

## Sunday 30th August - 2020 Readings and Sermon

### 1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Exodus 1 v1-15

#### *Moses and the Burning Bush*

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending 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?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When

you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’”

### **Gospel Reading: Matthew 16 v21-end**

#### *Jesus Predicts His Death*

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person

according to what they have done. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

### Sermon by Rev'd Kelvin Woolmer



There are many occasions when we listen to the Bible that we think to ourselves “well I’ve heard that before.” We hear Bible passages so often that perhaps we get too familiar with them

and we end up kinda ‘zoning out’ and we can actually be forgiven for just switching off.

Well, the story of Moses and the burning bush seems to be one of those readings where people just think we’ve heard it all before.



*Exodus 3 v1-15* is just such a passage. Here we find the famous burning bush and Moses standing before it. It’s even been made famous by Charlton Heston; he starred in that 1950’s version directed by Cecil B. DeMille. And I think for years everyone must have thought that Moses looked like Charlton

Heston because I can remember people suddenly ‘saw’ Moses had all this wavy hair and massive beard.

Trouble is, we watch that sort of thing and we get caught in a stereotype and without realising it we think that’s how it must have been. However as you might expect, the film got it wrong.

If we really look with fresh eyes at *Exodus 3 v1-15* suggests that we are in a **bit** of a pantomime.

Alright let's be honest, talking and burning bushes are pretty unusual. I mean can you think of another example?

But Moses, when confronted by this amazing; and let's be honest, unusual and once in a lifetime event he doesn't throw himself to the ground or run away or stand still in scared and terrified amazement. But he does end up engaging in a full-on conversation with it.

The scene at the bush is another event in Moses' life. Remember he has done a runner from the anger of Pharaoh. Why was he angry? Well if you remember Moses had killed one of the Egyptian slave overseers who had been beating one of the Israelite (*Exodus 2 v14-15*)

Let's go back in time a bit: before the meeting of God in the burning bush. Moses runs for his life to Midian, a tiny tribal community in the southern deserts on the east side of the Dead Sea.



There he meets a nice girl, named Zipporah. They get married.

Then they quickly start a family and from being a murderer on the run, he settles down and starts working for his father-in-law, Jethro, and becomes a rather good sheep herder.



So years pass, and we now find ourselves with Moses as he pastures his flock '*beyond the wilderness*'; and came to Horeb - the Mountain of God. Which is also called Mount Sinai in another tradition of the story.

Anyway, here he is at the Mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush (v2) He sees the burning bush, sees that it's one fire, but also sees that it isn't actually being burnt up - a bush on fire but not burning up. And if that were not enough, the bush starts talking!

God sees he's gone over to have a look, so the angel of the Lord is charged by God to speak. "Moses, Moses," says the bush, and Moses responds "Here I am."

Now the bush goes on to demand proper deference and respect to God insisting that Moses take off his sandals, "because where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3 v5) Then the bush reveals itself as nothing other than the receptacle of God, and goes on to give it's credentials by telling Moses he is standing before the "God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses, being nobody's fool 'hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God' (Exodus 3 v6) So far, so good!

God is at work and having chosen Moses from birth to be part of HIS plan, now here he is setting Moses up to actually get out and do Gods will.



God says: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; and 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."

There is a small problem that there are already six other nations living in the land of milk and honey but that's a problem for another day; for now, God wants Moses to do the work He has called him for.

You'd think that when God says that the Egyptians are oppressing the Israelites that Moses would actually understand he had now been called to help 'set these people free.' But now instead of being like the two midwives that had saved his life by not killing him at birth (remember last week - Shiproah and Paugh?), or active like his own sister and mother who had put their necks on the line to keep him safe for the first three months of his life before putting him in that basket in the water by the bulrushes. Let's not forget these were all brave women who didn't question their part in God's plan; no, but here's Moses having a debate with God and actually making every excuse he can to get out of his job.

Moses is on his knees before God who is in this phenomenal miracle of the burning bush, arguing with God.



God says he is sending Moses to save the Israelites, and Moses is arguing.

Immediately Moses says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3 v11) "After all, God, I am a fugitive from Egyptian justice, and besides, I have a wife and child and a steady job."

God, understanding that Moses is only a man, calmly responds, "I will be with you; and this will 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" (Exodus 3 v12)

If God had thought that His mere presence was going to make Moses go "Wow, so you really, really do exist - How wonderful that you have chosen me Lord, of course I'll do anything you ask - I'm only to honoured to have been chosen." Then God was surely taken aback

by the mere human now giving him umpteen reasons why he can't go and do anything for the God who had saved his life all those years before.

Moses says "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?" - First, who am I? and now who are you?

God was probably wondering at this stage if He should perhaps have saved Moses' sister for the job, after all we have no record of the women putting up any arguments to do God's will.



The voice from the burning bush says, "I am who I am". I would think God is probably getting a bit miffed and now giving Moses the 'I'm in charge' voice.

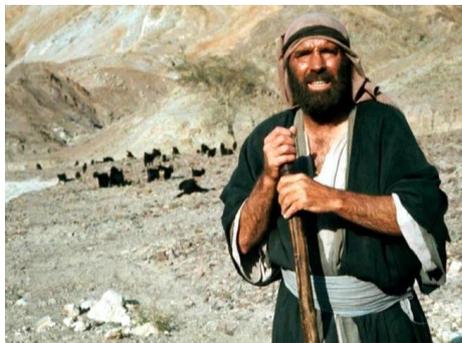
"Tell them, 'I am the one who sent you'" - that will convince them says God.

"You must be joking" thinks Moses; "They will not believe me" he whines in *Exodus 4 v1*. So God offers some miracles that Moses can perform on behalf of God to convince them - slithering serpent rods, cured leprous hands, and water into blood.

Moses begins to realise that God isn't letting him off. So he has another whinge: "God I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (*Exodus 4 v10*) In other words, "I am a poor speaker and I have not gotten any better during this dialogue with your blazing bush either." Given what we hear from Moses, both before this scene and certainly after, this claim is

absolute load of porky pies - liar liar pants on fire Moses! **NOT** an eloquent speaker - come off it?! You're standing here on God's mountain having a total debate with God about what you will and won't do.

There is nothing wrong with Moses' tongue; despite the long tirade that he had some sort of speech impediment. And this obvious porky-pie lie makes God distinctly annoyed! God reminds Moses of just who offers speech and word to humans in any case and in effect bids Moses to shut up (*Exodus 4 v11-12*)



But Moses is still not happy and will have none of it. He comes up with the classic lazy man answer: "God, send someone else" (*Exodus 4 v13*) It is then that God offers Moses his brother Aaron; a mighty orator, to speak on Moses' behalf. God

has made the divine choice of servant - and Moses is that choice despite his foolish and lying excuses. But what He's had to do now is send two men to do the job that one woman could probably have done on her own!



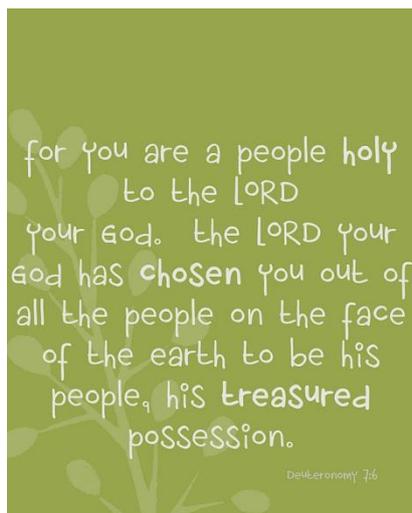
So this is where we sometimes get confused by the Bible and the film; and thinking we know all the stories because we've heard them so often. Consider this: Moses is the hero, but God has sent Aaron

with him to do the speaking. God is sending a message to all of us here, I think??

We are all called but few of us actually get pulled out the line and get chosen, but we all have a job to do for God. Thing is: as humans we are all scared to death to actually do what God wants us to do, **BUT**

(and here's the example) He will send someone with us to hold our hand. Moses got Aaron, we get Jesus, and we get the Holy Spirit as a bonus. Now come on; with those odds why aren't we out there shouting to the world how God is great and loves us?!

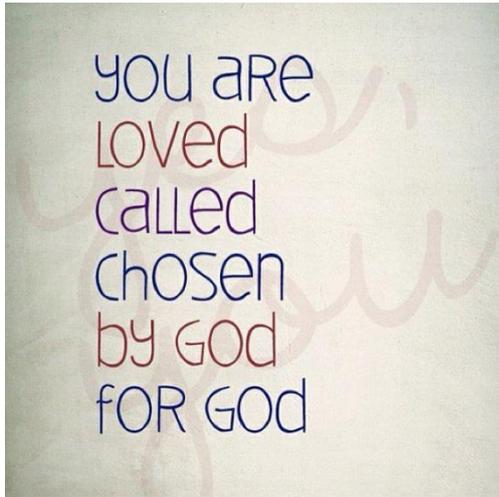
Problem is; and I keep saying it, we are only human. This meeting between God and human at the burning bush isn't actually that unique - it sets the pattern for all future divine calls. From Gideon to Isaiah; to Jeremiah to Ezekiel. I suppose even for myself when God called me to be his servant in the Church, my immediate reaction was definitely NOT "Oh how wonderful! God has called me to be his servant and save people's lives.' Nope, my immediate reaction was "Not bloody likely!"



God's call to service is regularly met with reluctance and almost always with a lack of enthusiasm. And are we surprised? God is forever calling people to say things that most people have no desire to hear. And when we look through the Bible, prophets have a way of dying at the hands of those they have been called to speak to. So **no**; Moses is not the heroic image of Charlton

Heston! He is in fact real and he is fact human. He is in fact, you and me - less than eager to speak the truth and more than happy to leave the job to someone else.

But sometimes, you know, the job God sets us, it is really ours and only ours, and we, and only we, must be the agents of God. We just need to remember that God doesn't leave us to do it alone.



So my friends: be filled with the Holy Spirit; know that Jesus is with you, and go tell people our God is a loving God. Change their lives as He changed yours. Amen