

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
14th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, August 30 2026
Scripture: Exodus 3: 1-12
Sermon: But God....The Burning Bush

Many of you have probably seen the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" but today we are going to look at Moses and his "Close Encounters of the Divine Kind". Moses wasn't ready to do what God was calling him to do, "But God"...knew that Moses was ready and that he was the one to lead the people.

When we encounter the Lord we might say we are surprised by the Living God. When we have a brush with the Almighty, when we come face-to-face with the Divine, we experience God. If we believe in a personal God then we must expect personal encounters with Him. If we believe Christianity is primarily a relationship, rather than merely a religion, then we must welcome encounters with our God.

A life without personal experiences would be less than half a life, would you agree? So a Christian life without personal experiences of God, would be half a Christian life. A Christian life without experiences would be a very boring Christian life, just as a human life without experiences would be boring. Christianity is not boring, it's not meant to be boring, God never designed it to be so. You see, our existence as Christians is that we should know God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a relationship with the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One Christian writer put it like this: 'There is nothing to replace personal encounter. Everyone must have their own. Just as authority comes in the commission, so power comes in the encounter'. So the authority comes to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, but the power comes through encounter with God.

At the very end of the book of Deuteronomy, it says of Moses in summary: 'But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face'. That's the relationship Moses had with God! I think it really started here at the burning bush.

Here God picks a mountain in the wilderness as a place to reveal His plan to save Israel from slavery. God meets with Moses away from the hustle and bustle of the crowds to reveal His will for Israel and an also curious detail about himself. In Moses' day and age, you might have expected a 'god' to show up in a Temple. But there is no sign that this is a 'holy place' except for a curiosity that draws Moses near to observe the bush. The curiosity is a bush that burns and yet it is not consumed.

This would not be the last time that God appeared to shepherds in a wilderness with a message. It would not be the last time that God chose an ordinary place to call someone to do something extraordinary for God and his people. God who has "seen the affliction" of His people and has "heard their cry". He is not a God who remains distant and uninterested in the lives of His people. He knows "their sufferings" intimately. His only response is to come and "deliver" them. God's promise to be with them is not just a promise for this moment though, it is a promise for all time. Moses who has drawn near in curiosity and is hoping to be able to satisfy the people's curiosity about God by asking for His name. God gives a name which is a curiosity in and of itself. In verse 14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God who is a deliverer because He is the great "I Am" causes the bush to burn to reveal a detail about God that does not consume us in wrath but lights the way to discover the great "I Am" in the person of Jesus Christ.

Under a burning Bethlehem star God reveals salvation to shepherds. He reveals a deliverer from slavery to sin in the Immanuel (Matt 1:23) which is the sign that God is with us. But even this babe born in Bethlehem is a curiosity that we must follow to see how God will accomplish this deliverance. In John's Gospel, Jesus frequently uses "I am" to signal who He is and why He came.

Moses' life was saved as a baby after his mother put him in a basket in the Nile River. The King was killing boy children so Moses' mother acted quickly. Miriam, Moses' sister, told Pharaoh's daughter that her mother could help with the baby after the King's daughter found the baby. Moses' life was spared. When Moses got older he realized he was raised in the palace but his mother taught him who he really was and ended up killing an Egyptian when he was defending his people. So Moses went to the desert and spent 40 years as a shepherd. It was during this wilderness experience of 40 years that paved the way for his Divine encounter. Moses was now ready to listen to God's leading to save his people. That forty years was preparation for the forty years he would lead God's people through their wilderness. Moses was going

to be the deliverer of the Israelites but Moses wasn't sure about God's plan and his abilities. But God... knew it was time and Moses was ready. Sometimes we don't feel ready, but God.. has other plans for us.

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 who changed his direction and noticed it.

What if the miracle of the burning bush isn't that it wasn't consumed by the fire, but that Moses noticed it? Maybe pausing to see this burning bush is the real miracle of this story.

What if the burning bush is a part of each of our lives? Maybe the only question is whether we will pause long enough to hear God speaking to us.

What if every burning bush is a call asking for and awaiting a response from us? Maybe God not only wants but needs a response from Moses and now from you and me.

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 see it and pause to notice it 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 stop and take notice. We take a second look. Sometimes 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 sometimes challenges and hardships

Moses never thought it was 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. It was all beyond his thinking and expectation of life. He thought at 80 years old he was done with challenges.

Each of us have experiences that shatter our life expectations. 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 weeping 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 guessed that this would be my life." They are those times when we shake our heads 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?

In burning bush experiences God calls more than God does or accomplishes something. The doing and accomplishing are for us.

God says to Moses in our scripture lesson, “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.” God is coming to rescue God’s people. But God... 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 existence to God’s call for deliverance. Moses is to make real God’s desire for the people to be delivered. What if that’s how God is working in our lives too? I wonder when you and I have not stopped to notice the burning bush from God. When have we failed or refused to respond to the call on our lives?

The Burning Bush experience happens in everyday life. In the midst of the ordinary tasks of life. Moses was doing the ordinary 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 the routine of everyday life; marriage, parenting, work, friendships, errands, church, reading the news, household tasks.

All we can do is to respond to God when we see a burning bush. We need to stop and notice God working in our life hoping that we can respond with a “yes” to God even in the midst of our doubting and insecurity like Moses.

Moses doubted, but God...was going to be with Moses every day. God is always with us as well. Has God gotten your attention?

Moses pausing at the burning bush and talking with God and reverencing God changed Moses’ life and it changed a nation and delivered a people and eventually it brought us our Savior.

‘Those that seek Me will find Me, when they search for Me with all their heart’. (Jeremiah 29:13) ‘The LORD said, ‘Seek My face’, and I said, ‘Your face, O LORD, will I seek’. (Psalm 27:8)