

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**2-Narrative 04 – Moses in the Bullrushes through Moses and the Burning Bush
Exodus 1.8-3.15**

**29 September 2019
Salem, Bridgeport**

“There’s a Fire Burning”

We began this year’s sprint through the Bible with the story of the creation of humankind,
continued through stories of Abraham and Isaac, and today come to the story of Moses.

What we heard this morning were selected verses from the first 3 chapters of the Book of Exodus,
verses that cover 80 years of Moses’ life.

There’s so much to preach on in those chapters that I could probably preach as long as a Pentecostal pastor,
but fear not – I won’t!

I’ll just set the context and then we’ll focus on the last part of today’s story – the story of Moses & the Burning Bush.

As you heard, Moses’ early life was a kind of fairy tale story.

A lowly baby born to Hebrew slaves in Egypt, he ended up being adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter,
and so became an Egyptian prince who had everything anyone could possibly want –
the best food and clothing, sumptuous accommodations, the very best education –
and as he grew, he ended up becoming Pharaoh’s right hand man, the 2nd most powerful man in Egypt.

For the 1st 40 years of his life, he had wealth, power, and fame –

he lacked nothing, he rose as high as any person could possibly rise.

And then came that day – that moment – that changed everything.

While he was walking along past one of the great construction sites he heard a commotion

and when he went to see what was happening, he found one of Pharaoh’s soldiers beating a Hebrew slave.

Rage welled up within him and before he even knew what was happening, he had killed the soldier – murdered him.

Quickly hiding the body, he ran for his life.

He ran and ran and ran, right out of the grand nation of Egypt into the sparsely settled hill country of Midian.

He had fallen from the highest height into the lowest depth.

From living in a palace of a sophisticated and urbane world power

he had descended to living in tent in a provincial and uncivilized country of no account.

From being Pharaoh’s right hand man, he had slipped to being nothing but an ordinary, everyday, lowly shepherd.

The first 40 years of his life were like a dream; these last 40 were more like a nightmare.

Well, perhaps that was overstating it. His life was okay.

It just seemed that the man who had lived in Egypt 40 years ago must have been somebody else.

I would bet that all of us can relate in some way to Moses.

No, we haven’t had the wealth & fame & power that Moses had, and we may not have slipped and fallen as far,
but we have all lost things that were important to us.

Some of us have lost people we’ve loved. Some of us have lost jobs or careers that were important to us.

Some of us have lost significant amounts of money or material goods.

And even if we haven’t lost actual things, I doubt if many of us are living the happily-ever-after life of our dreams.

But like Moses, we’ve adjusted. We’ve gotten used to not having what we had or what we had wanted.

We’ve settled. We’ve learned to make the best of our new situation.

And now that we’ve settled, adjusted, made peace with our current reality,

we no longer expect or believe or have faith that things can change.

That was certainly where Moses was.

He had had 40 years in Midian to grieve over his losses, to adjust to his new life,

and to bury any hope that things would ever be any different from his current reality.

And then one day, 80-year-old Moses was walking along with his flocks when he saw something glittering in the distance.

As he got closer he realized that something was on fire.

It was a bush, but there was something strange about it.

There was no smoke going up and the leaves were not turning black or being consumed.

As he went even closer to investigate, he suddenly heard a voice calling his name.

When he answered, the Voice commanded him to take off his sandals as he was standing on holy ground.

He did – right away!

And then the voice continued, “I am the God of your ancestors – of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob –

& I have come to get you to do a job for me – something that will change the course of history for my chosen people.”

Now I happen to know that there are a few of you here who are over 80
and a few more who are within 5 or 10 years of that number,
& I bet that many of you are kind of like Moses, getting ready to wind down, to downsize, to cut back on your work.
But don't get too comfortable because I have a feeling there may be a burning bush in your future.

When Moses encountered the fiery bush two things happened:
God revealed God's self to Moses and God revealed God's call to him.
In reality, however, all God did was stir up something that was already in Moses' heart.
All God did was set fire to a bush that had been planted in his heart long ago
when he saw a sin that needed ending, a wrong that needed righting, an injustice that needed confronting,
when he saw that Egyptian soldier beating a Hebrew slave.

Now I don't know what's going on in your heart of hearts,
but my guess is there is some task, some hope, some dream that you've given up on
because you don't think you have the money or the time or the ability to accomplish it.
Yesterday I was at the Durham fair and I saw this booth with a new invention for sale – it was a double rake leaf grabber.
I told one of the men in the booth that I found it fascinating how long it took
for someone to come up with such a simple, obvious idea.
The man said, "Oh, people come up with such ideas all the time. Most just never turn the ideas into reality.
All it takes is someone who has the time and interest to do so."

That's where so many of us are.
We have dreams and hopes and visions as grand as Moses' palace life, but we let our doubts and fears get the best of us,
and we end up settling for a Midian life – one that is so much less than what we desire or what God desires for us.

So the first thing to understand is if you have an unfulfilled desire in your heart, God wants to fulfill it.
If you have a dream that is still only a dream, God wants to help you bring it into reality.
If you have a vision that is still just a vision, God wants to help you reach it.

Buried deep in Moses' heart was that dream of setting Hebrew slaves free, a seed that had grown into a bush.
God knew that dream – that bush – was there, and so God set it on fire,
saying, "That's your calling, Moses. It's time to pursue it."

To that Moses replies, "You've got the wrong person. I don't have what it takes to do what you ask."
That's how so many of us respond also, right?
We think about those dreams, those visions, those hopes that were once planted in our hearts
and we give up on them, we set them aside, we bury them, because we don't feel we have what it takes.
We don't have enough time left.
We don't have enough money.
We don't have enough answers or insight or ability.

That's how Moses felt.
That's why he had not done anything more in 40 years to right the wrongs in Egypt.
That's why he told God he couldn't do it.
But to Moses' doubts and fears, God replied, "You have everything you need because you have my help".

So, the first thing we need to understand is that
those unrealized dreams and visions and hopes within us God wants us to accomplish.
And the second thing is that God will help us.
God never calls us to work alone, on our own, by ourselves.
God is there with us to help us every step of the way.

But even knowing that God was going to be with him wasn't enough, because Moses was thinking about God
as the God of his ancestors, the God of other people, the God of the past,
and that wasn't enough to give him the confidence in God's ability to help him in the here and now.

Isn't that how we so often look at God?

Sure, God worked in the past – in the lives of our ancestors in the faith, but what can God do for us here and now?

Which brings us to our third point.

Not only does God want us to fulfill our dreams, and not only does God promise to help us,

the God who promises to help us is

not just the God who was, but the God who is,

not just the God of our past, but of our present

not just the God of our ancestors but of us.

God says, "I am who I am".

In other words, God is that force of creation that brought the entire universe into being

the force that is still creating our ever expanding universe.

It's this God – the God of all creation – who is going to help us.

And that means that no matter how big our dream,

no matter how impossible it seems,

and no matter how ill-equipped we are to reach it on our own,

it's nothing to the God who created everything that is.

So first, believe that God wants you to accomplish the dreams that God has planted in your heart.

Second, remember God will help you.

And third, know that the God who promises to help you is the God who has the power to do absolutely anything.

God stirred up in Moses that dream of freeing the Hebrew slaves from their Egyptian taskmasters.

When Moses doubted his own power, he was told to rely on God's.

And when Moses doubted even God's power, God provided him with signs of that power.

God has planted a dream in my heart that has grown into a bush that God has set on fire.

There's no way I have the time or the money or the skills to reach it, but God has promised to be with me,

and the God who has promised to be with me is a God who can do absolutely anything.

And whenever I start doubting, God has promised to give me a sign.

I don't know what dreams God has planted in your heart,

but I pray that God would set your heart ablaze with a fire that will not go out.

I pray that the burning bush inside of you will reveal to you

who God is and what God is calling you to do.

I pray that when God does, and you fear that you don't have the time or the money or the ability to pursue your purpose,

that you will remember that God is with you –

the God who has the power to do absolutely anything.

I believe that God has planted a bush in each of your hearts

and has already – or is about to – set it on fire.

I know there will be times when you doubt yourself

and times when you doubt God.

But that's okay, because I trust that God will continue to stoke the fire within

by giving you the signs you need

to quell the fears and silence the doubts

as God works with you

to fulfill the deepest desire of your hearts. **Amen**