

September 11, 2022 God Reveals His Presence Exodus 3:1-15

It started off as just another day. And that is the first point to be made about signs and wonders that reveal God's presence. On the surface of things, it is just another day. It may be sunny; it may be raining. In Moses world it was a work day. He was acting as shepherd to the flocks of his father-in-law, which meant he had to lead them to forage and water. So he sets out and leads the flock to the far side of the desert, and there is little remarkable about that. Most of Israel is rock and sand. Rock and sand defines the wilderness. Agriculture is based on irrigation in modern times. There are no great forests that would compare with much of our home and native land.

But experience has taught Moses, that there are places near to Mount Horeb where the flocks would find grass to eat. It is a normal, predictable circumstance. And that is the reason from the human standpoint that Moses has taken the flocks there. And of course, Horeb is known as the mountain of God. Jethro, Moses father-in-law is the priest of Midian. And it is there, as the sheep are grazing, as Moses is watching over them, guarding them, that the sign appears. Moses sees something, something that invites curiosity. A tree totally engaged in fire. The thing that invites curiosity and draws attention is this: the tree is obviously ablaze, and yet it is not consumed. And the fire does not spread. I used the word tree. The word in the text is bush. It is not a great pine, or fir tree. It is more like what we call brush. Something small. Something

ordinary in this desert land. It inspires curiosity. Moses decides to investigate.

That is one of the purposes of signs and wonders in the Biblical accounts. They engage us. They create curiosity. They focus our attention. In Moses case, what he can see at a distance causes him to want to take a closer look. He is alert. There is something happening here that does not fit with ordinary, just another day, circumstances. He chooses to investigate. And investigation means taking a closer look and trying to understand what is happening. In terms of faith, God gets Moses attention. In terms of faith, the Lord gets our attention when signs and wonders occur.

As I look back over 54 years of ministry, and closer to 60 years of active belief, I have always been impressed that The Presbyterian Church In Canada chose as its logo the burning bush, with the Latin phrase that translates..."burning but not consumed." It was a disappointment to John Mercer when we were seeking to obtain new pulpit falls, that no one was manufacturing a pulpit fall with a depiction of the burning bush. Because he understood it is the sign that excites curiosity, and thereby leads to the call of God.

So Moses sees the sign and is drawn closer to it, striving to understand what is really happening. And then God speaks to Moses from within this bush engulfed in flame. In fact God calls him by name. I sought the assistance of the minister serving my chosen home church and I shared with him that God

had called me to ministry. He asked me why I felt that was the case. I said, "God spoke to me." He said that he was not convinced that happens. I reread Exodus 3 and concluded I was not crazy. And here we are 54 years later. I am here. And I have been everywhere I have served, because I heard that voice. Hearing that voice would cause Moses to return to Egypt, and lead the slaves population to freedom and the promised land.

In the sign that is given, God gets our attention. When HE has our attention, HE speaks to us, calls to us, and we discover our destiny.

The sign that invites curiosity, leads to hearing the voice in which our lives are claimed. And God makes a claim of HIS own. The claim God makes to Moses is this: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Moses hides his face because he is indeed afraid to look upon the God who is. For Moses this is a life changing moment. He has been struggling with the issues of identity ever since he fled Egypt. He has struggled to survive and at the same time wished he were not. He struggles with the fact that he is a Hebrew. He struggles with the fact that he has been a prince of Egypt. And now before this burning bush, he discovers he is God's servant...whatever that may mean, whatever that will mean he must do.

That sounds like it is easy for Moses. It was not. He has to process this revelation. The task to which he is being called. The fact that the burning bush is but a sign and God

speaks to him and gives him a life long mission to serve God's chosen people. He has questions. It is one thing for him to accept that he has had this encounter with the living God, but how will he convince others. How will he convince the Pharaoh of Egypt. Perhaps an even greater challenge, How will he convince the slave population to follow him to freedom. To roll the dice and take the risk. Some of them will recognize him as an Egyptian.

As he processes this revelation, he boils the issue down to a single question. They will ask me what is the name of this God who has sent you to us? What will I say? And the answer is "I am who I am." In modern English, the God who is. The God who exists. The God who is real and is alive. The God who made everything that has been made. The God who saves people who need to be saved. The God sets people free and gives them new life.

But here is my point. Moses struggles with all of this. It does not come easy. He argues with God because he is a man with a mind and experience that teaches him this is not going to be easy. Were it easy anyone could do it. The fact is Moses is going to need the presence of God all the way. All the way to Egypt. All the way in Egypt. He will need God's presence to convince the people to follow him. He will need God's presence to convince the Pharaoh to let the people leave...to let Moses live. Moses knows when he walks into the palace in Egypt he will be putting his own life on the line. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is. Indeed it is.

In the end Moses submits to the will of God. And that too is a result of the sign of this marvelous bush that burns and yet is not consumed. When God reveals HIS presence, things change. The impossible becomes possible. Miracles can indeed occur. We witness the grace of God in trying circumstances. We adore God and we stand in awe before HIM. It is not easy. And it does require of us that we believe. That we believe even as people we love and trust mock us for believing. But this is the truth. Miracles happen, when God reveals HIS presence.

Let us pray;

Lord we thank you for ability to be here together, and hearing YOUR word proclaimed. We thank you for the fellowship in which you have given us a home, and in which you have encouraged us, led us, and kept us. Help us as we continue to praise YOUR holy name, read YOUR holy word, sing YOUR praises, and experience your forgiveness. Open doors that we may serve YOU in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen