
Sunday 30th August – The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Exodus 3:1-15 & Matthew 16:21-28

Exodus 3:1-15

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."

'This is my name for ever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.'

Matthew 16:21-28

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.'

Reflection

"I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel". So said Maya Angelou the great American poet and civil rights activist who went through great traumas and injustices in her life. Moses and Peter certainly never forgot how God the father and Jesus made them feel in today's passages.

So how did Moses feel after being exposed to a burning bush that wasn't really burning, quickly followed by God being present and naming himself I AM? I would

suggest awestruck with powerful questions remaining. Something like, So God you can make a bush burn and yet not burn? Really? And you call yourself I AM? Really? And how did Peter feel when Jesus, who he had left everything in his life to follow, and who he had become very close to, says to him “Get thee behind me Satan”? He must have thought, Really Jesus? I was only saying what seems obvious, that you shouldn’t go to Jerusalem, suffer greatly and die. Surely the relationship we have built over the last three years justified me saying to you that must never happen? I suspect Peter felt very offended.

Moses and Peter were very close to God the father and son respectively, and both were challenged very strongly by them. Yet it did them no harm. The very next event recorded in Matthew 17 is Moses and Peter meeting on top of a mountain when Jesus was transfigured. I wonder how that made them both feel? They must have realised that God valued them highly, highly enough to have challenged them profoundly, and give them a deep insight into who he is, which led to them having a much better insight into who they are. When he needs to be, God can be very assertive, including with those he is close to, not being afraid to evoke difficult emotions in us, in order to help us learn.

And the learning? For Moses – that God is beyond the laws of nature. He just IS. For Peter? From “Get thee behind me Satan” to “come and meet Moses and see me transfigured” in double quick time! The message being “However close we are Peter I’m not afraid to challenge you if I need to, and by the way if you want to find your own life you have to lose it!” In essence Peter and Moses learned the same thing. That God and Jesus are beyond the laws of nature and in control, and they are doing all this because they love us, so don’t worry about being challenged by them. It’s helpful.

The feelings we have probably all experienced in the last 6 months of COVID aren’t of the same order. However, they can be challenging and an opportunity for us to learn about God, ourselves and how we engage with those around us. The profound challenges Moses and Peter experienced proved positive. The same God is watching over us, sometimes challenging us, but always with reassuring motives and benefit to us. Amen.

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