Good morning. Here’s the plan.
I am not here to convince you of anything, or persuade you to do something. I am here to plant a shovel into the soil of Scripture, turn over a measure of that holy ground from which the LORD God made humanity, sift through it, and ponder with you what we uncover.

We are looking for what’s underneath.
We are looking for roots, for heart, for core, for the fire in the middle of things.

Now Moses was herding the stock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He had driven the stock beyond the outback and had come to the Mountain of God at Horeb when the messenger of YHWH made himself seen by him in flames of fire from the middle of the bush. And he saw—there!—the bush was burning with fire yet the bush was not consumed.

Moses sees a bush functioning as a hearth. The bush is not on fire; there’s a fire inside the bush.

You can take this account at face value. You can also take it to mean that on an ordinary day a man was going about his business when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, he glimpsed the wild raging vitality in the middle of things.

And Moses said,
“ I must turn aside to see this great sight
of why the bush is not burning up.
When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see,
God called out to him from the middle of the bush
and said,
“Moses, Moses.”

Moses, Moses. When a person in the Bible hears their name called twice, it’s serious. Abraham, Abraham. Samuel, Samuel, Saul, Saul.

Then Moses said,
“Here I am.”
Here I am. Moses didn’t start the fire, the fire of life, the alarm clock that jars us into awareness that there’s something more. The Pentecostal flame of fire, that burning thing that starts us on every new adventure. But when the call came, he responded, “Here I am. Present and accounted for. The first and most important step is always merely, fully, to show up. Here I am. I ain’t dead yet. What’s up, life?

Then the LORD said,
“Do not approach closer to here.
Remove the sandals from your feet
because the place where you stand
is holy ground.”

Remove your sandals. Don’t be tracking dirt into the sanctuary. Remove your comfort. Remove your filters and insulation and uniform and credentials. Holy ground is not a place you can colonize or tame or decorate to your liking.

Then the LORD said,
“I have seen, have seen the misery of my people in Egypt,
and their cry for help in facing their oppressors I have heard.

So now it gets even more serious. Once the spectacle of the fire gets our attention, and we see into the middle of things, we see, we hear, we become aware that there is misery, there is pain, there are cries for help. The spiritual fire is not for our self-enrichment; it’s designed to increase our load capacity for remaining present to oppression without losing hope.

I have seen; I have heard. It’s not about the special effects anymore. They did their job. They got Moses’ attention. But now it’s not about spectacle or warm feelings. It is about what God has seen, what God has heard.

The LORD continues:
Yes, now—right now!—the Israelites’ cry for help has come to me
and I have seen the oppression by which Egypt oppresses them.
And yes, now: Start walking.
I am sending you to Pharaoh
so that he will let my people Israel leave Egypt.”

But Moses said to the God,
“Who am I?
that I should walk up to Pharaoh
and then he will let the Israelites leave Egypt?”

And he said,
“Absolutely; I AM with you.”
Moses had initially said yes. Moses dared to enter the zone of holiness and step on holy ground . . . and there still was room for doubt, for resistance, for hesitation. Yet when Moses turns “here I am” into “Who am I that,” God does not rebuke him, but reveals a little more. Actually, it’s not a little more, it’s a lot more: the divine name.

Ehyeh asher ehyeh. I am who I am. says,  
The meaning of I AM who I AM is a mystery. It could mean I am “the One Who Is,” Ultimate Being.  
It could mean I am “the One Who Will Be,” Ultimate Mystery.  
I could mean I am “the One Who Makes Everything Happen, the one who I am’s,” Ultimate Creator.

Moses gets enough definition, just enough, to have a name, a relationship, but not enough to ever fathom the full meaning.

He said,  
“Thus you will say to the Israelites,  
‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

And God said something else to Moses,  
“Thus you will say to the Israelites,  
‘YHWH, the God of your fathers,  
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob  
has sent me to you.  
This is his name for always.  
This is his memorial for all generations.”

My memorial, my signature, my brand, my style for all generations: to always be with you and be ever elusive.

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Looking back at this, one of the Bible’s greatest stories, what occurred to me this time was the The Bush. Six times we hear about a bush. Not a bush picked out at and delivered from a nursery, not a bush carefully wrapped in cheesecloth bound with a really long cord to retain its curves during the winter. But a bushy bush, a disorganized green and brown mess of twig and leaf.

Moses sees creation’s fire in the middle of a bush.  
In a bush, not at the Grand Canyon at sundown, not in Yellowstone when magma fire from the middle of the earth sneezes a geyser out form a geologic hot spot.  
Moses sees the miracle of being in the middle of a bush.

So we have our subject: seeing into the middle of things.

If we could see into the middle of things, What would we see?
In the middle of things we’d see the miracle of being, that there is something instead of nothing, that we and all creation got invited to the party. the miracle of this bounty we call life.

what did albert einstein say: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

in the middle of things is fire. How could it be otherwise? After all, the music of life on our planet is produced by a cosmic Sun studio. Goodness gracious, as volcanos and hot springs testify, the earth is a great ball of fire. in the middle of things is a ring that burns, burns, burns.

Seeing the grown-up seed already inside each child, seeing the childself in each grownup we encounter.

Seeing the circle of seasons and knowing we are a part of it, that we won’t bloom and grow, bloom and grow forever, and so gaining wisdom and compassion as we number our days.

By the way, I keep talking about seeing. This kind of seeing is not about eyesight; it’s about soulsight; it’s Stevie Wonder-sight.

Seeing the miracles; and hearing—this story is about hearing too—hearing the cries.

It was just another day of herding goats in the Sinai outback. Till Moses saw, till Moses heard.

in the middle of things, we see the miracle, and we hear the cries.

Cries from Houston, cries from Yemen. We would hear the disturbing Cries from neighbors in East Rock assaulted on a Sunday afternoon in August. We would hear Cries from Dixwell, from the valley west of Prospect Street’s peak, cries that remind us that we are a single community, that our prosperity and health must be a common-wealth.

Seeing into the middle of things translates to God-awareness.

God awareness means walking around awake to miraculous sights, God awareness means hearing the cries of the oppressed.

God awareness means daring to stand face-to-face with the spectacular glory of a solar corona and the unbearably painful totality of eclipsed hopes.
That’s a lot. And it would be much easier to forget it all and go shopping.

To hold, to bear, to keep eyes to the fire and ears open too the cries,
To accept the amor and the dolor, the love and the sorrow.
The wonder and the shudder.

Seeing into the middle of things all by ourselves would be impossible. How could we bear such poetry and pain by our lonesome?

But we are not alone. I am is with us. And we are with each other.

There’s another old Bible story, about how a group of brokenhearted, disappointed disciples found themselves in a house in the Palestinian village of Emmaus. And a stranger among them took bread, blessed and broke it. and passed the bread to them.

and then . . . the disciples saw into the middle of things.

their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and then he vanished.

and then they said to each other, “did not our hearts burn within us.”

As we prepare to restage that meal, I invite you to see into the middle of our ritual, to see the fiery core of everything in the simplest elements; and to see into the middle of our human community, to see the wonder and vulnerability of those with whom we share this meal.