

July 13, 2008
Exodus 3:1-3
“Turn aside and look”
Pastor Andy CastroLang

Exodus 3

3:1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

3:2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

3:3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

[The New Revised Standard Version](#)

I will step on an airplane on Friday, heading for Atlanta. It will take most of the day to get there, by way of O'Hare airport in Chicago.

In Atlanta, with 20 of my ministry peers and two professors from Wake Forest Divinity School, we will step onto another airplane and fly for about 12 hours til we arrive at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel. Tired out from the travel, we will get into a bus, drive a few hours to the Sea of Galilee, find our rooms at the “Pilgerhaus” (German for “pilgrims house”) there, and then, I imagine, drop into our beds!

Thus begins what I truly believe will be a holy opportunity, an amazing and unsought opportunity that has come to me; the opportunity rather like Moses, to “turn aside and look at this great sight”.

Life here at Westminster with all of you can be pretty exciting, and is amazing in many ways.

But the excitement, and depth of newness and strangeness that I will experience as a Pilgrim in the Holy Land, will be very great. I am sure of it!

I will walk a trail up to a cliff and look out over the Sea of Galilee, I will take a boat ride across that sea too. Imagine if you can, walking that shore and remembering the story of Jesus walking that shore, meeting Peter and his brother, Andrew; meeting the sons of Zebedee, James and John.

I will visit the hill where centuries of pilgrims have come to believe that Jesus sat and began to teach, saying: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled, blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Luke 6:20-21)

With my companions we will go to Nazareth, to Caesarea Philippi and the feet of Mount Hermon. We will drive through the valley of Megiddo (which is familiar to some as the famous site of the end times battle “Armageddon”) to get to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, we will see a bewildering array of sites: the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Wailing Wall, the Via Dolorosa, (the way of Jesus carrying the cross to Golgotha) and more. Jericho, the Dead Sea, the caves of the Qumran scrolls.

Yes, there will be a lot to “turn aside and look” at!

I feel honored to be included in such an opportunity. But I am not fooled, and neither should you be. Don’t be fooled for a minute!

Because, there is a message of warning in the story of Moses this morning. When we are willing to leave behind the comforts of home, the security of our known world, whether it is as a herder for a father-in-law, or a minister in Spokane taking an amazing journey – when we do this, then nothing stays the same.

Moses was forever changed by his encounter with the Holy and Mysterious God who spoke as a wonder and a marvel in the desert. He went places, he did things, amazing things; he became a leader, a powerhouse, a giant never to be forgotten. He was frightened, amazed, exhausted, and his life was charged with meaning in ways that had never happened to him before. And all because he was curious and willing to turn aside and look. Willing to listen to the power of new experience, learn from it, wrestle with it, and accept the changes brought by it.

This is no vacation I am on, my friends. I am not going to the Holy Land as a tourist: as an outsider to look at others, but be cocooned by my own life, language, culture and customs.

I expect to be shaken, amazed, changed. I don’t know how I will be changed; but I know it will happen! Being in the company of the Holy One, with focus and attention, with an open and a listening heart, does that to people!

If what we call “Holy Scripture” were just a series of rules, proverbs, maxims to live by, rules to govern community, guideposts for right living – I think we would have been bored to tears hundreds of years ago, and dumped it.

But there is so much more to Scripture; both the Hebrew texts and the Christian ones.

Is it the story of Moses, the giant figure of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? Could be.

Or his forefather Abraham, and Sarah his foremother; and their amazing wanderings, opportunities and challenges?

It could be the wild stories of Jael the killer of enemy generals and Deborah, the soldier leader of her people, or it could be King David. It could be Absalom, the son who betrayed David and broke his father’s heart.

It could be the story of Esther and Mordecai!

These are great tales, of men and women who were amazing and spirit filled and terribly flawed, but also courageous, open, astonished, and astonishingly like us too.

In every one of them, the divine spark of Yahweh burned! As mysterious and wonderful as a burning bush!

It burns in you. It burns in me.

Look around for it. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

***“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
And only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries”***

.Not just once long ago, but here, in our own seemingly mundane world, the fire of God is burning.

Look for it. Seek it. And when you find it, recognize the holy power of God therein.

It is not just in long ago wonders. It is around today, in every face, every moment, every place. It is there for those who will “turn aside and look”.

Take the time. Look around. In your office, or at a stop light. You don’t have to be in Israel, you can be in your backyard.

See the fire, the holy flame. Feel it. And may you be changed by it.

Amen.