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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO
Proper 17, August 30, 2020
Exodus 3:1-15

Moses wanders off the beaten path in this morning's reading from the Hebrew Scriptures. The writer of Exodus tells us that Moses led his flock of sheep to "the back of the wilderness." He went beyond the usual grazing grounds. Maybe he was getting bored with his usual routine. Maybe he was daydreaming. Maybe he was looking for better grazing land for his father-in-law's sheep. But he clearly wasn't looking for the Mountain of God!

In his wanderings, though, something catches his eye. This strange bush that was burning was not right in front of him. The text tells us he had to "turn aside" to really see it. Moses had to stop what he was doing to find out what this was all about. He could have said, "I'll come back tomorrow when I have more time to see if it's still burning." He could have said, "Wow. That's really pretty." And kept right on driving his sheep along to path. But he didn't. He stopped. He turned. He came closer.

When Moses goes out of his way to see what's going on, God notices. God calls out urgently, "Moses! Moses!" Two quick cries in succession. The scripture scholar Ellen Davis tells us that, "The ancient rabbis compared God at this moment to a person carrying a heavy load, about to collapse, who suddenly sees that someone standing nearby has noticed and calls: 'Quick, help me out!'"¹ God is calling Moses to help carry the load of human suffering, the suffering of the oppressed. Moses didn't wake up that morning and decide that he would lead the Israelites out of oppression. That was God's decision. It was only Moses's careful attention to

¹ Ellen Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 44.

what was happening around him that opened up the opportunity for God and God's desire for humanity to be revealed.

And the only proper response to God's calling is to take off his sandals, to stand in barefooted reverence before the power of God. The priest and writer Barbara Brown Taylor says, "reverence is the recognition of something greater than the self – something that is beyond human creation or control, that transcends full human understanding."² To be reverent is to be vulnerable, to acknowledge our human limitations. Barefoot before God, we acknowledge that God is far bigger and deeper and more loving and merciful than we can ever grasp. To be reverent means that we are willing to submit to God even with our limited understanding. To be reverent is to pay attention and to allow God to grab our attention in the midst of our daily lives.

God caught Moses' attention with a burning bush. How is God trying to catch our attention in the midst of this global pandemic that has uncovered so much suffering and inequity in our world? In the midst of our own daily shepherding of our children and grandchildren? In the midst of pursuing degrees and careers or a meaningful retirement? Where might God be longing to be revealed in our very midst. For Moses it was in the middle of a field full of sheep dung and weeds, dirt and dust. He stopped. He noticed. He was curious. He was willing to stand barefooted, vulnerable and in awe of something far greater than himself that was unfolding.

Removing one's shoes is not only done when entering a holy place. It's also done when entering a home. God's command to Moses to take off his shoes is also an invitation to hospitality. This powerful, awe-inspiring God is inviting Moses to be at home with him. This is a pretty big deal when you consider Moses' history. The Hebrews rejected him as one of their

² Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 21.

own. The Egyptian Pharaoh wanted to kill him. The Midianites see him as a foreigner. Moses is not at home in any community. But here, at the foot of the mountain of God, Moses has finally found a true home.

We are obsessed with the idea of home in our culture. Owning a home means you have finally made it. And bigger is better. I admit to watching my fair share of HGTV and drooling over the big, beautiful homes. It's amazing how "outdated" my home can feel after a few of those shows! But I wonder if all this focus on having the right home in the right place with the right fixtures and enough bedrooms and bathrooms for each person doesn't blind us to the real meaning of home – that of hospitality. Home isn't a showcase. It's a place where we can be ourselves, let our hair down, take our shoes off. Home is, ideally, a place where we are safe and loved and where others are invited to share in that love. This is why domestic abuse is such a painful affront – it's a violation of the sacredness of what home should be.

God invites Moses, and God invites us, to be at home in God. To be our true selves, to be vulnerable and barefoot, to share in the bounty of love that is God and to share that with all who enter our spaces. To be at home in God is to know our true identity. God, the awesome transcendent God, welcomes Moses in and offers him hospitality. It's from this place of both reverence and intimate hospitality that Moses is sent forth to free God's people. It is from that same place – God both beyond our imaginings and right here intimately intertwined in our lives – that we, too, are sent forth. Later in Exodus and other Scriptures, the people are told to put their sandals ON. But that comes only after the vulnerability and openness, the resting at home in the Divine that readies us to put on our sandals and to go out and bring God's love to the world.

The wanderings of Moses changed the course of human history. The story we heard this morning teaches us that God is so much more than we can imagine. Rather than trying to tell

God, from our limited perspective, how it should be, can we can “turn aside” like Moses to allow the breadth and the depth of God to be revealed? Can we have the curiosity of Moses to ask what is really happening in our city that is burning, in our families that are hurting, in our church that is struggling, in our neighborhoods that are divided? Can we find a home in God that is our true identity as people of love and justice and peace. My prayer this morning is that we may we be a bare-footed people who know that we stand on sacred ground and who are at home in a God who is at home with us. From that place of reverence and hospitality, may we be sent forth like Moses to change the world.