

## Reflection 1: Exodus 3:1-6 -The Burning Bush

I chose particularly to Read the Revised Standard Version as last week I was doing a reflective Bible study in a group and noticed something for the first time in this reading and the wording in this particular translation.

'I will turn aside and see this great sight, when the Lord saw he had turned aside he called to Moses out of the bush .

A specific action made by Moses he could have just walked by, but it was when he made this action that God spoke, that when God saw this he spoke.

\*Moses

I *could* have walked by.

It was a strange sight to be sure...  
but I could have walked past –  
averted my eyes  
and focused on the sheep.  
*(fondly)* Silly animals!  
But a full time job...

A wife – a family – a job...  
I had no need to notice anything out of the ordinary –  
life was full –  
life was good –  
life was all I wanted it to be...  
and yet  
and yet I looked.

A bush – burning and yet not consumed by the flame.  
I was puzzled –  
intrigued –  
curious –  
all that –  
and yet more...

It was as if I was drawn –  
I was called  
I was pulled  
I was invited...

It was not my initiative but that of...  
that of something speaking to a yearning I did not yet know I had –  
that of something enfolding a desire so deep it was hidden from me –  
that of something –  
of someone  
speaking in tones that resonated  
touched chords in me that vibrated with the harmony of the heavens –  
calling the deepest within  
to the utterly beyond.

The bush was burning –  
all that was needed of me was to notice –  
to notice and not to walk by –  
to notice and allow this thing I had never seen before  
to touch my curiosity –  
to create an attraction that was easier to act on than to ignore.

And once attracted...  
ah, once attracted –  
then I knew this was not about a burning bush –  
this was not an interruption to a day going about my daily business –  
not an aside.

God had stepped into the ordinariness of a day  
and enticed me to step into the extraordinary.  
In the wideness of the wilderness  
God marked out a sanctuary –  
a holy ground  
onto which he invited me to stand:  
bare sole against bare sand  
so that my body should know in time  
my soul's encounter with the eternal.

God sanctifying human time and space –  
a bush – burning...  
on such a small thing did the changing of history depend.  
A small thing  
a strange thing –  
and I could have walked by.  
But I did not –  
I took off my shoes and took the risk of standing on that holy ground – a mortal man,  
I dared to speak with the immortal and omnipotent God of my ancestors –  
and my God transformed me.

History knows my name because God called it first.  
An encounter – not in palace or temple –  
not between God and the great and the good –  
but an encounter next to a bush  
between God and me – a man slow in speech –  
unaware of my destiny...

An encounter such as can happen in this place –  
where God enters the ordinary  
to encounter his people –

Moses' burning bush is not just a magnificent wonder. It's not just God's glory spilling over into the world; though it is that, it is much more. It is God calling Moses, getting his attention to draw him into something more. "I have seen my people's slavery in Egypt, and I experience their suffering," God says. "I am going to deliver them." And then the kicker: "I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt." "Who am I to do that?" Moses asks. But God says "I

will be with you,” and wins him over. Moses takes the job and never looks back for the rest of his life.

That’s what a burning bush is about: not just an awe-inspiring encounter, but a call, God’s “invitation” that borders on a command to take a job, to join with God in God’s work of creating, liberating and accompanying us. God does that a lot. Think of Abraham, Samuel, Jonah, Isaiah, Mary, Peter, Paul.

Most of us are like Moses, minding our own business, tending our sheep. Like Moses we have our terrible secrets and our hidden hopes, but we mostly suppress them, and go about our daily work without an ear for the Infinite calling to us.

Until we can’t ignore it. God breaks into our lives with something—maybe glorious, maybe awful, maybe mysterious, but certainly something we can’t ignore—and stirs something deep in our hearts that calls us to join with God in something huge and important. Our own part may be small; it may be that God will do all the miracles and we just stand there—but we do have to stand in the right place. Something tugs at us, some bush flames up, some word speaks in our deep silence, and we know: God calls us to something more.

Often our fear holds us back. Like Moses we feel inadequate. We’re afraid God is going to get us in over our heads. But the good news is the flame of the burning bush is not some lovely supernatural wonder but the presence of God, the One who says “I Will Be With You.” It’s that presence that changes everything. In fact, that presence is our only hope.

What’s your burning bush? What calls to you, gives you purpose? Take off your shoes. Listen to the voice. You can try to ignore the flame, but it will not go out, and the bush will not be consumed. You might as well listen. What is God doing in the world, or what does God need to be doing, that you care most about? What great vision or little detail do you see that tugs at your heart? What calls to you?

\*“Moses I could have walked by...” © <http://wellsprings.org.uk/> used with permission

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## **Reflection 2 Matthew 16: 21 -28**

Imagine telling one of your friends they are a stumbling block or an obstacle. That is what Jesus did to Peter. Jesus was not really being rude to Peter! Jesus knew what he was going to face his own death on a cross. So when Peter said it won’t happen, it was not really helpful! Peter had just spoken as a friend would, as a friend horrified that Jesus would think of being killed.

But Jesus’ response was, you must forget about yourselves take up your cross and follow me. To follow Jesus means to forgetting about ourselves and putting God First. But what does that really mean?

One of the consequences of this difficult time has been the ways in which people from all walks of life have paused for thought and have reset their priorities in life. Whether through rethinking their approach to creation and the environment, reflecting on work life balance, engaging with the core values which underpin behaviour, or rediscovering faith in God. When we face a time of disruption such as the one we have just known we find opportunity to think again, to reframe what we are doing and to reconnect with what actually matters and to remember what it is that life is all about. In our Gospel reading this week we hear how Jesus responds to those who seek to defend him from the suffering which is to come. His rebuke is firm and clear – reminding his

disciples to set their minds and priorities on the things of God, and not be motivated by human things. What is clear as the story develops, is that the life of the Christian disciple is characterised by generosity, relationship and self-sacrifice, not by greed, protection and self-interest. These realities are even more pressing at the present time as we move into a time when the economic stability, we have known, is likely to suffer considerable disruption and we will be challenged to look closely together at how we respond to need and opportunity.

What Jesus describes in this interaction are the tools for the building of a loving and supportive community. The kind of selfless generosity which marked out the life of the early church and has been a foundation for all those who have sought to make the Gospel known through generations. The stories of the saints of the Church are stories which reflect such an approach.

In the passage from the letter to the Romans, which forms our epistle reading, St Paul reminds the early Church of how the new community, rooted in generous love, is to be shaped. He describes a series of interactions which are life giving and which demonstrate an outpouring of love. Paul helps us to understand this

First of all, forgetting about ourselves and putting God affects the way we behave towards others rather like in the beatitudes turning the world upside down.

**Love** each other and not just those close to us, our friends and people we like but our enemies too. We are not just to treat them well but pray for them and leave them in God's hands – we are not to think bad thoughts about them. And we are to have **no revenge**. Taking up our cross and following was not an easy task and perhaps a challenge!

**Welcome strangers**, not just new people who come into our church workplace or school but perhaps others who often get overlooked. Jesus loved the outcast and people that others did not.

Look at how others are **feeling**, when others are happy be happy with them when they are sad be sad. We are to live at **peace** with everyone.

Such that the community is built and developed, but also in a way which is deeply missional and leads on to Church growth.

Today, we are an example of that! In these very difficult and uncertain times it is clear that as Christian communities we have been deeply challenged and reminded again of what it is that binds us together. We have seen, and shared, generous and sacrificial love, we have seen great numbers turn to the Church (especially digitally) to make some sense of the current situation. Now as we return to our buildings and gently gather together our communities, we are exploring what the 'New Normal' might look like. There is a fresh opportunity to think about how generous self-giving love might help us to order our priorities. How, following the example of Jesus, and listening to the experience of the emerging early Church, we can look together to build on our past experience, but develop our life together in a way which brings hope to us, and hope to all those we seek to encounter.