

The Sunday Missive – March 20, 2022
The Third Sunday in Lent

Hymn 448 O love, how deep, how broad, how high

O love, how deep, how broad, how high, how passing thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take our mortal form for mortals' sake!

For us baptized, for us he bore his holy fast and hungered sore;
For us temptations sharp he knew; for us the tempter overthrew.

For us he rose from death again; for us he went on high to reign;
For us he sent his Spirit here to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.

All glory to our Lord and God for love so deep, so high, so broad;
The Trinity whom we adore forever and forevermore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNQXxwjOp-A>

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.

Psalm 63

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you* ***As in a dry and weary land where there is no water.***

So I have looked for you in the sanctuary* ***To behold your power and glory.***

Because your steadfast love is better than life* ***My lips will praise you as long as I live.***

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast* ***And my mouth praises you with joyful lips***

When I think of you as I lie on my bed* ***And meditate on you in the watches of the night;***

For you have been my help and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy* ***My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.***

But the king shall rejoice in God alone, and all who swear by him shall exult* ***For the mouths of liars will be stopped, and they shall be food for the jackals.***

1 Corinthians 10:1-17

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.

I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Hymn 685 Rock of ages, cleft for me

Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Should my tears forever flow, should my zeal no languor know,
All for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone;
In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyelids close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown and behold thee on thy throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

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

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

I’ll Be There -- Lent 3C

Here in California, when there’s a spark in the dry landscape, we pay attention; especially if it springs out of the middle of a bush. The many wild acacia and other thorn bush species with which the desert abounds are normally dry and brittle, so much that a spark can kindle a wildfire that burns far and wide. A fire, therefore in such a desert bush was a startling and frightening sight. The Biblical account places the event at the base of Mt. Horeb (believed to be Mt. Sinai, but in modern times also known as Mt. Moses) on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. Today, St. Catherine’s Monastery is on the spot. Constructed by order of the Emperor Justinian between 527 and 565, it is a

spectacular natural setting for a magnificent collection of antiquities, including Arab mosaics, Greek and Russian icons, Western oil paintings, ancient Christian religious objects, and the second- largest collection of illuminated manuscripts in the world, consisting of some 4 or 5 thousand handmade volumes in Greek, Coptic, Arabic, Armenian, Hebrew, Slavic, Syriac, Georgian and other languages. The Vatican, of course has the most.

But back to the bush. Moses' bush was thought to be a rare and extremely long-lived species of bramble, *Rubus sanctus* (holy red one), native to the area. The original bush has admittedly died, but the Greek Orthodox monks who live there assert that the one on display is a direct descendant.

It has been said that all the lessons in Hebrew scripture set forth events from Israel's salvation history as types or prefigurements of the Easter event. The accepted wisdom of the Church has at times been that everything in the Hebrew Bible was put there by God to foreshadow the cosmic event we call Jesus the Christ. After all, if God is omniscient, he must have known exactly when and where and how Jesus would eventually appear, so the rest of history before must have been back-story. Understandably, this theory has been disputed – especially by non-Christians. Instead of all history prefiguring Jesus the Christ, perhaps it makes better sense to say that Christ Jesus became incarnate so that we might grasp more firmly our own selves in history.

Thus, for example the Crucifixion took place at the time of Passover, which had been instituted along with the Exodus. Jesus' death and resurrection brought about the ultimate exodus, when all are freed forever from spiritual bondage to sin and death. Through Jesus, we can better grasp the powerful meaning of the Exodus.

Likewise, the Burning Bush: It is said that God's foolishness is more powerful than our intelligence. The foolishness in choosing Jesus, born in a stable to a poor carpenter and his wife, resembles the foolishness in choosing Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. One, perhaps comparable illustration appears in a list of the 776 dumbest things ever said: "A Superintendent of Schools in the town of Barrington, Rhode Island issued this statement: "After finding no

qualified candidates for the position of Principal, the District is extremely pleased to announce the appointment of David Steele to the post.”

Moses qualifications included neither personal magnetism, a spotless record, noble lineage, nor brimming self-confidence. What Moses does possess that is the one thing necessary to be of service to God: receptivity. He sees a tree on fire and investigates – he turns aside from his current path saying, “Here I am.”

In William James’ seminal text: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he describes conversion and the acquisition of faith: “The process, gradual or sudden, whereby a person previously unhappy, inferior and wrong becomes consciously happy, with a sense of belonging and justified in his beliefs.

The Exodus text does not give any indication that Moses at the bush was converted according to James’ definition. What Moses does exhibit is an openness to what is going on around him and a willingness to proceed with what he is called by God to do, even though he does not fully understand. That is the mustard seed faith that is all God needs from us to accomplish good.

Psychologists talk about ‘separation anxiety,’ which is not only in children or immature adults who fear abandonment, but also the uncomfortable state artists and scientists and entrepreneurs experience when they realize they are alone, that they are treading on new ground; holy ground. They perceive that they have ventured into unexplored, unmapped territory; there is a stomach-churning realization that maybe they are lost or absurd and irrelevant, or just plain wrong.

Because he is so alone, and naturally having any number of anxieties about what he is experiencing, Moses needs a name from God so he can trust the experience. He wants evidence to validate the encounter. Like when you are promised a visit from the plumber when you really need a plumber: You get the name of whoever promises you on the phone that the plumber is on the way over.

Per Martin Buber’s translation, the name God gives Moses is: “I will be there as the one who will be there.” The great philosopher Buber

died in 1965, so he wasn't around the next year when the Four Tops elucidated his idea: "When you feel the world grown cold, And you're drifting out all on your own, reach out, reach out for me. I'll be there, with a love that will shelter you. I'll be there, with a love that will see you through." I wonder if those are the sweetest words there are, 'I'll be there.' They are certainly the words Moses needs to hear. Not just that God is, but that God is and will be here, within us, as a promise and the power that goes with such a promise. Like a business fully capitalized, a project fully funded, a loan fully secured, a baptismal covenant, a thereto-pledged troth.

God is not simply "Being" itself, God is Being with a purpose; Being present, effective and liberating. God will be there in steadfast, unflinching love. If nothing else, the call of Moses reminds us that what God can do for us in our weakness surpasses anything we can do in our own strength. Christ on Calvary's tree makes this story explicit, immediate and apart from what we call time.

Mary Daly asks, "Why indeed must God be a noun? Why not a verb – the most active and dynamic of all? Hasn't the naming of 'God' as a noun been an act of undermining that dynamic verb? And isn't the verb infinitely more personal than a mere static noun? The symbols we have for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is Being."

And one might add, Becoming. "God does not offer to us finite beings a thing all complete and ready to be embraced. For us, God is eternal discovery and continual growth. The more we think we understand God, the more God is revealed as otherwise..." Literally, other-wise. We must liberate Christ from a Western intellectual form that is logical, abstract, privatized, and individualized. We must engage the complex Christ . . . which means accepting the diversity and differences of the other as integral to ourselves and thus integral to the meaning of God. Engagement with the other is not dissolving ourselves into the other but being true to ourselves — our identity — by finding ourselves in God and God in the other.

Being aware of presence of God is vital. The best way is to stop, get quiet and listen. Silence, meditation, centering prayer, whatever you

call it, the end result is the same – God is pulling at you hard, God wants you to get to work; God’s directions come in the still small voice.

Hear Jesus’ words from the *Gospel of Thomas*: “The one who is near me is near the fire and the one who is far from me is far from the kingdom.” Proximity does matter. May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi, Jesus. The dust that falls off your teacher may wind up on your feet, your clothes, in your hair; you might breathe it in. We have to keep up; to be aware of our encounters with the Holy, wherein we acknowledge God’s presence in our life. Then we have to find a way to respond. Too often, we think of a life devoted to Jesus where he is isolated in time and space, who lived and died, and about whom we know everything there is to know. This is unsupportable. Jesus is risen. The Holy Spirit is always with us as our guide. Being a disciple means movement. It means keeping up.

“...The more we think we’ve got ahold of God, the more God withdraws, drawing us closer into the depths of of ” what is holy and divine and godly. “The nearer we approach, through all the efforts of nature and grace, the more God increases, in one and the same movement, the attraction that exceeds our powers, and the receptivity of our powers to that divine attraction.” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

The Bible speaks a good deal about mystery. This is often the only way to understand it. Some approach the subject with the mind of magic. They want to revel in miracles just as the contemporaries of Jesus did. They did not understand that his miracles were not conjuring tricks, but but signs, signs of the mystery of the Kingdom.

“I am that I am,” or “I will be there as the one who will be there,” is no magic formula, it is a tautology, a statement that is true by necessity or by virtue of its logical form. Nor can we hear what it says if we are too busy conforming the mighty and mysterious stories of the Hebrew Bible to our mechanistic minds. We have to find our burning bushes right where we are, and listen to the voice that proceeds from the heart of such mysteries.

We are a community that exists to hear this voice. We exist because God called Abram and said, “Get thee out.” We exist because God said to Moses, “Eyah, Asher, Eyah.” We exist because, in the fullness of time,

God came to us as Jesus, saying, "Feed my sheep," as the fullest imaginable disclosure of the mystery; to be here for us, that we might be there for one another.

Hymn 344 Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing

Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing; fill our hearts with joy and peace;
Let us each, thy love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace:
O refresh us, O refresh us, traveling through this wilderness.

Thanks we give and adoration for thy Gospel's joyful sound:
May the fruits of thy salvation in our hearts and lives abound:
Ever faithful, ever faithful to thy truth may we be found;

So that when thy love shall call us, Savior, from the world away,
Fear of death shall not appall us, glad thy summons to obey.
May we ever, may we ever reign with thee in endless day.

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

The Dreamer

The night comes down, in ever-darkening shapes that seem--
To grope, with eerie fingers for the window--then--
To rest to sleep, enfolding me, as in a dream
Faith--might I awaken!

And drips the rain with seeming sad, insistent beat.
Shivering across the pane, drooping tear-wise,
And softly patters by, like little fearing feet.
Faith--this weather!

The feathery ash is fluttered; there upon the pane,--
The dying fire casts a flickering ghostly beam,--
Then closes in the night and gently falling rain.
Faith--what darkness!

Djuna Barnes