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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
February 23, 2014
7th Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: 1 Peter 1:3-21; Luke 7:1-10
Hymns: 21; 779; 398; 50:2 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Exodus 3:1-6

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

4 So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." 6 Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: “Familiarity breeds contempt.”

This axiom has stood the test of time. There are many regulations within government and private organizations that are expressions of this. Fraternizing between enlisted men and officers in the military is not allowed. Work place relationships are often discouraged by corporations, if not outright banned. It just leads to trouble because “**familiarity breeds contempt.**” When there is a breakdown in respect and the distance between those in charge and those who are being supervised, or those being governed become too familiar with those above them, then it doesn’t take long before human nature leads people to question “why”. Why should I listen to him, or her? What makes this or that person superior to me?

Now consider the grace and love of our God. In His grace God reaches out to us. It is His desire to bridge the gulf, the great expanse which man’s sin injected into the perfect harmonious relationship that existed between the Creator and the crown of His creation in man. By nature, that is the fallen nature of man, God is seen with distrust and suspicion. The Scriptures tell us it is even more than that, it is animosity, and enmity. And yet once man is invited to return to the household of God where peace and harmony are restored, all too often we find a lack of reverence and respect for the most holy God. People who have been called into this grace, people like us, often begin to take our Savior God for granted. There comes a generational slip, each passing generation slips a little more in respect for God, in reverence for God and His Word, and the hearing of it.

In our text this morning the Spirit would lead us a renewed appreciation of --

THEME: The Holy Ground upon We Stand.

Without doubt this incident in the life of Moses is not one we should expect in our lives the Lord intervened in the life of Moses in a supernatural way with the Angel of the Lord appearing to Moses in the burning bush. Moses had an amazing thing set before him. But that is where there is a similarity with our lives. Just as Moses had an amazing thing set before him by the Lord, so also --

I. An Amazing Thing Is Set Before Us.

Exodus 3:1-3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

Moses had spent the last forty years of his life working as a shepherd for his father-in-law. He had left the formalities and luxury of Pharaoh's palace far behind for this simple life where no one noticed him.

But that wasn't true. God noticed Moses, and God had a plan for Moses, and the remaining years of his life. It was at this mountain of God called Horeb that God revealed Himself to Moses in this remarkable incident.

It was an amazing sight that caught Moses' attention. He saw this bush and observed that in spite of the fire the bush was not being consumed. He did what any of us might have done. Being drawn in by natural curiosity Moses came near to the bush to see why it was not consumed. Present in that fire was the Angel of the Lord, the very Son of God, who had come to speak with Moses, and appeared in this amazing manner. God chose this way to make Himself known to Moses and to deliver to Moses the mission and purpose for Moses' life.

It is good for us to remember that Moses was eighty years old when God called Moses to his life's mission. God may use a variety of incidents that come into our lives to get our attention, but most often it is an ordinary thing common among people that the Lord uses to get our attention and lend direction to our lives. What is amazing is that the Lord takes note of us, not just as a people, but as individuals. The Lord reveals Himself to us in His holiness! But **we are not consumed!** The Lord reveals Himself to us in His grace and love. In spite of our sin, in spite of our unworthiness, the Lord comes to us in His Word, and reveals to us all the wonders of God

that we might comprehend through faith who He is, and what He has done for us in Christ Jesus.

In this revelation God also presents to us our calling, our purpose for being here alive on this earth. And whether we are eight or eighty, the Lord calls us to serve Him and His people. He sends us with a message even more glorious than Moses took back to Egypt. While Moses was to bring the children of Israel a message of deliverance from slavery in Egypt, we have been entrusted to deliver a message of liberation from the slavery of sin and death.

What we often fail to recognize is how personal this is, that --

II. Our God Speaks to Us in His Holiness.

God made this perfectly clear with Moses.

Exodus 3:4-6 “So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, ‘Here I am.’ 5 Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ 6 Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”

God called Moses by name, and Moses had to acknowledge the Lord! Then God made it clear that He was holy, that this place was holy, that Moses was standing in the presence of the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, indeed the **most holy God**. Moses realized the glory of the Lord, and he was overwhelmed by it. He was afraid to look upon the God.

These are truths which we also need to comprehend for ourselves. God speaks to us also. Even as the Lord knew Moses and called him by name, and revealed Himself as the God of his fathers, whom the Lord knew personally, so the Lord knows you personally and calls you by name. He calls you for He desires that you should hear the message that He has prepared for you. No, we don't hear His voice as Moses did, but He speaks to us nonetheless! He speaks to us in His Word. Before we dismiss this

as being something much less than the glorious presentation of the Word which Moses experienced at the burning bush on Mount Horeb, we should recall the truth about Holy Scripture. **It is God speaking to us in His Word.** It is not as many would have you believe, merely the writing of men and what ideas and even superstitions they imagined in their hearts and minds. NO, not at all! God speaks to us in His holiness through these prophets, apostles, and evangelists. **“Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit!”**(2 Peter 1:21).

The message is from God, every last word of it! It tells us of the holy will of a holy God. It speaks to us of the righteousness of God, a righteousness which He imparts to us by grace through faith, for Jesus’ sake!

We already mentioned how Moses hid His face as God revealed Himself to Moses. There is more for us to learn from this incident. The Lord directed Moses in His behavior toward God. Moses’ response was to --

III. Honor the Gory of the LORD.

Exodus 3: 5 “Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’”

God directed Moses to keep his distance, and not come too close for this was holy ground. Moses who became closer in his relationship to God than any other mortal man, knew enough to honor the Lord’s warning, and to keep his distance. The Lord also told Moses to remove his sandals, his shoes, out of reverence for the Lord, and **Moses was reverent and humble before the Lord.** He remained that way for the next forty years as he led the people of Israel out of Egypt and through the years of wandering in the wilderness. Moses was very close to the Lord, but **that familiarity never became contempt.** Moses treasured the relationship He had with the Lord for it was a gift of grace. It was a special gift indeed.

Do we even understand such reverence and know what it is any more today? We are not coming to the Lord on Mount Horeb, but the Lord is present with us, and He has presented His holy will to

us, and He has honored us with this revelation that we might know Him, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. We should hold a deep reverence in our hearts, an abiding respect for the God of our salvation. We should show that respect in our manner and behavior when we come before the Lord. Whether we are at home opening our Bibles, or turning to the Lord in prayer, or coming here to church to hear the Word and praise our God, reverence should be evident for any and all to see, including the Lord, who searches the heart!

Our culture is different in America today than the days of Moses in the Middle East. We no longer remove our shoes as a sign of respect. But we do remove our hats, and we are careful to be presentable, that we dress appropriately, so that we look respectable when we come before the Lord in church. It is a matter of reverence for that which is holy, for our God is holy, and our God is gracious to save! It is our honor to glorify Him and praise His holy name, and hear the Word of the Lord. We are honored to be invited to come before Him and hear of His gracious good will for us. So we behave accordingly while we are here in church, in the sanctuary of God. We are properly comported, and ready to hear and obey. We don't just hear, we listen, for the words that come to us from God are the words of life.

CONCLUSION: And so we hold the Lord in reverent awe! God is far and distant from the masses of humanity who have never heard His Word, or worse, have spurned His Word. But for those who have been called, and so draw near to the Lord, we have received a special gift. The Lord has declared that He is our God, and that we are His people. He has initiated a close personal relationship with us. He has adopted us as His children and made us heirs of everlasting life. Let us never take this grace for granted. Let us never allow that generational slip to come into our families. Let us pray for the strength to be steadfast and true, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Let us pray that the Spirit would keep us humble and always holding the Lord in that holy awe, that reverence that glorifies His holy name, until that day when we shall sing His praises with all the holy angels in the mansions of heaven.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.