**“Where’s *my* burning bush?”**

**A sermon preached by Rachel Wildman on February 28th, 2016**

**Inspired by Exodus 3:1-15**

*May we be on fire, and yet not consumed, and may the place in which we now stand, be Holy Ground.* AMEN. Please be seated.

Ahhh…the burning bush. On fire, yet not consumed. So easy for Moses to notice.

Oh, how many times have I prayed for my own burning bush! In the decade that it took me to finally figure out that all the confusing emotions and imaginings I was having were a call to ministry, I must have said a hundred times, “If Moses got a burning bush, why can’t I?” There were times in New York as I passed by the various greenery on my walk from our subway stop to home that I literally paused for a moment, praying with clenched fists that a branch would spontaneously combust in front of me…and I, too, would hear God’s voice.. “Rachel…turn from your research and go to seminary…”

I am guessing that I am the only one here who has made a very pregnant pause in front of public greenery…but I imagine, and for the effectiveness of this sermon I so very much hope, that at least the general desire for a direct, clear communication from God resonates with many of you.

Wouldn’t following “the path” be *so much* easier if burning bushes popped up and God’s voice reverberated around us each time God was calling us to do or be something particular?

PAUSE

I thought so…until I read again the full account of Moses’ call from God. Sure, Moses gets the burning bush. *And*…Moses gets God’s own voice calling him by name. Moses knows, with certainty, that this is God calling him. But even with that certainty about who it is that’s asking, and certainty about what God wants, Moses *still* struggles with whether or not to commit. Clarity that it was God who was asking was not really what Moses wanted. It seems to me that what Moses *really* wanted was to know how it would turn out. Moses wanted to see the future, play-by-play.

If I’m really honest with myself, the burning bush wouldn’t have been enough for me either. As I was discerning my call to the priesthood, I wanted the burning bush AND God’s clear rquest..AND to see, before I made even the smallest move towards it, the unfolding of my ordination process, play-by-play.

Those three things are what most of us want, I suspect. **One**, we want to know that our restlessness or our feeling drawn in a new direction is, indeed, a communication from GOD. **Two**, we want God to tell us clearly what it is that God wants us to do. **Three**, we want God to roll out a little video of the future, showing us what will happen at each critical juncture so that there are no unknowns.

Moses got one and two…So, I’m still going to hold out hope for those—if you see me staring at the greenery around Bedford, stop and watch…one of these days I’m expecting to see an eruption of flames… But, Moses didn’t get number three. He didn’t get the play-by-play of the future. So, unfortunately, I suspect we won’t either.

Instead, what Moses got was the promise that God would be with him. Things did not end up being easy for Moses. And yet, if we take the time to read through the remainder of the book of Exodus, we see clearly that God was with him. Moses goes to God with every worry and every unexpected event, and God is right there each time.

Now, I know that it’s highly unlikely that most of us will have an actual spoken conversation with God each time we encounter a challenge. But, for us, today, what I love about God’s assurance to Moses that he would be with him was the sign God promised of that companionship. God says, *"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."*

However challenging Moses’ journey would be, the sign for him that God was right there the whole time was that Moses would be moved to worship God on the mountain-top when it was all over.

This is what we are promised, too. Like Moses, we are promised that God will be with us. And Like Moses, we are promised that at some point we will know of that presence with such certainty, that we will be moved to worship God. To worship—to adore. The Hebrew word used here is ah-vad, and it is translated as either to worship, or to serve...I love that both of those translations are captured in the same Hebrew word since, in my experience, authentic service to God so often feels like the most glorious worship experience. As the writer and theologian Evelyn Underhill wrote, “Adoration [worship] is the central service asked by God of human souls. *It transfigures work and suffering. It purifies from sin. The moment we turn to adore, we cease to be alone. We share the very life of the angels and take our place in the Communion of Saints.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* Mountain-top worship…this is the sign that we are promised that God has been, that God IS still, with us.

So very often, the things I interpret as signs that God has “ordained” my path are the successes along the path. But, the sign that God promises is not success—the sign that God promises is that our service to God will overwhelmingly move us at some point to praise—adoration—worship. The sign that we have been doing the work God has asked of us, and being the people God calls us to be, is our own gratitude--gratitude welling up in us so powerfully that we can do nothing else but be taken over by it. Success or failure apparently gives us little information as to whether or not we are doing what God has called us to do. What gives us certainty, are the moments that our souls are in grateful peace.

I can tell you that this has been my own experience. The path to ordination was not easy. It was full of twists and turns, uncertainty and risk, successes…and real failures. However, now, almost day in and day out as I serve God in the particular vocation to which God has called *me*, I stand on top of the mountain, overflowing with boundlessly joyous praise for God, my soul at peace with gratitude. And that adoration I truly do experience as a certain sign that God has been with me, and still is.

Think back…have you had a mountain-top experience? Have you been so full of gratitude and adoration that you have had to just stop momentarily and offer it in some way to God? I so very much hope so, as it is a truly amazing feeling. This moment of deep gratitude was your sign that God had been with you and that you were, in some way, answering God’s call to you. This was your sign that you were doing God’s work, alongside God’s *own* self.

Each time you recall it…each time you literally re-member that gratitude, it is again, the powerful sign that God is still with you …As Underhill so perfectly captured it, the moment we are moved to turn and adore ….our suffering and work are transformed…we are purified from “sin”—from any separation we may feel from God and God’s adoring presence with us…and we cease to be alone.

So, do cultivate a practice of loosely holding successes and failures, while tightly holding the memory of these grateful moments …recall these moments for yourself from time to time….and each time a new one occurs, languish in it…for, God *is* with you there, and you are doing God’s work.

In all your uncertainty…in all your doubt…in all your confusion about what it is that God wants from you…may you, however fleetingly, feel the sign that God is with you, and throw your arms open in adoring praise. AMEN.

1. Evelyn Underhill, *The Ways of the Spirit*, p. 180 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)