The Ground Beneath Your Feet

Exodus 3:1–15 | Matthew 16:21–28

Moses could have walked right past it. He wasn't looking for a revelation. He was tending his father-in-law's sheep, leading them beyond the wilderness, when something caught his attention. A bush was on fire, but it wasn't burning up. So Moses stopped. “I must turn aside and look.”

Then comes a detail I had read many times without paying much attention to it. “When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush.” “Moses, Moses.” “Here I am.” “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

The bush was burning before Moses noticed it. But listen to what God says next. “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt.” “I have heard their cry.” “I know their sufferings.” “I have come down to deliver them.”

Moses turned aside because he noticed a burning bush. Then he discovered that God had already noticed Israel.

Before Moses saw the fire, God had seen the people. Before Moses heard a voice from the bush, God had heard the cries of slaves in Egypt. Moses is only beginning to understand what is happening. God already knows their suffering.

And God has not come simply to comfort Moses in the wilderness. God intends to free an enslaved people. The holy ground beneath Moses' feet leads straight toward people whose cries God has heard.

I think there are times when we need to know that. You can pray about something for so long that you begin to wonder whether anything is happening. You can worry about someone you love and have no idea how to help. Grief can stay with you much longer than other people realize. Somewhere in all of that, a question can creep in: Does God see this?

Exodus doesn't give Moses an explanation for suffering. It gives him God. “I have seen.” “I have heard.” “I know.”

And then God sends Moses back toward Egypt. That is about the last place Moses would have chosen to go. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” God never tells Moses that he has underestimated himself. There is no speech about discovering his potential. God simply says: “I will be with you.”

Then we come to Peter. Last Sunday we heard Peter say what no one else had yet managed to say clearly: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Then Jesus tells them where he is going. Jerusalem. He will suffer there. He will be killed. And on the third day he will be raised. Peter pulls Jesus aside. “This must never happen to you.”

It's hard for me to fault him for that. He loves Jesus. He has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah. Now Jesus is describing a future Peter cannot fit into anything he believes a Messiah should be.

Moses encounters something he cannot understand and moves closer. Peter encounters something he cannot understand and pulls back.

I know both reactions. There are places where recognizing God comes easily. Then life takes a turn and we think, *Surely this cannot be where God is.*

That doesn't make suffering sacred. Cancer is still cancer. Grief hurts. Evil remains evil. But suffering does not create a place where God cannot reach us.

Peter looks toward Jerusalem and sees the cross. He seems unable to hear the rest of Jesus' sentence. Jesus has already said, “on the third day.” Resurrection is there before Peter can imagine it.

Most of us eventually find ourselves sitting somewhere thinking, *This isn't how I thought this would go.*

We would like a map from there. Moses doesn't get one. Neither does Peter. Moses hears, “I will be with you.” Peter hears, “Follow me.”

And Jesus is already going.

He doesn't point Peter toward Jerusalem from a safe distance. He walks there himself. He enters the suffering Peter fears. He goes all the way into death. Then comes the part Peter could not yet see.

Resurrection.

There may be some ground beneath your feet today that you would not have chosen. You may not be able to see very far from there. That is different from being abandoned.

Before Moses noticed the bush, God had already noticed Israel. Before Peter understood the road to Jerusalem, Jesus was already walking it. Neither man's understanding started God's work. And neither does ours.

So when you cannot see what God is doing, you don't have to pretend that you can. Stand where you are. Tell the truth about what hurts. Remember what Moses heard: “I will be with you.”

And look where Christ has gone. Through suffering. Through death. Into life.

Look down.

You may already be standing on holy ground.

Amen.