

Worship at Home for August 30 2020

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please call or email me directly:
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In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Centering Prayer

Turn us to you, Loving God, as flowers turn to the sun.
Focus our hearts and minds on your praise and your presence,
as the hummingbird focuses on the nectar that sustains it.
Be with us as we worship on our couches, in our kitchens,
separate from one another, but never without you.
Amen

Opening Music: "Come, Christians Unite"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWAq6dXEhDA>

Opening Prayer

Ageless God, throughout time you have called to us,
demanding our attention, sending messages of love and hope.
You walked with the first ones, with Adam and Eve,
you visited our ancestors in faith, Abram and Sarai, with promises.
You led your people through the wilderness –
helping them notice you in clouds and fire.
You sent Jesus to focus our vision and point us to you.
Continue to change our focus and direction, Holy One,
and help us to notice your presence and your way.
This we pray in Jesus name – who continues to draw us to you.
Amen

Scripture Exodus 3:1-15 Moses at the Burning Bush

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. 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. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, '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 at God.

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' He said, '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.'

But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you." ' God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you":

This is my name for ever,
and this my title for all generations.

Reflection

During our time of enforced staying at home, my sons have complained that it can be difficult to get my attention, and that I am often distracted by email or phone messages, even in the midst of a conversation or watching television together. I will admit that it has sometimes been difficult to concentrate, and that sometimes I needed an 'exceptional' reason to draw my focus and my attention away from tasks.

In our scripture passage from Exodus, we find Moses – who has run away from his life in Pharaoh's court, and who has built another life outside the city. He has morphed from Hebrew babe to adopted royalty to murderer to sheep-tender. His attention has not been on the plight of his people, left behind when he left the court, but perhaps on the more mundane tasks of helping his father-in-law care for the family 'business' of raising and tending flocks. Probably Moses was not looking for God, or expecting God to 'show up' in his vicinity.

But God needs to get Moses' attention, God has a plan in which Moses will play a central role, and chooses the extraordinary ever-burning bush to draw Moses' gaze and direct his feet. Perhaps Moses needed to encounter something so out-of-the-ordinary that he could not turn away, but was compelled to meet the very presence of God.

The story of Moses' life and leadership is firmly entrenched in our society's awareness. Even those who do not share the Jewish, Christian or Islamic faith in which Moses is a central figure have likely encountered at least part of his story in art, film or in images like the baby in the basket, the burning bush, the plagues of Egypt, the Red Sea parted, the tablet-bearing and tablet-smashing. In this larger-than-life story, it is easy to forget that there was a moment when God simply needed to get Moses' attention.

Our own stories and journeys of faith are perhaps not as large as this one! Yet I believe that God still has work for us to do in this world, God is still trying to get our attention, and that God still calls out to us and waits for our "here I am" in response. My faith tells me that God still leads us into encounters with the extraordinary, where we may find ourselves on 'holy ground.'

Perhaps God gets our attention when we read or hear a story of great compassion or sacrifice – many of which have been shared during these pandemic times. The 'ground' of many care facilities and nursing homes became holy as lives were lost and others stepped forward to offer care. Front doors became 'holy ground' as friends and neighbours – and sometimes strangers – dropped off groceries or other needed items.

Maybe we are inspired and drawn to encounter God through music created virtually, like choir members or orchestra members recording from their homes and edited together to create the whole. Perhaps God redirects us when we see art turned into cloth face masks, or depictions of hope painted on buildings. Our computers, tablets, phones and televisions become part of God's 'holy ground' where deeper faith and inspiration may be found.

I know some people would say that God 'got their attention' when they have been exposed to the real and disturbing struggles with systemic racism endured by our Black and Indigenous siblings. Burning buildings in protests become like Moses' burning bush – an opportunity for our focus to become riveted so that change and liberation may follow.

How does God get YOUR attention today? What is God calling you to see, or recognize?

Ultimately, after this encounter, Moses' story becomes one of action. Not without God's help, not without God's presence and urging, not without faith. May our attention continually be drawn to and focused on the great "I AM" – the one who loves us and calls us, the one who meets us in Christ and surrounds us in Spirit, the one who can surprise us. Amen

Music: "I, the Lord of Sea and Sky"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhTpjdrLf0s>

Prayers of the People

Loving God, today we remember all that connects us as your people –
a commitment to justice and caring for one another
a yearning for peace and wholeness
a yearning to be able to gather
a dedication to facing evil with good.

Thank you for relationships that help us to be and do our best.

Thank you, God, for those who teach us, lead us, care for us, serve us, and work to make our lives full and rich.

We pray for those with whom we have special bonds of friendship, faith, and community.

We remember those with whom we have shared the work of our church, and the work of facing the evils of our time.

We are grateful, Holy Source, for the many ways we can connect with the world despite these pandemic times. The spoken word still reaches us through our computers and television sets, the written word is still powerful whether we read a paper book or one on a device. News and opinions flow freely and quickly.

We offer our prayers, God, for those who do not feel connected, or those who feel that their stories and truths are not told. Give us courage to search for those stories and listen openly, give strength to those still working to have their stories included.

We pray for those who are on our minds and in our hearts – especially where there is illness, or worry, grief and uncertainty.

We pray for those needing our actions, our service, our compassion, and our willingness to stand with them and overcome evils with good.

Living God, we put our trust in you—

help us to risk disappointment, risk failure,

as we follow you and work with hope and in Jesus' name. Amen.

Closing music: Courtney Patton - Take Your Shoes Off Moses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFe8k5ZrAFs>

Blessing

Go with God, who waits to surprise us,
and with Jesus, upon whom our attention rests,
and with the Holy Spirit, who attends us.
Amen