

“Burning, But Not Burnt Out”
Exodus 3:1–15
Rev. Henry Pascual

Prayer: Divine Light, shine on your Word so these stories speak to us today. And shine on our hearts, and show us how to respond. Amen.

Some Scripture passages are so familiar that we can almost read them without really seeing them. Exodus 3 is one of them.

We know the story of Moses and the burning bush. We know he was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. We know he saw something unusual in the wilderness and heard God call his name. We know God sent him back to Egypt under that mysterious name: “*I AM WHO I AM.*”

But perhaps familiarity can keep us from noticing the wonder and mystery. Because the first thing Moses sees on Mt. Horeb isn't a stone tablet with the Ten Commandments written on it. The first thing he sees is a bush on fire. And the amazing thing isn't simply that it's burning—it's that the **bush is burning**, but it's **not burned up**. It's on fire, but it isn't consumed by the flames.

What a powerful picture of the life God wants for us: **burning brightly without burning out**.

And yet so many of us fall into the trap of confusing exhaustion with devotion. We keep pushing, keep giving, and keep taking on more responsibility until we are completely drained, completely running on empty.

We live in a world where burnout can become the norm. Parents are tired. Teachers are tired. Caregivers, workers, volunteers, and pastors are tired. And it isn't just physical exhaustion; it's a weariness in the soul that can leave us discouraged, impatient, and emotionally numb. We keep showing up, but inside, we may feel as though we are slowly losing our sense of joy and purpose.

The danger of burnout is that it can sometimes look like faithfulness. It can hide behind good intentions. We convince ourselves that because a cause is noble, we must keep going—even when our strength is running low.

Another need, another crisis, another expectation. Little by little, we may begin to believe that God is pleased with our exhaustion.

But God never asked us to destroy ourselves in the name of service. Constantly pushing ourselves beyond healthy limits isn't a badge of honor, and it isn't what faithfulness requires.

In Exodus 3, God appears as a fire that burns without consuming the bush. The bush was nothing special. Not a magnificent cedar or a towering oak—just an ordinary desert bush. Yet God chose that humble bush as a place of divine revelation.

Moses looks at it and essentially says, *“What is happening over there?”*

God tells him, “Take off your sandals. You’re standing on holy ground.”

The ordinary became the place where Moses encountered the extraordinary. Holiness isn't reserved for the elite or the extraordinary. God meets us in ordinary jobs, ordinary homes, ordinary acts of service, and ordinary lives.

Notice this: God doesn't destroy the bush to use it. The bush doesn't have to disappear to become holy. God's presence inhabits the bush without destroying it.

We need to hear this because the church has sometimes confused sacrifice with self-neglect. We've admired the volunteer who never says no and the pastor who gives every available hour to ministry. Sometimes we have unintentionally treated exhaustion as evidence of commitment.

But God never says, *“Wear yourself down for me.”*

There's a fire that consumes, but there's also a fire that gives life. God is the fire, not our exhaustion. God gives the heat, the light, and the energy.

Moses had been in the wilderness for forty years—going from palace prince to desert shepherd. He was simply tending sheep when God interrupted his routine.

God brought up the very thing Moses had likely tried to put behind him: Israel. The Hebrew people were suffering in slavery, crying out in pain. God

said: *"I have observed their misery. I have heard their cry. I know their suffering."*

Those might be the most comforting words in the whole text. **God knows.**

Generation after generation had passed, and God's promises seemed distant. But God's silence was not God's absence. God wasn't indifferent.

So, if you are carrying a quiet weariness today—a family burden, a demanding job, or a personal grief you find difficult to express—know this: **God sees. God hears. God comes near.**

The fire in the bush reminds us that God isn't distant or abstract. God is present right in the middle of our wilderness.

When God reveals the divine plan to rescue Israel, God tells Moses, "I am sending you."

Moses immediately asks the logical question: *"Who am I? Who am I to stand before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead these people?"*

Please notice that God doesn't offer a motivational speech. God doesn't say, "Believe in yourself, Moses! You're more capable than you realize!"

Instead, God gives a simpler answer, **"I will be with you."**

Moses asks, *"Am I enough?"*

God answers, *"I will be with you."*

We often ask God to make us capable enough for every challenge, but the real question is whether God is present. Faithful service pours us out in love; believing everything depends on us only leaves us depleted. It doesn't depend on us—it depends on God.

Divine calling isn't about human striving alone. Human striving says, "It all depends on me." Faith says, **"God is with me."**

Moses asks for a name to give the people, and God replies with that holy mystery: *"I AM WHO I AM."*

God cannot be boxed in, managed, or reduced to a simple formula. Moses wants a detailed blueprint; God gives him God's presence.

I AM means: I am the One who is. I am the One who acts. I am the One who remains faithful.

Moses didn't need to know every step of the future; he just needed to know who was walking with him.

When you want to know what happens next, God says, "*I will be there.*" When you wonder if you're capable, God says: *I am with you.* When you fear the future, God says, "*I am still God.*"

This whole encounter began because Moses noticed something. He stopped. He turned aside. And he paid attention.

That may sound simple, but it wasn't. Moses could have kept going, but instead, he stopped long enough to see what God was doing. And because Moses stopped, he met God.

And I think there's something important for us in that. We live in a culture that tells us to hurry, to stay busy, and to keep moving. But sometimes, stopping is exactly what we need to do. When we slow down and pay attention, we may discover that God has been trying to get our attention all along.

There are burning bushes around us every day—people whose lives reflect the persistent, unquenchable light of God. People who have served for decades and remain generous. People who have experienced deep hardship but continue to choose hope. People who know how to work hard, but also know how to rest and say "no." People who have walked through difficult seasons without allowing those experiences to take away their compassion. When you see those people, stop and pay attention. Learn from them.

The answer to burnout isn't apathy. It isn't walking away from every responsibility or deciding that nothing matters.

The answer is rediscovering the source of your flame. There is a fire that can consume us—the fire of anxiety, self-reliance, and the constant pressure to prove our worth.

But there is a fire that gives us life—the fire of grace, trust, and God's abiding presence.

God is the fire, not our exhaustion. God gives the heat, the light, and the energy. God isn't standing over us demanding that we become empty.

There is a vast difference between being poured out in love and becoming depleted because we forgot that we are human. There is a difference between faithful service and believing everything depends on us.

It doesn't. It depends on God.

God doesn't ask you to become empty to prove your love. You are meant to be set on fire with love, justice, courage, and hope.

So, if you're feeling burned out or completely depleted, maybe it's time to pause. Maybe it's time to stop trying harder. Slow down. Stop and listen.

Take off your shoes and recognize the holy ground right where you are. Hear the voice of the God who sees you, knows you, and promises: *"I will be with you."*

Because God is—we can be. Because God is faithful—we can rest. Because God is the source of the flame—we can burn brightly without burning out.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**