

Rev. Zach Moffatt
Adams UMC
World Communion Sunday
October 6th, 2019

First Taste: Moses and the Burning Bush

Exodus 3:1-15

Focus: What makes it “holy” ground?

Function: The function of this sermon is to discover the holy ground of our lives and to hear the God who invites us there.

Will you pray with me and for me: Holy God, we are your people. Open our eyes and our ears to see and hear your calling out to us. May we follow your Spirit onto the Holy Ground of our lives. May the meditations of our hearts and the words of my lips be acceptable and pleasing in thy sight, oh God, our strength and our redeemer. Speak, Lord Jesus, for your servants are listening.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, AND OF THE REDEEMER, AND OF THE SUSTAINER, AMEN.

As all of you know by now, we are in the midst of our sermon series called, *First Taste*. Throughout this series have been looking at those stories that we grew up hearing in Sunday or those stories that are so well known they have made it into the broader culture. We’ve looked at stories like Adam and Eve, Jonah and the Fish, Ruth, and Sarah and Abraham. As you know, we’ve done a good job of funneling these stories down into a truth or nugget of our faith for folks to know—but in reality they go much deeper and they have so much more they can teach us.

Today’s story is one that many of us know well. The story of Moses and the burning bush. This story is often used as they archetypal call story. Moses is one of the most well-known figures in all of Scripture. He has an interesting story and a powerful story of redemption and leadership. Starting out as an orphan whose mother sought to save him and set him in a basket on the Nile River and being found by the Queen of Egypt—Pharaoh’s wife. He finds out his Hebrew identity and flees, murdering an Egyptian soldier in the process. Now a fugitive, he is on the run. Meet’s a Midian priest named Jethro. Marries one of Jethro’s daughters and serves as a part of Jethro’s household tending the sheep.

Then, one day, as he is tending his father-in-law’s flock, and sees something interesting. He sees a bush on fire—but it’s not being consumed by the fire. Consumed...interesting word that we will come back to in a moment. As he approaches the bush, he hears a voice calling out his name, “Moses. Moses.” And Moses responds, “Here I am.” And, it is here, where God tells Moses that he is standing on Holy Ground.

Moses is standing on Holy Ground. As many times as I read this passage, that phrase or part of the story never really stood out to me. I'm usually always pulled to Moses's call story and then reflect on my own. Or, I stay with the burning bush trying to picture it in my mind. Or, I'm drawn to the understanding the powerful truth that is found in here that God indeed hears the cries of the oppressed, violated, and vulnerable. All of these are important parts of the story—and contribute to, I think, what makes something Holy Ground.

But, what really makes something holy ground? What makes something holy? What even does holy mean? Holiness literally means to be separated for the divine. It is something that is made separate from the mundane, from the normal, from the worldly. And, what is so amazing about this, is that Moses' holy ground experience happens while Moses is doing normal, mundane things. Our God is not the God who needs to be kept separate from the mundane, but our God is the God steps into the mundane, the worldly, the normalcy of our world. After all, that is what the resurrection is all about. God taking on flesh and walking as one of us—stepping into this dirty, beautiful, broken, good world in order to redeem it and make it whole. And, not only that, but at the end of our text, God names Godself to Moses. Moses asks, “What am I supposed to say when they ask what is this God's name?” And, God replies, “I Am Who I Am.” Such a strange name for God. Why couldn't God say “My name is Jeff,” or at the very least, “Just call me God?” I am—a verb meaning to be...in the present tense. God's very name literally means God is present in the very moment—in the highs and lows of life, in the midst of trauma and tragedy, in the midst of joy and excitement, in the midst of oppression and violence, in the midst of hope and healing—God is present, in all things, making them holy, redeeming them, transforming them, making all things whole.

So, Holy Ground is a place where God's presence and glory appears. But, what does that look like? What does it look like when we are on holy ground? Yes, it's all great and dandy to say that God makes holy ground *holy* ground. But, what does that look like, especially if we don't have a burning bush to look at?

Friends, I'm convinced that if the burning bush wasn't there, God still would have shown up. I don't think the burning bush is as significant as we make it out to be. Rather, what makes this holy ground that Moses is standing on is what happens in his encounter with God. Moses is seen by God. Moses is known by God. Moses is called by God. These three things are important. It's not the literal burning bush that makes it holy—it is the very presence of God that makes it holy. And, when we are in the presence of God, we are seen, we are known, and we are called in profound and transformative ways. Some of us may have a burning bush experience—but many of us won't. But that does not mean we haven't stood on holy ground.

We stand on holy ground when we are seen by God. God didn't see Moses for who Moses was but for who Moses could be. God didn't see Moses as someone rejected, as a murderer, as someone filled with fear, as someone with shame. God saw Moses as a man who could be transformed into a leader who will lead God's people out of bondage and into freedom. God saw that Moses could be a healer of a nation. God saw that Moses could be a leader who had compassion, hope, and love that flowed from him and out into the world. And,

friends, on holy ground God sees us too. God sees us not as we see ourselves, but as whole and redeemed people who have worth and purpose in our world. God sees us as God's beloved and holy children. God sees us not as the world sees us, but as God's holy and precious child stamped with God's holy and beautiful image. The church has spent a long time speaking and teaching on original sin—we need to reclaim our theology of original goodness. When God created us, God called us good. Despite our sin. Despite our brokenness. Despite the shame and guilt and pride and affliction we might carry—God calls us good. No matter who we are, what we've done, where we've been. No matter how much or little education we have, how much or little money we have, where our status is in society—God calls us good, time and time again. God calls us God's beloved. You are seen by God—not as the world sees you, but as God's holy child. On holy ground, you are seen.

We stand on holy ground when we are known by God. Knowing and seeing are different things. When we read known in the Bible—it isn't speaking about conceptual or intellectual knowledge. It is intimate knowledge. On holy ground, we are intimately known by God. God knew the shame and fear Moses carried in his heart. God knew Moses's objections and had an answer to each of them. God knew the guilt Moses carried and his feelings of being rejected. And, still, God also knew what Moses was capable of, through the strength of God's healing and holy grace. On holy ground, we too are known by God. Our past mistakes are known. God knows the shame we carry. God knows the fear we keep buried in our hearts. God knows the burdens we try to carry day in and day out. God knows our anxieties, our depression, our addictions, our afflictions. God knows our pride, our hatred, our ego, our bigotry. God knows the ways in which we've harmed others and ourselves. God knows all of that and God still says, "I love you." On holy ground we are known by God and invited into God's healing and holy grace to be made whole.

We stand on holy ground when we are called by God. Moses was seen and known by God and God still called him—numerous times to live into God's liberating love. Friends, as Christians we know that we each have callings that are brought about by the gifts given to us by the Spirit. But, all of those specific callings lead us to live into the greater and general calling of all of God's people—to live into the liberating love of God. When we stand on holy ground, we are so moved, so changed, so transformed by the experience that we have no other desire but to lead a life of love and grace. We are consumed...there's that word again...we are filled up to where we literally become love for the world. That is what it means to be made perfect in Christ—we become love for the world. We perfectly love God and neighbor in all that we do. And, all of us are called to chase, embody, and live into this love—this love that sees others as God sees them. This love that sees others not as their past mistakes. This love that sees others not as who they currently are, but as who they can be with God's healing grace. On holy ground we are called.

Friends, my prayer is that you find yourself on holy ground more times than not. Essentially, holy ground is a time to see and be reminded of who God is and what God does. It is a time to see and remember that we are loved by God more than we can possibly imagine. May you find yourself in the presence of the great I Am—the God who is present, who was

present, and who will always be present. May you find yourself in the presence of the God who sees you, knows you, and calls you good and God's beloved. May you find yourself so moved by God that you follow God wherever God leads us—to live into God's liberating love—which frees us all from the clings of sin, shame, fear, and hatred—and sets us on a path of healing, hope, peace, and unending joy. May you find yourself on holy ground.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, AND OF THE REDEEMER, AND OF THE SUSTAINER, AMEN.