

## **Burning Bush**

### Exodus 3:1-15

#### **Intro**

Let me begin today's sermon with John Wesley's question. "how is it with your soul especially during this Covid-19 pandemic?" How is it really? Honestly, I have to admit that I have struggled with the question of what it means to be a pastor for the last 6 months. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit our society, the government issued lock-down orders. The church had to be closed because it was considered to be 'non-essential business.' Some churches defied stay-at-home orders and became coronavirus hotspots. I fully agree that canceling in-person worship services was an appropriate and necessary decision for our safety. But as a Christian, I was saddened by the fact that our society no longer perceives church as 'essential.' Even after the lock-down order has lifted, people continue to see the church as a dangerous place to be until the pandemic is over.

As a pastor, I also have had to cope with feelings of helplessness and uselessness. I have sometimes called you to check on how you are doing. Most of you are doing fine and I am grateful for that. Some of you are struggling to manage your lives in this challenging time. Whenever I heard about your struggles, I have said, "I will keep you in my prayer. I will pray for you." In fact, prayer is the only thing I can do for you in this time of semi-quarantine. I know prayer is important and it has power. But at the same time, it's hard not being able to visit you when I knew you were distressed or in the hospital. When I heard that Judith Anderson was in critical condition but I was not allowed to visit her, I felt useless and helpless. I thought "What can I really do for my church members in their time of difficulty if I cannot be with them due to the coronavirus? What does it mean to be a pastor in this time of pandemic?"

As a church, I imagine you have had similar experiences. Most church activities revolve around in-person meetings that we cannot have these days. Due to limited financial resources, we may not be able to abundantly support our neighbors in need. Calling, sending cards, and praying are things we can do for our church family and neighbors. But what else can we do for God and our neighbors? There seem to be few options. Facing this unprecedented Covid-19 situation, I have felt useless, impotent, and helpless.

#### **Moses at the Burning Bush**

In today's scripture, we see a man, an old man in his 80s. He was a shepherd but he didn't have his own flock so he worked for his father-in-law for 40 years. His daily schedule was almost the same for the past 40 years. He woke up in the morning and led his flock beyond the wilderness. He watched sheep as they fed themselves. When the Sun went down, he led the flock back home. This was his simple daily routine for 40 years. He seemed to be an ordinary man or a little less than ordinary since he didn't seem to achieve anything.

Of course, when he was young, his life looked very different from this simple shepherd life. His family history is a little complicated but he belonged to an Egyptian royal family anyway. He not only had a passion for justice but also courage to act on it. He even dared to kill an Egyptian to do what he thought was right. But somehow, the word got out that he killed an Egyptian and he had to flee for his life. He was a kind of political refugee from Egypt. Ever since his arrival at the land of Midian, he had become a son-in-law of Reuel and worked as a shepherd for his father-in-law. I bet you know who this man was. Right? This man was Moses.

Like any other day, Moses led his flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, which is known as the mountain of God. After making sure that his sheep were safe, he sat down on the ground and leaned back against a tree. What would he do while waiting with his sheep? I am pretty sure that he thought a lot about his life journey, especially his decision to kill the Egyptian man who beat his own kin, the Hebrews. He might have regretted what he did over and over again. In some sense, he tried to do something right and changed the world with his own hands. And he failed... he failed miserably and lost everything he had. Now, he was in his 80s and the world seemed to have forgotten who he was and what he had done. As he looked back his life, what would he feel about himself? He might struggle with feelings of loss, insignificance, and uselessness. Moses might have felt he failed in his life and become like the useless dried bushes he saw in the wilderness everyday. Did Moses dream a great dream of saving his own people again as he had 40 years ago?

We are not very different from Moses. Some are better and some are worse, but you might have said to yourself or your closest friends, "I feel like a failure." Especially, when we don't have the power to change a negative outcome or worsening situation in our lives, we may feel helpless, impotent, useless and like a failure. Just like Moses, so many Christians and churches feel this way. There is nothing we can do about the Covid-19 situation. Young people seem to not care about faith. We wanted to try something for the sake of the church and neighbors, but we don't have many options. Right? In this discouraging situation, we may feel that we are failing, though no one dare to say it out loud. If you have ever felt like this, it's o.k. There is still hope!

### **Burning Bush**

When disheartened Moses vacantly stared at the bush, "the angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush." And Moses looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up. God appeared Godself through this useless bush. Isn't it surprising that divine theophany occurred through an ordinary bush that was insignificant and even useless? God sometimes reveals Godself through extraordinary activities like powerful thunder, whirlwind and earthquake. But God often appears to us through very ordinary people and very ordinary events.

As you know, my wife, Juhee, became a pastor last year. I often joke that my wife has become a pastor because she didn't like my preaching, but I know her calling story. Juhee struggled with infertility for many years. She really wanted to have a baby but we were not able to have a baby because of her fragile health. It really hurt her a lot. That struggle led her to deeper questions about God and eventually to Boston School of Theology. Although she was in a theological school, she was not sure about her calling to be a pastor.

In my previous church, Juhee was a little depressed because of her unresolved suffering over her infertility. At that time, one of my church members had to move into a nursing home. She was 88 years old and she was no longer able to maintain her independent living. She struggled with the feeling of loss and uselessness. Juhee wanted to help her pack and clean her house so she visited her. And they happened to have a conversation about Juhee's struggle. After listening to Juhee's struggle, the wise old woman despite of her own struggle, said to Juhee that "Juhee, I am your child. You already have many of God's children in our church. Although you cannot bear your own child, you will have more children of God when you become a pastor and do ministry in other churches." That was a moment of divine affirmation of Juhee's calling. God

appeared through this ordinary woman who had her own struggles. She just wanted to share her wisdom and compassion for Juhee and God talked to Juhee through her.

God manifested himself to Moses through an ordinary and useless bush and wanted the very ordinary and somewhat useless Moses to be God's messenger of liberation for his people. "The bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2) because limitless fuel from divine God sustained this flame. Similarly, God's provision for Moses and God's people is endless.

My friends, you may feel that there is nothing you can do for the church or God. "I am not rich. I am not successful. I am just an ordinary person." But that's enough for God. God can use a very ordinary bush to reveal God-self to Moses. God used an ordinary Moses to carry out God's extraordinary plan of salvation. So God can and will use our beloved Asbury to be like a burning bush that shines a blazing light, sustained by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit. Don't be discouraged for being ordinary people and an ordinary church. God can do extraordinary work out of our ordinary love and compassion and commitment. We don't have to be special to be used by God. Ordinary is enough. Ordinary is a blessing. Even less than ordinary is enough for God.

If you are looking for God's guidance at this unusual and uncertain time, look for the extraordinary in the ordinary. Pray as you usually do. Have an ordinary conversation with people around you. If you can, try to be a little more compassionate and kind to others. Be more attentive what's going on around you. You may encounter a burning bush in these ordinary activities and without realizing it, you may be a burning bush for someone who is desperately looking for a light in this difficult time. In fact, I have already seen some light burning in you! Thank you and let us continue to work our faithful journey together! Amen.