

"Holy Ground, Holy Calling"

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Exodus 3:1-15

Exodus 3 is the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. Moses is the pivotal figure of the Old Testament. After Moses nothing is the same. The Exodus from slavery in Egypt is the foundational, saving event of the Old Testament. What the Cross & Resurrection are to the New Testament, the Exodus is to the Old Testament. And it all starts here on Mount Horeb. Let's take a look.

Exodus 3:1-15

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.

A student in preaching class once asked the professor, *"How many points should a good sermon have?"* You know how a lot of sermons and talks have 3 points. Some have 4, 5 or 10 points. Some have just two. So the student wanted to know which format is best.

"How many points should a good sermon have?"

The wise professor answered, *"At least one."*

Well, today's sermon has just one point. It's this: *An encounter with God shows us not only who God is, but an encounter with God also shows us who we can be.* This is a great theme in the Bible.

Abraham has an encounter with God and he learns that he is to be the father of a great nation. His wife **Sarah** has a similar encounter. And though they both laugh at the thought at first, the prediction from God comes true.

Jacob, their grandson has an encounter with God, wrestles with God all through the night. He comes out forever limping, forever changed. He's even given a new name, "Israel." He learns that God will always walk with him and that God will do great things through him. He learns who he is to become.

Peter, James and John were fishermen, until they had an encounter with Christ, and they learn they will then fish for people. The encounter didn't teach them who Jesus was. It taught them who they were to be.

Zacchaeus & Matthew were both tax collectors and therefore outcasts in society, despised by their countrymen. But they too had an encounter with Christ and it made them want to be honest men, men who weren't outcasts, but instead men who experienced fellowship and community among the disciples – men of compassion and service. The encounter changed them. Somehow the encounter showed them who they could become.

A man named **Saul** was a fierce persecutor of the earliest Christians. Then one day God blinded him on the road to Damascus, a fitting act, since Saul was spiritually blind to what God was up to. Saul would finally have his eyes opened in more ways than one. And he learns that he's to be a key agent of God in bringing the Good News to the non-Jewish world. Saul even gets a new name - Paul, as in The Apostle Paul, and later on, Saint Paul. The encounter changed him and showed him a whole new way of life for him.

In the Bible when people encounter God they not only learn who God is, almost more importantly, they learn things about themselves – their calling, their purpose and the possibilities before them. This was the experience of Moses on Mount Horeb.

Many of you know the backstory for this event. When Moses was born in Egypt, Pharaoh was persecuting the Jews, so Moses' Mother put him in a basket in a river and he floated downstream to where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing. She plucked him out of the river. Moses was eventually adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, even though he's an Israelite. No one knows his true identity until one day as a grown man he sees an Israelite being beaten by an Egyptian. Moses has a fiery temper at this time, and he is so outraged at the beating that he kills the Egyptian. This gets back to Pharaoh and Moses' life is now in danger. So he flees to the wilderness and stays out there in the wilderness for 40 years. And he's not very successful there. His father-in-law has to

give him a job, tending his flock. So Moses' life is going nowhere. It was truly a wilderness experience. He's in a dead-end job with no real place to call home. But God has bigger plans for him. God's not done with him yet. God sees who Moses can become. And through this Burning Bush encounter with God Moses comes to see it, too.

The place of Holy Ground also becomes a place of Holy Calling.

"I have heard the cries of the people, Moses," says God.

"I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

Moses' encounter with God came with a calling, a purpose, a mission for Moses. I think that's how God works. I think that's the effect God has on people. When someone experiences God they want to become all that they can be.

Have you ever had that feeling? I've had that experience, not only in church, but also during concerts, plays and musicals. You know those moments in a play or musical where your heart is just ripped open wide and you experience something so wonderful, so inspiring, so beautiful that you say to yourself, *"I can do better than I've been doing! Would you look at that! I can be more!"*

In 1997 Jack Nicholson & Helen Hunt starred in a movie entitled, *"As Good As It Gets."* Jack Nicholson played a man named, Melvin Udall, a man with "issues," shall we say. Like a lot of Nicholson's characters Melvin is more than a little off center, unstable, and often pretty mean. But then he meets Carol Connelly, played by Helen Hunt. He is smitten with her beauty. And at one point he says to her, *"You make me want to be a better man."*

Now if an encounter with Helen Hunt can do that, how much more can an encounter with God! We have such an encounter with God when we come to the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Presence of Christ fills us. The Voice of God calls us to be Christ's disciples in the world. The Spirit of God within us confirms this call. When we encounter God our calling and our identity become so much clearer.

During the Protestant Reformation there was an important reformer named, Ulrich Zwingli. He did very well for himself, especially considering his name was "Ulrich Zwingli." (I'm making fun of myself here, since I've never been able to accurately pronounce his name) Zwingli once said this about communion - *Through receiving the body of Christ we become the body of Christ.* We encounter God through this sacrament and we are reminded of our calling to be the body of Christ to the world - to be the hands and feet of Christ to the world. An encounter with God shows us not only who God is, but an encounter with God also shows us who we can be. So let's encounter God now through the prayers of our hearts and through the sacred meal.

Amen.