

“Standing On Holy Ground”

Sermon by Vicar Kevin Tracey

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Pentecost 16

Exodus 1:8-14; 3:1-15 | (Mark 12:26-27)

*Grace to you and Peace from God our Creator and our Lord Jesus, the Christ. Amen.*

I remember pretty distinctly the first time I heard the story of Moses and the burning bush. I was in third grade Sunday School, which in my home church, was the year we went through the big stories of the Bible. When we got to this story, and God tells Moses to take his shoes off, I was super confused...

I was used to taking my shoes off when I went into my house but certainly not when I was in the middle of a field or on a mountain. In fact, those were places I was specifically instructed to not remove my shoes.

Now as I look back, I have to laugh at my childhood self—the kid who took no issue with a burning bush but had concerns about Moses’s footwear... Who knows, maybe I was onto something...

This is the first time Moses encounters God—he’s in the wilderness, tending to his flock when suddenly, before him is this bush, un-consumed by the flame. And as Moses turns to look at this miracle, God calls from the bush to Moses...

And God’s first command is for Moses to take off his shoes.

This isn’t a typical ask for God—it’s the first time it shows up in scripture and we won’t see this type of request again until the book of Joshua, when Joshua is instructed to remove his sandals as he stands on Holy Ground...

As Moses encounters God, removing his sandals seems to be an appropriate sign of reverence—a sign of recognition of the importance of this space... A moment of “here you stand before the creator of the universe, your being laid bare”

A removal of any barriers between Moses and God and a symbol that Moses is to open himself up to the call that God has for him.

And in this space, God offers a plan... a plan to bring God’s suffering people out of Egypt with Moses as God’s vessel to Pharaoh.

And Moses, standing before God, his bare feet resting on Holy Ground... talks back a bit...

Moses is... ordinary.

God tells Moses “I will send you” and Moses replies “who am I?”

I can hear in his answer the worry... the fear... the feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy filling his mind...

And Moses is a man with a checkered past—born to an Israelite mother, he should have been killed as infant, yet he was pulled from the reeds by the Pharaoh’s daughter as raised in pharaoh’s house.

And eventually, he flees Egypt after killing an Egyptian slave master and builds a new life for himself, away from anyone who might know his past.

But this is kind of how God works, isn't it? God has this habit, as we see in scripture over and over again, of calling ordinary people to do God's work in the world.

I hear a lot of myself in Moses's response to be honest... the "who am I?" rings a little bit closer to home than I like to admit. For a while, I intentionally avoided God's call and did everything I could in my power to close off or avoid the path to seminary and ministry for myself. Just as Moses comes before God with a bunch of excuses, I was pretty good at those too...

Like maybe I swear too much to do this work or maybe I'm not smart enough to handle the deep theological questions or maybe those pride protestors are right, and this isn't the role for an openly gay man (To be clear: They're not right).

And it's really easy to stay in that place... to sit in the worry and the fear... to allow those feelings of doubt and insecurity to wash over you

Moses asks God "Who am I?" and God responds with presence—with the acknowledgement that God is with him and will be with him every step of the way...

It's a reminder that God is fully present in those moments of self-doubt and denial

And that God also invites us out of those places

To stand with confidence and certainty in our status as a beloved and called child of God.

God doesn't call Moses because he's perfect. God could have chosen anyone for this role, but God picked Moses... with all of his flaws and shortcomings and gifts and abilities... God chose him, for who he was.

Just as God has called each one of us—has chosen each of us—to be a part of God's hands and feet and words in this world.

I think a lot of times we talk about a "call" in the church, people tend to assume it's a "clergy only" thing. In fact, I remember a conversation I had with my mom once. I had just finished up my first semester of seminary and was home for Christmas. And as I happily chattered on about this theologian and that liturgical color, my mom kindly nodding along to what I'm sure was an excruciatingly boring conversation, I started talking about how cool it was to be in seminary surrounded by people who all had a similar sense of call. And my mom stopped me and said she didn't know if she bought into the whole "call thing"... She said that her work as a teacher and role as a mom really did feel like the things she was meant to do in life and were important to God—and it seemed odd that only clergy could experience this "call thing"

And she's absolutely right—which I don't say just because she's my mom...

God calls each of us into various kinds of things.

Maybe that's playing music or designing computer systems

Maybe it is parenthood or creation care.

Or maybe, as we've seen the past few weeks, God calls you into setting up tables or pricing collectables or sorting clothing or some other type of involvement in the yard sale; this great ministry that has benefited many people for 40 years.

This is how God tends to work in the world. By calling everyday people, people like me and people like you, to do extraordinary things in this world. To stand on holy ground, not in spite of our flaws, but because of them... Because of who we are—fully ourselves.

Just as God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush thousands of years ago, God too calls to each one of us, welcoming us onto Holy Ground, with our unique gifts and strengths and flaws and weaknesses because those are the things that make us who we are.

This is not a call that invites us to check a part of ourselves at the doors but rather invites all parts of ourselves in... into the holiest of spaces... to stand on Holy Ground before the Creator of the universe, questions in hand.

“Who am I?” Moses asked.

I've asked.

I'm sure you've asked in your own way...

And God responds with a simple reminder. A remind that God is and always will be present alongside you, forever and for all generations.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.