

Session 2: The Exodus: Moses

Main Reading: Exodus 3

Moses at the Burning Bush

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

⁷ 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, ⁸ 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. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹² 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.'

The Divine Name Revealed

¹³ 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?' ¹⁴ 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.'" ¹⁵ 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.*

¹⁶ Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey." ¹⁸ They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God." ¹⁹ I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. ²¹ I will bring this people into such favour with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; ²² each woman shall ask her neighbour and any woman living in the neighbour's house for jewellery of

silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians.'

Theme: Wilderness people: trusting God

How can our relationship with God grow through reflective practice as we journey through the wilderness times of life?

Reflection

I have a wonderful book (which I am reading again!) written by Susan Beaumont, which is entitled 'How to lead when you don't know where you are going'. *Please* don't take that the wrong way.

It comes to mind because, after their rather hopeful beginning, we know that Moses and the Israelites wander round and round and round and round for forty years, starving hungry, constantly complaining, and getting up to all sorts of mischief to boot. The promised land is a long time coming, and the wilderness the Israelites get themselves stuck in isn't a great place, especially when they find themselves in the wilderness in terms of their relationship with God.

I also don't want you to take it the wrong way, because I don't want you to be disappointed by the idea that your new priest would lay claim to the fact that she doesn't know where she's going. After all in the secular world, people expect their leaders to have a plan (or several plans, each detailed on massive spreadsheets). I used to have a five year plan...before I came to faith. Then I realised that there was another plan - perhaps not so much a plan as a vision - and that I was always going to be in God's hands. And I relaxed a bit!

It's a frightening thing to face the unknown. It's horrible feeling lost. It can be devastating to discover that you've been going down the wrong path and have to retrace your steps (literally or metaphorically) and begin again. But, as someone wise once said, life is a journey, not a destination. If we are able to take each step trusting in God's desire for good, (even in the moments when that seems almost impossible to believe) then not only will we be constantly surprised and amazed by the wonderful things that will come upon us out of nowhere as God does his new thing that we hadn't perceived. We will also find that when the going does get tough we can face up to more than we think that we can.

There are many tough stories in the Bible which are truly horrific. The violence in the Old Testament is breathtaking. Imagine Abram about to kill his only son.... The violence in the New Testament no less so. Another only son dies an excruciating, harrowing death...

Why are these stories even in the Bible? How are such horrific tales meant to help us face up to the harshest of harsh realities of life? Perhaps it is simply to bring God into the equation, so that when life is, as it quite often can be, just pretty awful, seemingly senseless and without a plan (let alone a good one) Scripture can prompt us to try find the answer to that ever-present question - where is God in all of this?

Reflection on that question - which is a standard of both spiritual direction and personal theological reflection - highlights that what makes the wilderness most wilderness-like is often a spiritual disconnect with God. It is very easy, in our times of difficulty, to strive to sort things out ourself, to get busy doing what needs to be done to address this or that issue, or in cases where we feel powerless, to rail at God, even blame God for what

has happened. That approach, whilst a natural human reaction, generally only makes things more difficult.

We only have to look to the Garden of Gethsemane to see just how natural a reaction it is. But what it is that eventually aids Jesus to go to the cross to which he had earlier 'set his face' is the understanding that God's will shall be done. And whilst he also fears, as his mortal life ebbs away, that God the Father has forsaken him, history proves this not to be true - bringing reconciliation, sanctification and everlasting hope for us all.

Questions for discussion

- What word, or phrase, or idea in this reading has particularly struck you in your time of reflection or on hearing it today?
- Moses is like so many other patriarchs and saints in being less than happy with the task he is given...we too can feel like this when in wilderness places - what can we learn from these characters?
- Often people assume that being a Christian means being a bit of a doormat. How do you respond to that idea and what can you see in this story and elsewhere in the Bible to reflect upon?
- What do you think we need to notice, to name and to nurture as Christians when we find ourselves in the wilderness?

Other resources you may like to explore:

Scripture: The Book of Job

Psalms 22, 42, 43

Music: Hear my prayer O Lord, Henry Purcell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74Q33UL7ugc>

(if you find it possible to get through the following music, which was inspired by the above, you may find it becomes a staple for you in times of darkness)

Hear my prayer O Lord, Purcell & Sandstrom

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9qU1_gHg00

In the Middle (Your Peace) - Brian Doerksen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-4pHADtltg>

Other writing: C. S. Lewis - 'On Grief', or 'The Problem of Pain'

Henri Nouwen - 'The Wounded Healer'

Susan Beaumont - 'How to lead when you don't know where you are going'

Stephen Cottrell - 'Hit the ground kneeling'

Other materials/sources:

Open Doors <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/>

Christian Aid <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/>

Medecins Sans Frontiers <https://www.msf.fr/>