush that somehow retains its green leaves as it "burns" on this holy mountain.

The story takes place as Moses finds himself at a lull in his narrative. After escaping Egypt and finding a new identity in the Midian tribe, Moses lives what is probably a comfortable, nomadic life. His major responsibilities are to take care of the flock and to follow the lead of his father-in-law Jethro. His life is one where he has been able to cultivate a new identity, one devoid of having to deal with his background as a Hebrew brought up in the household of the elite Egyptians. That is all gone and he now a simple Midianite wondering in the wilderness with the tribe. Life is simple and has a new rhythm without any real challenges.

But when Moses finds himself at an intriguing burning bush, everything changes. On God's holy mountain Horeb, he has been told that the God of his ancestors is calling him to lead God's people out of the oppressive Egypt and into the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. Moses questions his own identity and ability to do so, but God assures Moses that the call is real and genuine. God has heard the peoples' cry and God wants to use Moses to deliver the people. Through it all, God will be with Moses and God's will shall be done.

This narrative is the first of many in which we see God and Moses converse with one another. It is on "holy ground" where God calls Moses and it is "holy ground" where God tells Moses to bring the Israelites to so that they may worship and honor God. Moses' call story is one that is straightforward: God pursues the one who God knows will do the task before them.

Application:

Of all the call stories, Moses' is one that resonates with the story of so many. We go about our daily lives doing ordinary things and having our own rhythms and routines. God may be a part of our lives, but it flows without interruption. We do what we are supposed to do and that is all. Like Moses, we have our family, our work, and our lives are "normal." We go day in and day out trying to be as ordinary as we can be.

But suddenly we notice something different in our surroundings. Our burning bushes vary from person to person. It may be an event or a news story. We see someone

doing something or speaking negatively of a group of people and think: “I don’t see Jesus in the midst of this situation. Maybe it’s time for me to do or say something.” Or maybe we read an inspirational story of a ministry or something life-giving in another place that makes us wonder if God might be leading us start our own ministry or to think of a need where our own gifts might be needed.

It might even be the actual landscape or a place in nature where things are so quiet that we can feel God’s voice in nature. The burning bush at Horeb is quite a site. But if you look around at other places you find God there as well. There are the fields and field of crops in south Alabama where you drive and think of all those who tilled the land so that others might live and eat. There is also the camp in the pines where hundreds of children and adults have felt God’s presence in worship or in the sunset of a lake. Those are the places that God speaks as well. It may be a quiet whisper or a loud booming voice that is God leading us to the next steps on our journey in life. We realize that “holy ground” isn’t just in those places, but is everywhere we go where people live and dwell.

For Moses, the burning bush was a place where he first heard the audible voice of God and it was also the place where he was reminded that he was on “holy ground.” As I think of our place in our world, I realize that we all stand upon “holy ground.” God still speaks to us today and wants to liberate people from the oppressive forces of this world. Oppressive forces like racism, sexism, ageism, and all the other isms that sometimes creep up on us, even in the church. Like Moses, we are reminded that God can use even the simplest of people like a farmer/shepherd in the middle of the desert to step up to these forces and know that God is with us. We are called by God to see that this world we live in is where we are called to live. Our lives are entangled with those of others and in our burning bushes, God is asking us to listen to the call so that we may lean into our own callings to serve and be agents in the Kingdom of God.

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