

Holy GPS Exodus 3:1-, 9-15  
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – 11th Sunday after Pentecost (August 28,) 2011

<sup>3:1</sup> Moses 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. <sup>2</sup>There 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. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' <sup>4</sup>When 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.' <sup>5</sup>Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' <sup>6</sup>He 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.

<sup>9</sup>The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup>So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' <sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' <sup>12</sup>He 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.'

<sup>13</sup>But 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?' <sup>14</sup>God 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."' <sup>15</sup>God 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 for ever, and this my title for all generations.

I was trying to get my car inspected. The one station had been out of inspection stickers the last three times I had come in. I only came back each time they told me when they'd be in, and each time, they still were out of stickers. I was starting to get irritated – so irritated that I wasn't too much interested in the news bulletin that was on the television in their customer waiting area.

This was just about TEN YEARS ago. By the time I went to another shop, where they did have stickers, the second plane had hit the world trade center. I began to forget about my earlier irritation. My mind got taken to another place. Something had replaced my irritation with one of the ordinary snafus of ordinary life. **It was still there, for sure.** It just didn't register anymore. **I was looking at that day from a different perspective.**

It was September 11, 2001. I bet most of you can tell a similar story – similar stories about days that began in the same old ordinary way, and then somehow got transformed. Some of us can remember exactly what we were doing on **November 22, 1963**, in the afternoon, when there was

another news bulletin. It had been just an ordinary, unseasonably warm November afternoon. And then something happened.

Moses had lived forty years of a pretty ordinary life ... once you got past the almost being killed by Pharaoh and then saved by Pharaoh's daughter, and then growing up as an Egyptian prince ... it was a pretty ordinary day for him when he came upon the Egyptian who was beating on one of the people of Moses' secret identity. And that ordinary day transformed Moses into a killer.

So Moses had fled to the wilderness, got married, had a family, and herded sheep, for another forty years. And then one ordinary day, up on top of the mountain, as he was grazing the sheep, the ordinariness was cast aside, causing him to forget all about the irritations of ordinary life. There was this bush that was on fire – but not. And he knew that he was on *holy ground*.

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning** wrote these words regarding that day:

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,  
and every common bush is afire with God;  
but only [those] who see take off [their] shoes.  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."*

(That was Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who wrote those words<sup>1</sup>.)

I know that many people talk about how God made this **MIRACLE OF THE BURNING BUSH** – on fire, but not consumed by the fire. But I think Lawrence Kushner is correct when he writes that **IT WAS NOT A MIRACLE SO MUCH AS IT WAS A TEST.**

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasized for the purpose of the Groucho-Marx-television-show-type contest included in the bulletin

How long does it take to discover that the combustible material in a fire – the wood – is not being consumed by the fire? **“Several minutes, at least,”** writes Kushner. Sit in front of a fireplace sometime and try it out.

God was looking for a leader to bring the children of Israel out of Egyptian captivity into the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey.

God was looking for someone who would stop and pay attention; stop and look for God; someone who would allow God’s Presence to be noticed in the midst of whatever is going on around them.

God made a test out of the burning bush. **We don’t know how many people**, how many shepherds or others, saw the burning bush, said, **“Hmm, there’s a burning bush”** and went by without stopping and noticing that the bush was not being consumed.

And then ... then the next important part ... who said **“I MUST TURN ASIDE AND LOOK ... AND SEE ...”**

According to scripture, **THAT** was the critical part for Moses to pass the test. It says: **“WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT [MOSES] HAD TURNED ASIDE TO SEE, GOD CALLED TO HIM OUT OF THE BUSH, ‘MOSES, MOSES!’ AND HE SAID, ‘HERE I AM.’”**

⚡ First Moses had to TAKE THE TIME TO OBSERVE that it was burning but not being consumed.

⚡ Then, Moses had to TURN ASIDE AND SEE.

It’s **what we must do** in our lives,

- if we are going to discover the HOLY GROUND in our midst.
- If we are going to be rescued from the mundane that consumes us.

- If we are going to be enlivened to seeing new possibilities right there in front of our face.

In the Gospel of Thomas (Sayings) Jesus says: **Know what is in front of your face, and that which is hidden from you will be revealed unto you.** (5:1)

I am amazed, sometimes, when I watch the **instant replay of a challenged call in an NFL game**. I can see the play happen, and believe I know what happened. Then I see the same play in slow motion, and it confirms what I thought before, and “know” that there is no way it could be anything else. And then the television network will show the same play, in slow motion, from a different angle, and VOILA! I see that, indeed, it was NOT what I thought it was. It really did happen differently. They show the first angle again, and I see it the one way, but this time I also am able to see how that angle prevented me from seeing what really happened – that can only be seen from the other angle.

**“WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT [MOSES] HAD TURNED ASIDE TO SEE, GOD CALLED TO HIM OUT OF THE BUSH, ‘MOSES, MOSES!’ AND HE SAID, ‘HERE I AM.’”**

There are so many times when my path crosses the path of someone who is only able to see their life in terms of **BEING A VICTIM**. I understand how the circumstances of their life made them feel that way. But it is so frustrating for me when I am unable to get them to **TURN ASIDE AND SEE**

that **VICTORY**, **not VICTIMHOOD**, is standing right there. They seem to only be able to see the one thing.

An old farmer wrote to his son in prison. "This year I won't be able to plant potatoes because I can't dig the ground, I know if you were here you would help me." The son wrote: "Dad, don't think of digging the ground because that's where I buried the guns." Police read the letter and the very next day, the whole ground was dug by police looking for guns but nothing was found. The next day the son wrote again "Now you can plant your potatoes dad, it's the best I could do from here."

There are different ways to see things.

One of my favorite expressions for Christianity is found in Paul's description written to the Corinthians. It's found in 2 Corinthians, chapter 2. He calls them **"the fragrance of Christ."**

I really like that description, for a number of reasons – and time does not allow me to share all of those reasons now. But, in particular, note what he says in that passage. We **ARE NOT** **"Peddlers of Christ."** Rather, we are persons who **speak with sincerity**. **We speak as persons STANDING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.**

**That is what Moses was - someone standing in God's Presence**  
.... When he stopped and paid attention.... When he stopped and turned aside to see. **When he realized he was in God's Presence. THAT made everything look different.**

That is **what Paul tells us that we are also called to do.** What we are called to be.

We are **called to pay attention to where we are** – to see all of what is in front of our face. And we are called to turn aside and see – **TO SEE THAT WE ARE IN THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR MIDST** – and to tell people what we are able to see.

I quite frankly have grown so weary of people who have confused Christianity with all the people who are grabbing the headlines and saying that they speak in the name of Christ.

People who – **as Jesus indicted the Pharisees of his day** – go out of their way to make converts and then to make those converts twice the children of hell because of all of their guilt laden duties. (Yes, indeed, that's how Jesus saw it.)

- ⌘ We are people of **GOOD NEWS**.
- ⌘ We are people of **VICTORY**.
- ⌘ We are people of **LIBERATION**.
- ⌘ We are people of **SINCERITY**.

We are **NOT peddlers of the Christian commodity**, but persons speaking with sincerity, sent by God, and speaking as persons standing in His Presence.

And – like Moses and Paul before me – I, for one, believe it's time that we stop standing in the rush of the current of the secular streams around us – and instead

⌘ **STOP**

⌘ **PAY ATTENTION**

⌘ **TURN ASIDE**

⌘ **SEE THAT WE ARE STANDING IN THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD**

⌘ **And begin to SPEAK WITH SINCERITY**

**It's time that we take back the Church of Jesus Christ, for Him Who died to show us how to be victors and not victims.**

How about you? Or **would you rather sit and pick blackberries?**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
AMEN.