

Holy Ground

Exodus 3:1-12

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.'



Sermon

When I was in high-school, our church youth group would go on a week-long retreat every year. The kids in our church really loved this retreat. We drove down to North Carolina and gathered with a couple hundred other teenagers to worship God twice a day, share with each other in small groups, have fun, and pray together.

We thought the place was special. When we came home, we kept talking about it all year long. We only wanted to sing the songs that we sang there. We told each other stories about what happened last year. And we couldn't wait to get back next year.

We told everyone that we just felt closer to God there. We claimed that it was some sort of "thin place" where the distance between heaven and earth just wasn't quite as far.

But, as I've gotten older, and as I look back on it now. I don't think there was ever really anything so special about that place up in the mountains outside of Asheville. I think that what really made that experience so powerful for us was that it was the only time of year that we worshipped God twice a day. It was the only time that we invited the Holy Spirit to come into so much of our lives - to fill up our mornings, noons, and nights. It was the way that we opened ourselves up to Christ's presence that really made the difference. And it was **that** presence that we yearned for all year long, even when we thought we were longing for that special place where we took our retreat.

When Moses found God's presence in the burning bush - he was about as far away from anything that anyone would call "holy ground" as you could get. God called him over from the sheep herd out in the wilderness. He had gone out there, not seeking God's presence, not on some great pilgrimage, not trying to find some beautiful sanctuary, but because he was on the run. Moses had killed an Egyptian out of anger over how he had been treating a fellow Israelite, and Moses worried that Pharaoh would seek his revenge. Moses was in hiding, out there on his own, far away from anyone else he knew.

And out there in the wilderness, when he was feeling guilty and alone and smelled of sheep - that was when God called, "Moses, Moses, Here I am." That was when God told him to take off his sandals because, there in the wilderness, he was standing on Holy Ground.

Not because there was anything special about that waste-land of a place, not because there was anything extra holy about that scrub of a bush that God caused to burn. The only thing that made that ground holy was that God was there. God was there with a promise and hope to share.

And if God can call this ground holy, then I believe we can call any ground holy, as long as we're willing to turn aside from what we're doing and recognize that God is right there with us, waiting to speak to us and give us new hope as well.

I know that many of you are yearning to be back in your church building, to get back to that place that has been the site of weddings and funerals, baptisms and Easter Cantatas. I know that it is a holy place for you.

But, remember, that building is no more special to God than your home. Those pews are no more precious to God than the sofa in your living room. Even that communion table is no more holy in God's eyes than the kitchen table at your home. Because we know that God has made them all. And we trust that God is just as present in your home as God is at the church. The more time you spend with God there, the holier it will feel. The more you sit in prayer there, the more you share that space with others, the more you invite God in, or use your space to do God's will, the holier it will feel to you.

So, take off your sandals, right there where you are and remember: You are standing on Holy Ground. Because anywhere God is, is holy, and anywhere you go, God goes with you.



I have set up a little place in my home that feels especially holy to me. It's no more holy than any other place either, but it helps me remember that, when I'm stuck at home, God is right here with me.

If you feel inspired to do the same, I would love for you to take a picture and send it in to me, or to the church so that we can celebrate together, all those places that God is making holy for you who are God's holy people, saying:

Thanks be to God, and Amen.

This sermon was first shared with Aurora First Presbyterian Church, by Rev. Doug Friesema. To receive future communications from the church, please contact:

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