

Sermon and Readings 14th Sunday After Pentecost 30th August 2026

Exodus 3.1–15

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴ 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.' ⁵ Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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, ⁸ 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. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹² 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.' ¹³ 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?' ¹⁴ 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." ' ¹⁵ 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 for ever, and this my title for all generations.

Psalm 105.1–6, 105.23–26

- ¹ O give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name:
tell among the peoples what things he has done.
- ² Sing to him, O sing praises:
and be telling of all his marvellous works.

- ³ Exult in his holy name:
and let those that seek the Lord be joyful in heart.
- ⁴ Seek the Lord and his strength:
O seek his face continually.
- ⁵ Call to mind what wonders he has done:
his marvellous acts, and the judgements of his mouth,
- ⁶ O seed of Abraham his servant:
O children of Jacob his chosen one.
- ²³ Then Israel came into Egypt:
and Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham.
- ²⁴ There the Lord made his people fruitful:
too numerous for their enemies,
- ²⁵ Whose hearts he turned to hate his people:
and to deal deceitfully with his servants.
- ²⁶ Then he sent Moses his servant:
And Aaron whom he had chosen.

Romans 12.9–21

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰ No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16.21–28

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter

took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷ 'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

Sermon

In her poem/novel "Aurora Leigh," Browning writes: "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God." Thus, here's what I ponder.

What if burning bushes are a dime a dozen? Maybe the burning bush is not unique to Moses. The rabbis of old say that others passed by the bush while it was burning but only Moses turned aside.

What if the miracle of the burning bush isn't that it wasn't destroyed by the fire, but that Moses turned aside? Perhaps turning aside to see this thing is the real miracle of this story.

What if the burning bush is a part of each of our lives? Perhaps the only question is whether we will turn aside.

What if every burning bush is a call asking for and awaiting a response from us? Perhaps the caller of this call, God, not only wants but needs a response from Moses and from you and me.

You probably know where I am headed with this. I think there are burning bushes in each of our lives, throughout our lives. The question is not whether there is a burning bush in our life but whether we will turn aside and respond to the call being made upon us.

Burning bushes are those circumstances or events that interrupt life and grab our attention. They are not part of our plans. They take us by surprise. They stop us in our tracks and cause us to turn aside. We take a second look.

At times we are brought up short, speechless, at a loss for words. Burning bushes come to us as an overflow and an excess, sometimes in positive and welcome ways and other times not.

Irrespective of how it comes to us the burning bush smashes the horizon of our expectation. Here's what I mean by that. We all live within a horizon of expectation. It's that part of life that can be somewhat planned and calculated on. It holds a future that is mostly anticipated. We mostly know what tomorrow will bring. Our expectations will likely be met. But we don't know what lies beyond or is coming toward our horizon. Within our horizon life is reasonably stable, which means it is also reasonably unstable. There is risk and potential for instability, for something to shatter the horizon of our expectation, something that we could not see coming. Moses never thought it possible for a bush to be on fire but not be burned up. He never expected or planned on being the one to bring God's people out of Egypt. Those were beyond his horizon of expectation.

In each of our lives there are experiences that fragment our horizon of expectation. They are events, conversations and words, happenings that were unplanned, unexpected, unforeseeable, and they always ask something of us, a response. They are those times that leave us sobbing and asking, "Why?" They are those experiences when the excess is just too great and we have no words, only tears of joy. They are those times when we can't wait to share with someone what has happened and we say, "Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined or predicted that this would be my life." They are those times when we shake our head in disbelief and say, "No, that's not possible; it can't be." And sometimes we throw up our hands and say, "God only knows." When and how has any of this happened in your life? What have been the burning bushes for you?

This does not mean, however, that God caused those things to happen. It means that God calls in every place and situation. God calls with the promise of life, more life, new life. And each calling awaits a response.

The burning bush doesn't reveal God to be a Supreme Being, a Superhero, or the Big Guy in the Sky. It reveals God to be more like a call, a firmness, an asking. In burning bush experiences God calls more than God does or accomplishes. The doing and accomplishing are for us.

God says to Moses (Exodus 3:1-15), "I have observed the misery of my people." "I have heard their cry." "I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians." Now it sounds like we're getting somewhere. God is coming to rescue God's people. But listen to what God next says to Moses. "So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of the land of Egypt."

"I have come down to deliver them," God says. "So come, I will send you," God says to Moses.

God is going to deliver God's people by sending Moses. Moses is to give presence to God's call for deliverance. Moses is to make real and enact God's desire for the people. What if that's how God is working in our lives too? You remember I told you that the rabbis say others passed by the burning bush but did not turn aside? What if they too were to have given existence to God's call, God's insistence, that the Israelites be freed from Egypt? I wonder when you and I have not turned aside. When have we failed or refused to respond to the call on our lives?

The burning bush story is one of call and response. Something is being called for in the name of God. And I can't help but believe that call and response is also the story of our lives. Something is being asked of us in the name of God.

The burning bush experience does not happen apart from or in spite of everyday life but in the midst of life, in the keeping of our flocks. That's what Moses was doing when this happened. He was keeping the flock of his father-in-law. He was doing the mundane routine things of his life, the same things he did the day before, the week before, and the month before. Burning bushes show up as we keep our flocks of routine and everyday life; marriage, parenting, work, friendships, church, reading the news, household chores.

In what ways is the horizon of your expectation being fragmented today? What is interrupting, disrupting, erupting, in your life today and asking for a response? What is being called for? How will you respond?

This is where I often get stuck; on the response. What's the right response? I want to get it right, don't you? But what if there isn't one right answer? What if we can't know for sure? What if the "right" response is whatever brings forth life, more life, new life? And what if that looks different in each of our lives?

Maybe life is the only measure, and the measure of life is life without measure. And Moses? How does Moses know if he'll get it right? He doesn't. He doesn't know any more than we do. There will, however, be a sign. The sign, God says, will come after the people have been delivered, not before. It's as if God is saying you'll look back on all this and see I was there all along. And isn't that a pretty precise description of life? We live life forward, uncertain, and not knowing, but we only begin to understand and make sense of it in retrospect.

What if there are no guarantees and the best, the most, we can do is to respond hoping against hope, loving and being faithful in our way forward? What if that's how we tackled every burning bush in our life? And what if we saw "every common bush afire with God?" Amen.