

HOLY GROUND

Exodus 3:1-15

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Moses. Pssh. What a mess he made of his life up to this point. Rescued as a baby from death, grew up in privilege as an adopted son of Pharaoh...and he went and screwed it up by, in a fit of anger, killing someone. Afraid because he thought he might be found out, he ran away from home, and didn't stop running 'til he had gone nearly 200 miles across the Sinai peninsula and was headed into the larger desert of the Arabian peninsula.

He settled in an area known as *Midean*, married, had a son, become a shepherd to his father-in-law's flocks. And it was settling. Not in the way you and I settle into a comfortable chair. No, this is settle like your car dying and you can't afford a new one so you have to settle for a car that's not even as good as the one that died.

We know Moses is miserable because he named his son *Gershom*, which is a Hebrew word play on being an alien in an alien land, which is how he describes himself in the 2nd chapter of Exodus. "I have no home, nobody loves me, life is over."

Here in chapter three, Moses takes the flock out to graze; takes them deep into the desert. He comes to a place known as *Horebah*. In Hebrew, it literally means a place of emptiness, dry ground or a wasteland. Biblical archeologists debate WHERE in the Sinai desert *Horebah* might be, and point to this mountain or that mountain. I suggest that the very specific location that Scripture, and God, is concerned with is actually Moses' heart and soul, that the *Horebah*, the dry ground, the wasteland, was Moses himself.

[Exodus 3:1-15]

The writer of Exodus tells us in the midst of the wasteland in the desert is the mountain of God. One would expect if God was going to appear, it would be in a great display from the top of this mountain, right? Strangely, God chooses not the large, dramatic mountain, but a small, burning bush. And not even a bush right in the middle of Moses' path, but one in which he has to turn aside and "go over" to see it.

Curiosity becomes a calling as God calls out to Moses, "Take off your sandals: you are on holy ground." Holy ground! To be in the very presence of God, the God of Moses' ancestors, the God who created all of reality, The God! We'll leave for another time considering *why* we are supposed to take our shoes off when we stand on holy ground, for this morning let's ask what it means to be in the presence of God, to be on holy ground.

Simply put: to be in the presence of God is to be moved to the depths of your soul and it fundamentally changes your life. It did for Moses. He had left Egypt in fear and shame,

never to return. Having stood in the presence of God he returned—returned not only to Egypt, but to Pharaoh's house. And he did not just return, but returned to publicly claim his Jewish heritage, and to proclaim that God had sent him to free the Israelites...knowing God would watch over him.

Why don't we have experiences like Moses had? Where are burning bushes like that these days? Where's holy ground in the 21st century? For many, if not most of us, we see the sanctuary or the church building as a whole as holy ground...and what does it mean, then, that we are not there while we are worshipping and haven't been there in far too long? Does it mean we are not close to God, that we cannot hear God because we are not in THAT place?

I want to assure you: you are close to God no matter where you are. You may remember in the story of Jesus' crucifixion we're told the curtain of the Temple was torn in two. This was the curtain between the Holy of Holies—the room at the very center of the Temple where the very presence of God dwelt—and the rest of the world. The destruction of that curtain demonstrated there was no longer a barrier between the world and God. Through Christ's death and resurrection we are no longer separated, but are freely able to be in the presence of God.

There are no more burning bushes OUT THERE. We do not have to be in a special location at a specific time to find holy ground. The fire now burns within us. God lives within us. We are on holy ground...because we ARE holy ground. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we are holy ground.

What does it mean, then, to BE holy ground? What does that look like for us? Look at what being on holy ground did to Moses: he was called to return to the place he'd fled, return and claim the truth of who he was, empowered for God to do great things with and through him. The man who'd killed another person and ran away came back to bring life to people being oppressed.

To be holy ground is to be a bringer of life, a bringer of hope, a bringer of consolation. The apostle Paul gives us a powerful image of what it means to live as holy ground: to hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good, to share with those who are in need, to bless others, to be modest and humble with others.

In the face of the evils of our time, we have we have the power to overcome evil with good. In the face of the hopelessness so many feel during the pandemic, we have the power to bring hope. In the face of entrenched racism in our society, we have the power to call out that sin and change our society for the better. In the face of those who abuse their power and authority we have the power to stand firm in the fight for justice for ALL people. In the face of greed, we have the power to

This is what it is like to live on holy ground, to be holy ground.