

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA  
Proper 17, Year A, September 3, 2017  
The Rev. Bill Queen  
**“Encountering God”**  
**Exodus 3:1-15**

**you have probably been familiar with the story of Moses and the burning bush since Sunday School days; and maybe you remember the scene from Cecile B DeMille’s film *The Ten Commandments*, with Charlton Heston as Moses (he also did the voice of God!); I want to pull that story out of the reaches of your Sunday School memory and out of the archives of classic films and put it right here in front of us; because this story, like most stories in the Bible, is also about you and me and God; it is about us today; let’s look for the connections that relate this ancient story to the present day story of our lives and what God is calling us to do**

**Moses is keeping his flock, but recall some of the background up to this point; Moses’ clandestine birth; his being put into a basket in the Nile; his rescue and being brought up in the house of Pharaoh; his murder of an Egyptian who was abusing a Hebrew; and his fleeing for his life from Egypt; now he’s away from his people; he has married outside of the faith; he is working happily as a shepherd; he is unaware that God is about to call him to do something new and unexpected; is it possible that this might be exactly the position that you and I find ourselves in?; might we be thinking that we are otherwise happily employed in our jobs or leisure activities, when God is about to call us to do something new and unexpected?**

**Moses’ wanderings just happen to lead him to the mountain of God (but he doesn’t even seem to know it is the mountain of God); consider the possibility that what looks merely random or happenstance in our lives today may have more of God’s purposes behind it; something that only later we may be able to see how the time, the place, or our frame of mind was just right for subsequent things that happened; and God has broadened his field of activity over the centuries; we don’t have to find ourselves near some holy land or or holy mountain or holy place to be able to encounter God; we can find God, and God can find us, wherever we happen to be; even in the most unlikely of places**

so Moses sees the burning bush, and recognizes that it is something out of the ordinary; and he could have just kept right on going; he could have let his fear overrule his curiosity; but instead, he decides to turn aside and take a closer look; I wonder how many of God's marvels we see daily, without recognizing that there is something special there, and we just keep on going; now a burning bush that doesn't burn up is miraculous and out of the ordinary; but think how much there is around us that is still miraculous even though it may not be out of the ordinary—the wonders of creation, human life itself, the amazing gifts and abilities and understandings and accomplishments with which God has graced our world and our lives; if only we would turn aside and take a closer look at the marvels around us, at the miracles around us, no telling what we'll find

only after Moses decides to turn aside does God call out to him, showing that Moses could have missed out on this encounter entirely; God doesn't force things; God doesn't force himself upon us; God invites; it is up to us to listen for that invitation and then to respond, or not; when we do take the time to turn aside to look at or listen to something unusual, we can look for the possibility that God has a message for us to receive from it; and this is not usually a direct verbal communication as it was in Moses' case; God may speak to us through our hearts, emotions, or intuition; sometimes we just know that we have been shown something we hadn't seen or recognized before; and sometimes we do receive verbal communications, indirectly, that come to us from God, but through other people's voices, or from other people's experiences that they share with us

finally, after some haggling with and questioning of God, Moses comes around to doing what God needs him to do; I would not advise you to follow Moses' example of self-doubt; he doesn't think he can do what God is asking him to do; it would be better for us to keep on the tips of our tongues the response that's used time and again throughout the Bible, when other faithful people hear God's call: "here I am, Lord; send me"

maybe looking back at our lives we may be able to identify how God has already led us through circumstances similar to this story's; maybe God is presenting us with such circumstances anew, or maybe God is doing this for the first time right now in our lives; no matter where we are; no matter what we are doing; no matter how we got here; no matter how we judge our own level of spiritual growth or awareness or worthiness; what's most important

**is that we pay careful attention; that we keep our spiritual antennae open to what is going on around us; that we turn aside and respond when God calls us to do something new and unexpected; we might encounter God anywhere, any time, because nothing contains or limits God, and nothing restricts where God's holiness can be encountered**

**it seems that what delivers us into God's presence more than anything else is our state of mind and heart; it seems that what is most important is our ability to recognize God's presence anywhere and everywhere; maybe the liturgy of church worship puts us in a more receptive frame of mind and heart; but think about the possibilities open to us if we would put ourselves into that same receptive frame of mind and heart no matter where we happened to be; think about the possibilities open to us if we would keep ourselves in that same receptive frame of mind and heart no matter what we happened to be doing; could it be that God is about to call you to do something new and unexpected?; if so, you'll know how to respond, right?; "Here I am, Lord; send me."**