

Take Off Your Shoes
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
October 1, 2017

Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17

Since last week's episode – Jacob's ladder dream - all of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" has happened.

Jacob had twelve sons (and some daughters), including Joseph. Little Joe was sold into slavery in Egypt by his rotten brothers, became Pharaoh's secretary of agriculture, and saves the entire known world from a famine. Jacob and his sons go to Egypt to escape the famine and in a plot twist fueled by grace, become honored guests.

Years later there arose an Egyptian king who hadn't learned his history and betrayed those people who had saved his country by putting them into slavery. Seems the king was afraid of the sheer number of foreigners so he ordered the midwives to kill every male child at birth. These women resisted him, they learned to hide the children until they reached a safe age, and the Hebrew population exploded.

Then, because God has a great sense of humor, Pharaoh's own daughter found a baby boy in a basket in the river when she bathed. She adopted him and raised him in the palace. That little guy's name was Moses.

When he grew up, Moses saw a slave being mistreated by an overseer. In a fit of rage, he murdered the Egyptian and had to skip the country. The next chapter of life was tough for Moses, going from being a privileged crown prince to a homeless refugee overnight is rough. He tried to put the past behind him and live a quiet country life by marrying and working for his father-in-law, Jethro, herding sheep.

One day, Moses found himself on Mount Horeb, which means "wasteland." So ironic, since his life had turned into a wasteland. Wasted opportunities, wasted potential, broken dreams, no clear future. Something caught the corner of his eye, and he discovers a burning bush. Maybe this isn't a wasteland after all, maybe he's standing on holy ground?

Did you ever wonder why Moses had to take off his sandals? Removing shoes in many cultures is a sign of respect. This passage reminds us that getting in contact with God is not just a cerebral thing; it's a whole body connection. Too often we act as if faith is just a thing we do in our heads;

this story reminds us that sometimes we need to get out of our heads and just feel the holy.

Maybe today you find yourself in a wasteland of problems, wondering where God is for you. Go ahead, kick off your shoes. They rest on the holy ground of this meetinghouse, where scores of saints have come before you. God is here. Let this place be your Mount Horeb.

We may not have a burning bush to look at, but God is still speaking through the scriptures about love and forgiveness and justice which guide us. We have prayers, songs, and members and friends of this church who can testify to the reality of the God that gets us through.

What does the burning bush story say about God? God hears the cries of the suffering and calls normal, flawed human beings to address the problem. God calls people that no one would expect including midwives and a murderer to set the oppressed free. You want to find where God's heart is? Look in those who are poor or suffering and hurting. These are the friends of God.

God is always going to be more than we can grasp. When Moses asks for God's name, God replies "I AM who I AM." What sort of an answer is that? I AM? God is the source and ground of all that is, of all existence. I AM. No matter what happens, God is.

Other passages in the Bible use different images to help us understand the character of God:

In Luke's gospel, God is a savior, saving people from their wounds, from their enemies, from their sins.

In Matthew's gospel, God is an alternative ruler to Caesar, establishing a new matrix of how to live with compassion, justice and love.

Here in Exodus, God is the one who liberates and leads the people out of slavery.

In other places in the Bible, God is like a shepherd or a friend, or a rock or a mother hen brooding over her chicks, or a father or mother – all of these images help us understand something of God's nature.

Ultimately, God's vague name: I Am, is a reminder that we should never try to limit God; because try as we might, we will never fully comprehend all there is to know.

What does the burning bush story have to say about us? It reveals that when God calls us to speak up, we have a tendency to make excuses. In a two-minute conversation between God and Moses, Moses offers five excuses in order to try to wiggle out of God's call. He tries everything from, "Who am I? I have no power or influence" to "I'm, a wanted man, and I've got a speech impediment."

Like Moses, will usually find some excuse to not do what God is calling us to do. If you've been resisting and putting up excuses, you are in good company. What's your favorite excuse? I've used them all!

I don't have enough faith.

I don't have enough time.

I might make a spectacle of myself.

It'll be too hard.

That costs money!

If I say what you want me to say, I'll disappoint someone.

Our Creator says, *"I don't care about you're your excuses, your past, your fears and doubts, or about your lack of knowledge about who I AM, I'll be with you."* What the gospel calls us to do, God will support us in doing – both as individuals and as a church community.

What does this burning bush story have to say about your life? Only you can answer that. Notice the enormity of Moses' task: liberate an entire people from slavery. No big deal, right? It's easy to relate to his excuses. Think about the equivalent for our lives today.

What if God were to say to you: Go liberate the Middle East from violence. Go and free my children from the power of addiction. Speak up and liberate my little ones from the specter of racism and threat of gun violence. Go and set free my creation from the poisons that people are dumping into it.

Who? Me? Who am I? Who are we, together?

Some people look at the world and ask: Why isn't God doing anything about the problems? Guess what? God did do something: God Created You.

Please remain seated and join me in singing "Break Now the Bread of life", number 321 in your hymnal