

Seeking Holy Ground

Exodus 3:1-15, Psalm 105: 1-6, 23-26, Romans 12: 9-21, Matthew 16: 21-28

Today's text about Moses and the burning bush is one of deep riches, and repays deep reflection. However, today I would like to simply look at the recognition of holy ground and the two questions that Moses asks when he meets God upon holy ground.

What is holy ground? Holy ground here is the place of God's presence, the place where Moses encounters God. Here he heard God and questioned God. God called Moses by name and the first thing God said to Moses was to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground – a reminder that this was an awesome, holy, significant encounter, probably the most significant encounter of Moses' life, although he would have many other encounters with God.

Where is the place of God's presence for us, the place where we encounter God? Where do we question God and listen to God, pour out our hearts to God and place our trust in God?

We may find ourselves on holy ground when we pray and when we reflect on the scriptures or, like Moses, it may be unexpectedly in the dust and labour of our daily life.

In his transforming conversation with God, Moses lost his identity as fugitive from justice and shepherd, or sub-shepherd really as he worked for his father-in-law. Instead, he became God's man in every way, with a great task to perform, "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

If you were in Moses' place you might have a few questions about how all this was supposed to work. Well, Moses had 2 basic questions for God: *Who am I?* and *Who are you?*

You may find some relationship between these questions and Jesus' question that Peter spoke about last Sunday, *Who do you say that I am?*

Question 1 Firstly, Moses' ***Who am I?*** question: *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*

What is God's answer? Not words to build Moses' confidence in his special suitability or capability for the job, but words of greater reassurance.

I will be with you. That is a powerful answer. You are the one whom I will be with. That is who you are.

Like Moses, we can also ask the question *Who am I?* or *Who are we?*

Who are we in response to the Lord our God. We are the ones God is with. *I am with you*, Moses was told. We have been told even more richly that God is with us. We know that Jesus came to earth as one of us, to be with us and to die for us. We know that the Holy Spirit was sent to us to be eternally with us. God is with us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Question 2 The second question Moses asks, the ***Who are you?*** question, was a really big one: *Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?* This question is not just about a naming word but about identity, essential nature, authority and ultimate power.

Who is the Lord our God? What answer did Moses receive? It was a simple answer, but like many simple things, actually more deep and complex than might be immediately apparent.

The Hebrew text has YHWH, which is sometimes Anglicised as Jehovah, and usually translated LORD. Since it seems related to the word translated *I am*, it may be translated as ***I am the one who is*** or *I will be what I will be* or *I am the one who brings into being*. The LORD is a god of action and of life, the one who was and is and will be, from the beginning to eternity and who also

brought and brings into being, as we say in the creed, *all that is, seen and unseen.*

That is a lot of meaning to be carried in one word. This is not only the name that Moses shall give to the Israelites in Egypt but the name they are to call upon forever, from generation to generation. The Lord our God is the One who is. All other gods or god-substitutes are those who are not, those who have no real substance.

We can also ask Moses' second question *Who are you?* for ourselves. I don't believe the answer is any different. The LORD is still a god of action and of life, the one who was and is and will be, from the beginning to eternity.

The questions *Who am I? and Who are you?* are both answered in our relationship with God. We are the ones whom God is with; and God is the one who is, and is with us - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Love in action As we live our lives in relationship with God, we stand on holy ground. Holy ground is the place where we can grow in God's love. Holy ground is where we can act in response to our God who is a God of action and a God of life.

We are made in God's image, and we too are to show love in action, in our being and in our doing, not only in our relationship with God but also in our relationships with one another.

I encourage you to look at the reading from Romans. Many of these examples of love in action are difficult, even impossible, to achieve on our own. We need to be rooted and grounded in the love of God. It is from this holy ground that we can grow in love and hope to achieve at least some of what Paul describes.

If it all seems too hard, remember Moses' first question to God, *who am I* that I should do the thing you ask of me, the thing that seems so difficult, even impossible. And remember the answer, *I will be with you.*

Of course, this doesn't mean it will be easy.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Matthew 16:24-26)

Love in action is not always easy but God is with us. How easy was it for Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt? How easy was it for Jesus to take up his cross, even with full knowledge and a heart of loving obedience?

Let me finish by reading you a quote by Kristin Swenson, who is a professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University:

Jesus, the incarnation of "I Am," told his disciples that he would have to suffer and die. And they would too. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." I don't think that he was talking only about physical martyrdom, but rather about acting and be-ing, day in and day out, in the One who Is. This, Jesus says, is life, and the whole world's profit doesn't hold a candle to it. (Swenson, Christian Century, para. #5&6)

Prayer

We give you thanks for the fire of your love which burns forever,
making all places holy with the power of your presence
and leading us into your life, which is worth more than the world itself.

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