

Sermon for Sunday – September 3, 2017
 McClure
 Exodus 3:1-15 – God and the Burning Bush

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer.

Do you remember the movie “The ten commandments”? Do you remember that Charlton Heston played Moses? Do you remember the scene where Moses meets God in the burning bush? Charlton Heston looking all shepherdly – notices a burning bush - and then God in a lovely deep male old English voice speaks using the King James version of the bible – tells Moses to take off his sandals. The Moses played by Charlton Heston is all reverent and humble and timid.

Well friends I think Hollywood got it all wrong. You see - this passage isn't about a timid exile's reverent first meeting with the God of his ancestors. Rather, this story is about a no-holds-barred encounter between a wily, even conniving outlaw and a God who's more than up to the challenge of transforming him into an instrument of salvation.

You remember our Bible Moses – he is the one, who as a baby was put in a basket by his mother and sent him down the river into the hands of a princess. It is Mose's sister who tricks the princess into hiring Moses Mom as a nurse maid for the baby. Then Moses is raised in the pharaoh's palace with all its privilege and luxury. He then kills a man and packs his bags and runs away to hide. It is Moses who marries a woman his mother would not approve of and who hunkers down hoping the authorities won't find him. It is Moses who is enjoying a rather comfortable life – though its not a palace – he has a family and a steady job working for his father-in-law.

The Bible tells us that one day as Moses is going about his work he comes across a bush that is engulfed in flame but not consumed.

The drama of this scene peaks when Moses asks what seems an innocuous question. Up to this point, it's been pretty much your standard encounter with a deity: spectacle (burning bush), booming address ("Moses, Moses..."), appropriate show of humility (shedding the sandals), followed by a huge promise by deity ("I will deliver my people from bondage"), self-deprecating hesitation on the part of the chosen one ("I can't do this"), and divine reassurance ("yes you can").

And then it comes. "Suppose I go to the Israelites and tell them all this great news and they're a tad skeptical, you know, to the point of asking just who this God is who sent me. What shall I tell them?"/ Such an innocent, understandable, even reasonable question, don't you think? Except that it's not. It's a total power play; subtle, even sly, to be sure, but a power play none the less. Everything at this point - in this time in history - hinges on names and, particularly, the power of names to reveal the character of a person. Remember Jacob, the heel -- *literally* -- who received his name because he was grabbing his brother's heel as they came out of the womb and never stopped grabbing for all that he could the rest of his life, until he wrestled this same God to a draw and was given the new, life-transforming name of Israel.

That's what's going on here. Moses isn't asking for a calling card, he's trying to cleverly get the name out of this divine being because to know its name is to have a certain power over it. Which is what makes God's answer so perfect: "I AM WHO I AM!" How do you like them apples, Moses?!

I love God's answer because through it God is saying, in a sense, "Don't box me in, Moses!" Significantly, the divine name, Yahweh, has a future intent to it as well, which makes it even more elusively, "I will be who I will be." Which means, I think, that what God is actually saying is that you can't really know who God is unless you're willing to sign on for God's mission in the world.// Which is what Moses ultimately does, going to Egypt, confronting Pharaoh, leading his people out of Egypt, taking them through the parted waters and into the wilderness. //And it's there, on the other side of things, Moses doesn't need to ask for God's name anymore, as he learned it first hand, through his own experience, and so he is ready to sing of what he has discovered.

We hear Moses song in Exodus 15 - 'I will sing to the LORD for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Ex. 15:1-2).

Moses has learned who God is, you see, only by following God on the path God set for him and thereby learning first hand the nature, purpose, and truth of this God. And the thing is, this doesn't stop -- or even begin -- with Moses. It was true of his ancestors -- Abraham taking off for a new land in his old age; Jacob fleeing God in every which way only to be called by God to sire a nation. And it will be true of his descendants, as well, from Old Testament prophet and priest to New Testament disciple. To tell you the truth, I suspect that this is the way it always is, even today. To know God, you have to go with God. Faith is a full contact, participation sport. You just can't sit back and expect to really know God, you have to get up off the couch and get in the game, take a risk, try something marvelous, reach for something you thought unachievable, step out onto the winding road the end of which you can't see from your doorstep.

Quite frankly it might be easier not to want to get to know God better -- but who can resist looking at a burning bush that is not consumed. You know you are going to look -- you have too.

So to what task is God calling you? Where is God calling you to go? What path have you been set upon. It doesn't have to be spectacular but I guarantee it is important.

We might have some trouble figuring out what it God is asking of us because the truth is most of us don't see ourselves as the stuff of which faith-heroes are made. But that's probably because we haven't been reading our Bibles very carefully. After all, few of the characters God employs -- including Moses (remember he was a criminal hiding from the law) -- are the stuff of heroes. And yet God uses these frail, fallible, and oh so ordinary people, over and over again, to do extraordinary things.

Like tell the truth, to set captives free, to show the way to the lost, to heal what is broken, to love with a fierce and a tender love. These are but a few things perhaps that God is call you to do. But only you can know, only you can answer.

And like I said: Quite frankly it might be easier not to want to get to know God better – but who can resist looking at a burning bush that is not consumed. You know you are going to look – you have too.

Exodus 3:1-15

³Moses 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. ²There 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. ³Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴When 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.” ⁵Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶He 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.

⁷Then 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, ⁸and 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. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹²He 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.” ¹³But 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?” ¹⁴God 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.’” ¹⁵God 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 forever, and this my title for all generations.