

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 30th August 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

God has chosen us and has called us by name. God has a purpose and a plan for the rest of our lives. Today in our worship today we reflect on the call of Moses and draw closer to God and listen for His voice.

Prayer of Approach

We draw near, O God of burning flame.
We draw near and humble our hearts.
We bow before the king of all kings,
the shepherd of our souls.
We approach the one who sees our hearts.
For some of us the flame of faith is burning steadily.
For others it battles in the winds of the world.
Some of us struggle to rekindle it at all this day,
While for others it leaps and burns brightly.
In whichever state we are today, we gather in faithfulness
to worship the One who is ever faithful to us.

Amen.

Hymn/Song

Introduction to the Bible Reading

As a baby Moses was kept safe from king Pharaoh by floating in a little basket on the river, hidden by reeds. Moses grew up in Egypt in the palace of the Pharaoh. When he was about 40 years old, he ran away from Egypt because he killed an Egyptian that was beating up a Hebrew. Moses spent another 40 years in the far side of the desert. This is where we pick up the story today.

God appears to Moses when he was an old man and taught him what he would need to know to be a leader, a leader to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Read Exodus Chapter 3 verses 1-15
Read Romans Chapter 12 verses 9-21

Prayer of Confession and Renewal

When we have stopped listening for your call, Lord:

Help us to make a fresh start.

When we grow tired of trying to do what is right, Lord:

Help us to make a fresh start.

When a friendship or relationship is broken, Lord:

Help us to make a fresh start.

When we withhold forgiveness, Lord:

Help us to make a fresh start.

When we withdraw from the needs of others, Lord:

Help us to make a fresh start.

When our faith in you burns low, Lord:

Help us to make a fresh start.

Forgive us and transform us for the sake of Jesus Christ who died and rose again that all might be made new. **Amen.**

Hymn/Song

Sermon

Does God see the pain of humanity?

Does God hear the cry of suffering and injustice?

Does God care?

Yes, yes and yes, is the message of our Bible reading today.

Does God bring freedom and deliverance?

Again, a resounding yes!

Amazingly, God calls ordinary people like me and you and Moses to respond to the needs around us. We can learn much from Moses experience, at the start of this new season, a new academic year, a new Methodist year. In my sermon today I'm going to share with you the 3 stages or movements in our Bible story:

Come and see

First of all God gets Moses attention. We find Moses in the far side of the desert, with only the sheep for company. Something in the distance catches his eye. What is that? Where is that smoke coming from? Something is on fire. I must take a closer look. Moses is distracted. Moses is curious. He wants to know more. He changes course. He turns aside. He investigates. He leaves his sheep. Yes, I see, says Moses. It's a thorn bush alight – it must be the heat of the desert sun that set it on fire.

Sadly we have seen immense bush fires in California. For Moses, the bush is burning, but it's not burning up. It's not turning to ashes. This is strange. Out of the ordinary. What does it mean?

Moses has seen a bush before. He sees them every day.

Bushes are ordinary. Moses has seen a fire before. He lights one every evening. Fire is ordinary. But a burning bush that doesn't go out? That is extra-ordinary. Notice how before God called Moses, God got his attention. That's what God does in our lives. We can often function on autopilot. With our heads down we don't stop to look, to think. But the Coronavirus crisis has stopped us in our tracks. Our daily routine has been changed. Our way of being church has changed. The extraordinary events of this year have captured our attention. This chimes with a Bible verse I was given this week. Habakkuk chapter 1 verse 5: "Look at the nations and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told!"

We have been forced to turn aside.

We have our questions and we look for answers.

Now I don't believe Covid19 was sent by God, but it is not unusual for God to overcome evil with good and scatter darkness with light. God has got our attention. People within and beyond our faith communities are searching for God, searching for spiritual meaning. With Moses, curiosity can turn to awe and wonder and to an encounter with the living God. God begins by saying to us 'Come and see this situation as I see it'. The Bible and all of history is full of curious people who experienced a divine distraction, who turned aside, who left their intended path for a closer look. Are you curious about life? About what God is up to? God continually interrupts our lives. God interferes with our agenda. God gets involved. As we become more aware of our new surroundings, we might be surprised to find that it doesn't take a burning bush for us to notice God's presence. It might not be a burning bush but it could be a burning issue that makes us stop and listen. We see a world on fire. We see racial injustice. And to confront a similar injustice and human cruelty, God needed Moses help.

This brings me to my the second movement in the story:

Stop and listen

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. God calls Moses by name. Moses is humbled. He is commanded to take off his sin stained shoes. Our God is a consuming fire, whose love burns up our sin and our pride and our resistance. Like Moses, you don't need to be in a good place, you may be in the desert place or beyond the wilderness - wherever you are, God is ready to meet you. God has something to say to you.

Every place can be Holy Ground, since in Jesus God has walked on earth, walked in our shoes. God understands. With his face in the dust Moses listens as God tells him how his heart burns with compassion for his people. God is not deaf or blind. God has seen their misery and heard their cry. Like the burning bush, Israel feels the heat of oppression, the thorns of hard labour but Israel is not destroyed, because God is in the midst of them. And God makes a promise to deliver them out of slavery and lead them into a land of freedom.

Today, are you ready to stop and listen to the cry of God's heart? Are you ready to have your feet grounded in earthy reality? Are you ready to listen to the cry of those who are suffering? Are you ready to act? God gave Moses a job to do. Which brings us to the final movement in the story:

Go and do

God chose Moses to be his agent for change. God sent Moses back to Egypt, back to challenge Pharaoh the cruel King. No wonder Moses was afraid. No wonder Moses resisted. But Moses was under God's authority and so was under God's wing. God reassured Moses. 'I will be with you'. God reassures you and me today. And God overrules our hesitancy. We make excuses and say 'Lord, not me. I'm not a good speaker, I'm not confident, I'm not capable, I'm not clever, I'm not qualified'. But God overrides all that and says: 'Go. I am with you. I am what I will be'. We need to hear that today from God: 'I am what I will be'. This speaks of both mystery and certainty. In this new season of activity, in our ever-changing world we depend 100% on God who loves us and leads us. God will be all you need. God will be what God will be and so you will be what you will be and the Church will be what the Church will be. You will be God's voice. If God could speak through a bush and through Moses, God can certainly speak through you.

As one writer put it: "It is laid upon the stammering to bring the voice of Heaven to Earth."

Remember the words of St Paul: *Consider your own call, brothers and sisters, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1 v 26-29)*

For Moses the time had come to stop making excuses, to stop talking and get walking. Moses was ready to find his sandals, find his voice and find his calling – and find that God was true to his word. In obedience he went from shepherding sheep to shepherding the flock of God's people. What is God calling you to do with your life? With your week? With today?

Where will your yes take you? Where will your God take you?

To recap:

Come and see – get ready for a holy distraction.

Stop and listen – to the cry of God's heart and God's people.

Go and do – believe in the God who believes in you. Amen.

Hymn/Song

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of mystery and power, we thank you for your love and faithfulness through the years. Through times of change and loss, your love is constant and your mercies are new every morning. We pray today for our changing world. We pray for lives affected by COVID 19 and for all who suffer in body, mind or spirit.

We lift them up to you in prayer...

'Let my people go' says the Lord:

Lord, help us to set the captives free.

Journeying God, we pray for all who are on the move at this time.

We pray for ministers taking up new appointments.

We pray for migrants seeking a better life in a country far from home. We pray for those in slavery and those facing injustice, violence and oppression. For those affected by fire and flood.

We lift them up to you in prayer...

'Let my people go' says the Lord:

Lord, help us to set the captives free.

God of the next step, we pray for children and teachers beginning a new term next week. We pray for those preparing for college or university and for their families. We pray for Sarah and all who work to bring the gospel to children and teenagers.

We lift them up to you in prayer...

'Let my people go' says the Lord:

Lord, help us to set the captives free.

God of the future, we pray for our church and our congregation.

Bring your scattered family together and make us one.

Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Help us to follow Jesus and serve you faithfully all our days.

Bringing to mind our own trials and longings

We lift them up to you in prayer...

Help us to remember that you are big enough to help us with everything we face. Lord hear the cries of all your people and set the captives free, for the sake of your son Jesus Christ, who was led captive to the cross that we might know glorious liberty. **Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

Father God, call us by name and send us out

And we will go for you

Lord Jesus, lead us out of slavery

And we will set the captives free

Holy Spirit, like a flame, warm our hearts and make us bold

And we will live for you. Amen.

Coffee Time Conversation

- In what ways does God get your attention?
- What for you is Holy Ground, where you sense God most?
- What is God calling you to do this week?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Holy, Holy, Holy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8>

How Great Thou Art

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGDa3OkEle4>

Master Speak Thy Servant Heareth

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

More Contemporary Music:

Speak O Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4o-l7k-Xdgc>

Be still for the presence of the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKfyudrhGK4>

I the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6grXk3e5bs0>

Keep social distancing. Keep safe. Keep communicating.
Keep trusting in God and standing on his great and precious promises.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter