

# Sermon for Sunday, September 3, 2023

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Turn to Wonder”

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

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Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Imagine how the story of Moses and the burning bush might have gone if Moses was living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He'd probably have a smartphone because today even shepherds out “beyond the wilderness” have them. Which means, while Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock, chances are he'd also be texting updates about the sheep, posting selfies of himself looking tough, and following an online argument about some controversy in the world of shepherding. Chances are, he'd walk right by the burning bush and not get to hear God speak.

Notice, God didn't start talking *until* Moses noticed the bush that was blazing yet not consumed and *until* Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” “When God saw that Moses has turned aside”, *then God* started talking. If Moses hadn't noticed the bush, if he hadn't stopped and paid attention, he could've totally missed a powerful experience with God.

What do we miss when we're so focused on our screens, our routines, our to-do lists, worries, wants? How often do we overlook God's presence in our world? It seems God places a high value on paying attention. In this story alone, we're told five times that God was attentive to the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt. God *observed, heard, knew, listened to, and saw* their suffering.

Throughout scripture we see that God showers care and attention on our whole world all the time. But there's so much that keeps us distracted and absorbed with ourselves. Even without a cell phone, so much could have gotten in the way for Moses. He could've been tired or hangry, fixated on tension with a family member, or completely overwhelmed by the painful events in his past. And even if he did notice the bush, he could have just kept on going rather than turning aside to look at it. He might've thought *oof* - I've been in the wilderness too long, my mind's playing tricks on me. Or huh, that's weird but gotta keep going or I'll be late.

At any given moment there's so much that can prevent us from looking beyond ourselves. Yet Moses noticed the bush and took time to turn and wonder about it. Because he did, Moses could see God, could see that God wanted to work through him to bring freedom and new life. God is still about freedom and new life. God wants that for you, for us, for the world. What helps you see that? What helps you to notice, turn, pay attention, wonder? In my life, sunsets often play that role. I still remember one particular one. I was studying in Zimbabwe during seminary, wrestling with the impacts of colonialism, when I got a call from home with the news that my dad had cancer.

That same day, my friends and I were headed out of the city for a trip to a beautiful mountainous area. I was in such a fog of worry that I hardly noticed the gorgeous scenery until the last evening when we were out on a drive. The high mountains had hidden the setting sun but then we came

around a bend to a cliff and a clearing. The whole entire sky was full of color, rolling, swirling layers of intense color from the horizon all the way to the heavens. I have never again seen a sky so alive. We pulled over on the side of the road, got out to watch, and sat in silence taking it in. The sunset lasted for another 30 minutes.

It was a burning bush experience for me. I was jolted awake to the presence of God. My eyes and my heart were opened. I began to pray, to bring my questions and pain to God again rather than staying stuck inside myself. The sunset didn't make everything all better of course, but it helped me see God amid the pain. It awakened in me a desire to be attentive and compassionate, and reminded me that when things are difficult, I need to turn to prayer and turn to wonder. Still to this day, sunsets remind me to pause and pray.

The burning bush didn't make things all better for Moses either. In fact, it made his life much harder. It was not a mountaintop, happy time for Moses. God's call to go to Pharaoh and work for freedom, was a fairly unwelcome disruption of his everyday routine. Moses had many questions and concerns, but rather than getting stuck inside his own head, he turned to wonder and brought them to God. He was assured God would be with him in all that was to come.

Like Moses, we all encounter things that interfere with our lives, our plans, our routines. Sometimes they are beautiful - astonishing sights, times of great joy. Sometimes they're painful - grief, unwelcome news, transitions. Sometimes they're more mundane - annoying interruptions, or issues that make us uncomfortable. When we encounter disruptions of any kind, I think God is inviting us to pause and turn to wonder.

In the midst of lives that are full of surprises, joys, and trials, we always have the opportunity to pause and turn to wonder. We can ask ourselves, "What is God doing here to bring life and hope, and how can I be part of it?" And even when you can't do this, even when you are numb, in a fog, bored, tired, or hangry, God is always present for you, always working to get your attention to say, *I am here, I love you, I am working in and through and for you.*

God is always present, always bringing life for you and for all creation.

Take a look. Amen.