

“How Does the Burning Bush Challenge Us?”

Exodus 3:1–12

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Last Tuesday, the Church Council had a monthly meeting to discuss and review our church ministries and future plans. One of the agenda items that captured my attention was the subject of “soft promotion of our church.” Echoing today’s Scripture reading, we shared ideas focusing on this question: **“Moses was drawn to the burning bush. How can we make our faith/church attractive like a burning bush?”** We brainstormed about how we can effectively reach out to our community as Methodists. And we will continue to explore how to make ourselves attractive to our community as God’s burning bush. We especially want to reach out to those who are eager to seek God’s presence and those who have never heard about God’s love as a spiritually inviting place to abide in. I want to thank Helena, the chair of the Council, and Loren Guffey, our Sunday adult Bible class leader, who introduced this great question to us and stimulated us with this good challenge. This morning, I want to invite you to reflect on the metaphor of the burning bush, not only in relation to your own life situation but also in relation to our church’s mission and purpose.

Today’s Scripture reading is about God’s calling for Moses, who was asked to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt to a promised land. Frankly, Moses wasn’t a perfectly prepared leader for God’s great mission, but unexpectedly and surprisingly he was called to be a leader. He thought that he wasn’t ready, but God thought he was ready. And God decided to use his gift and talent to carry out God’s mission. In our Scripture reading, Moses met God in a burning bush in the wilderness for the first time. What attracts you the most in this mysterious image of Moses’ first encounter with God? The burning bush! In ancient Israel, bushes were ordinary things. They spread out and grow anywhere, in many of the places where Moses was guiding sheep and goats here and there. God appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush, and the bush was blazing but yet it was not consumed. What does God want us to learn and realize from this story? The key point is **God’s appearance in an ordinary place.**

I want to tell you a little bit more about the background of this story. The Israelites lived in Egypt for four hundred years as slaves to the Egyptians. God observed the misery and suffering of His people, so He decided to deliver them from the Egyptians to a promised land. God found Moses and called him using the burning bush. Friends, notice that at that time Moses was about eighty years

old. He was an elderly man! But know that there is no age limit and no other conditions required to be a great leader for God. God can use me and any of you as He used Moses. Who was Moses? He wasn't a great model of a successful man. Instead, his life was pitiful and filled with identity confusion. He was born as one of the Hebrew people but was adopted and lived for forty years in an Egyptian royal family. He had to flee out of Egypt into the Midian wilderness when he was accused of a murder. He lived another forty years there. He called himself an alien in a foreign country for forty years. But that didn't matter to God. God used Moses and his life to carry out His great plan.

What does God want us to learn from Moses? Spiritual curiosity and sensitivity to God's presence! That's why God chose him! I want you to be aware of Moses' reaction when he observed the burning bush. When he saw the mysterious sight of a burning bush that wasn't being consumed by the fire, he didn't pass on by. Instead, he said, "What is going on?" and "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burning up." Then, God reminded him that he was entering 'holy ground.' God asked him to take off his shoes. Moses had a holy moment of meeting God and was reminded of his mission in the presence of God. Moses was spiritually sensitive to God's presence. This was what God expected him to possess to be ready to lead his people. This was Moses's spiritual experience, and he was assured of God's presence as he led his people out of Egypt. ***Don't you think God would want us to have spiritual curiosity and sensitivity like Moses did? Do you feel God's presence in yourself and in your daily life?***

Last Tuesday night, after the long Council meeting, I came home about 9:00 pm. When I opened the door, I saw my two boys running towards my master bedroom with a joyful shout. I hope that you will understand one of my boys' favorite things. They love to play hide-and-seek with me! My task is always to locate them and find them in their hiding places. Some of you might remember the story in which I had to tuck my whole body into a small clothes closet to hide myself while playing hide-and-seek. I still do this! They really enjoy playing this game. Their most favorite hiding place is my wife Youngjae's clothes closet in our master bedroom. When I entered the room, the room was quiet, and I saw Joshua hiding himself underneath the upholstered footstool. It seemed that he hadn't had enough time to hide with his brother in the closet. Joshua and I happened to make eye contact. He looked disappointed and said, "Daddy, you cannot find me! I am a rock! Please go to the church, and can I try again? While I was talking with Joshua, I heard some rustling noise coming out of the clothes closet and saw that the clothes were moving. Jacob was making this noise to draw my attention to him! Holding Joshua in my arms, I approached the clothes closet and tried to find Jacob there. He tried to keep

himself hiding by moving here and there inside the hanging clothes! Obviously, he messed up the whole closet, stepping over paper boxes and Youngjae's clothes!

While I was preparing today's message, my boy's hide-and-peek game overlapped with the image of Moses's burning bush. The Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) said, "Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy." I found both blessing and holiness in my boys while I was playing with them. In a similar way, what Moses found in the burning bush was the mysterious sight of God's presence. When Moses was very curious and tried to see more by coming closer to the burning bush, God warned him not to come closer but to stay out of the bush because, God said, the place where Moses was standing was holy ground. The meaning of the burning bush is God's holiness and presence, and it always draws us to be spiritually curious about God's fascinating presence in us and around us. Moses found God's holiness and presence not in an extraordinary place but in one of the common bushes near him in the wilderness. Perhaps, like a hide-and-peek game, God maybe is a hidden mystery and a surprise gift for us, close to us and waiting to be found by us. This could be anywhere and anytime, either in our worship hour or in our daily lives.

I want to challenge you to think of Fair Oaks United Methodist Church as God's burning bush for our neighbors and for those who are eager to be connected to God to quench their spiritual hunger. The burning bush doesn't mean a bush that is blazing with fire and then consumed. It is a special bush that will draw people in to come and watch it. This metaphor refers to our passion and enthusiasm to share God's holiness and compassion. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, and his followers often emphasized our Methodist spirit in the expression, "Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn."¹ Friends, the challenge to us from the story of Moses is that the church is not called to be merely a shade tree for ourselves where we can rest and enjoy the summer breeze. Our worship is not prepared only to entertain our souls; it is prepared to affirm our faith and witness the love of God for *everyone*. Truly, the Church is a burning bush filled with passion and enthusiasm to spread God's holiness. We are called to be the messengers for the good news of God's joy, love, holiness, and justice through our passion and mission.

I hope that our Sunday worship will be your 'holy ground' where you see and experience God's burning desire to love everyone. Spiritually tune yourself

¹ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Wesley Accessed July 28 2017

in to God as God appears to you on any channel. God will appear to you unexpectedly, at anytime and anywhere. Just open your heart and be curious and sensitive to God's presence in your soul. Amen.