



**St. Michael's, Surrey**  
**February 28, 2016 Lent 3**

**Exodus 3:1-15**

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. 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. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 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." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 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.

Then 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, and 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. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send 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?" 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."

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?" 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.'" 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 forever, and this my title for all generations.

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Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 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."

A young woman, let's call her Janice, is walking home at the end of the day from where she works in downtown Vancouver to her small apartment some five blocks away. It's a path she takes every day. It's been a long day and so Janice is focused on getting home, getting on her jeans and just having some time to herself before meeting friends for dinner. But as Janice crosses the street, she spies something unusual out of the corner of her eye. She hesitates just long enough to get a quick look. It's a man she has never seen before on her route home, a man holding a sign that says something about this being his 1<sup>st</sup> day in Vancouver after having lost his job in Alberta and something about needing money. Inside Janice groans. "How can this be?" she says to herself. "Don't stop. Keep going." another voice inside her says. And so she continues on her way.

A man, let's call him Tim, lives right here in Surrey, a single parent of two teenage daughters. Tim loves his family, and he especially loves his family's routines—their daily morning and evening routines in their home, their weekend routines out and about in the community, their yearly holiday routines with extended family and friends. But lately, something has changed with his older daughter. Normally excited to participate in these routines and rituals, she has been insisting on more time alone. Her grades have been slipping at school and she has also been losing weight. "What's going on with her?" Jim worriedly says to himself. "Don't intrude. It's just a normal phase she is going through." Another voice inside him says. And so he continues on his way.

A man, let's call him Moses, is out tending his flock, something he does every day as a shepherd. He's tending his flock when out of the corner of his eye he catches sight of something unusual—a bush that's on fire with a fire that does not consume what it's burning. He asks himself "What could that be?" while at the same time another voice inside him says, "Pay no attention to that fire. Just keep walking! Just continue on your way!"

But as the Biblical writer tells us, Moses does not listen to whatever was surely urging him to keep walking, to continue on his way. Rather, Moses says to himself: "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." It is then and only then, when Moses decides to turn aside to look, that God begins to speak. "Moses, Moses!" God says. And Moses responds "Here am I" meaning, "You have my attention, God. I'm ready to listen. I'm ready to converse with you, the Lord of Life, and to allow my life to be changed by what you have to say to me."

Resisting the impulse to continue on past something unusual that appears to us on the periphery, turning aside and looking at the burning bush we catch sight of out of the corner of our eyes: the story of Moses makes it sound so, well, understandable. After all, who wouldn't turn aside if they were walking the dog around the block and came upon a fire that did not burn something up or burn itself out? Who wouldn't turn aside if they were about the business of their work or the routines of their life and noticed something that odd and out of the ordinary.

But as I think about this image and my real life, what I know is that when something powerful and intrusive comes into my periphery, I do not readily turn aside to consider it, to give it the attention that will allow it to speak to me. Far from it, I often work hard to keep it on the periphery, or I fling a little water on it so that it's not burning in such a distracting way. It takes me a while to turn toward it. And the result of this is that sometimes whatever was burning at the periphery trying to get my attention has instead turned into a raging fire right at the center of my life.

Perhaps my unhelpful resistance comes from knowing Moses' story only too well—that to turn aside and to be open to something or someone from another realm is to risk leaving the life I have been accustomed to and to move onto a path that will ask pressing and uncomfortable things of me.

And, of course, the Moses story is all about this. Once Moses turns aside to the burning bush and makes himself available to it, the press is on—God, it seems, cannot stop talking. To mix some metaphors here, it's a bit like a fire hose coming from a burning bush: “Don't come closer (God says), take off your sandals. I am the God of your forebears. I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have come down to deliver them and to bring them up out of Egypt to a good land flowing with milk and honey...one which incidentally is currently occupied by others.”

And, then comes the clincher: And, oh, by the way, my plan for making all this happen is to send you, an unqualified barefoot shepherd, to the mighty Pharaoh.

Yes, this is what happens when we turn aside—things are asked of us that we feel unqualified to do, unprepared to take on, things that are generally not in our plan for our lives.

And so this morning, what is the “burning bush” at your periphery? What is the conversation with God or with others that you are being asked to make yourself available to? Whose deliverance—your own or another's—are you being asked to play a role in? In what way do you feel unqualified, unprepared or inconvenienced by being asked to play such a role? What might God be saying to you about this?

What God says to Moses is that God will be with Moses despite Moses' own misgivings about Moses' qualifications or preparation for the work. This, of course, should offer us comfort when we, ourselves are asked to turn aside from the routines of our lives and be open to the things that stand burning at the edge of our paths. This should offer us comfort. But, I believe there's even more for us here.

For the experiences in which we are asked to leave behind the tried and true, the routine, and to step into a place that is unknown, in which we are invited to do things we do not know how to do, is not simply an opportunity to discover that God will be with us, it is an opportunity for our own transformation.

And so I would say that God was not just *with* Moses or that God is not just *with* us when we're asked to enact God's own desire for our deliverance or the deliverance of others.

God, through our feeling of being unqualified and unprepared for the task, is actually working our own transformation—a transformation that can only come when we abandon the routine, well-traveled path and when we turn aside, turn toward the path we do not know.

Lent, itself, is really all about this—a time we intentionally turn aside, leave the well-known, well-traveled path, and, enter a pathless wilderness relying both on God’s presence with us and on the possibility of our own transformation.

And so this morning, whether your name is, say, Janice or Tim or Jeddy or Melissa or Krista, go ahead and turn aside, go ahead and look into the fire burning at the edge of your life, and listen for what it is saying to you. Listen to where it is sending you. Listen. Listen. Listen.