



## The Burning Bush

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

August 30, 2020

Whenever we become ill, our mothers taught us to stay home, rest, drink plenty of fluids, and when symptoms become severe or lasting, to consult our doctors. But where the flu lasts 24-48 hours, a cold's symptoms may be with us for a week or two, we have already endured this pandemic for 6 months so far. Waiting, worrying, washing our hands while praying the Lord's Prayer, wondering if we are asymptomatic, when we will be able to live normally again. We often think of TRAUMA as being sudden: A bad fall, an accident, a crisis. But TRAUMA can also be living in anxiety, feeling isolated/oppressed by not being able to do what we want to do, to go where we want to go. We have been/are living in trauma.

We have a tendency to condense history, looking for the Reader's Digest version of what happened. In the Book of Exodus, we go from the Hebrews being Slaves oppressed by Pharaoh in Egypt; crossing the Red Sea, then as Israel searching for the Promised Land. But this overlooks what God originally sought, what Moses asked Pharaoh to allow: to "Let My People Go to WORSHIP God on God's Holy Mountain."

Moses had grown up in a world burning with trauma and anxiety. The former Pharaoh had attempted to kill all male Hebrew babies, yet Moses lived. Pharaoh's own daughter had found and adopted the baby begging the question and gossip throughout Moses' life, whether she found the baby in the bulrushes or whether she SAID she found the baby in the bulrushes? The next Pharaoh was more harsh and oppressive, believing himself to be a God. Ultimately, Moses had an identity crisis snap when he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and Moses killed the Egyptian burying the body. Fleeing Egypt with Pharaoh pursuing, Moses was an escaped Murderer. Crossing into the country of Midian, he married Zipporah the daughter of a prominent local family and all he needed to do was to keep his head down and follow the sheep. Stay out of trouble, do not ask questions, do not attract attention, hide in anonymity. How people at the Pharaoh's Palace in Egypt would have laughed, to see the high and mighty Hebrew, Moses, herding sheep!

AND THEN GOD places this burning bush in Moses' peripheral vision. One of the factors that sets Moses apart is he takes notice of incongruities, he questions reality, Moses cannot leave well enough alone. Of all the flocks and all the shepherds in all the wilderness, Moses is the only one to stop and take notice. According to the Park Rangers at the Grand Canyon: the average visitor spends only 8 to 15 minutes looking at the South Rim of the Canyon. When Judy and I took our sons, we travelled for days to get there. Imagine after days of travel, spending 10-15 minutes or less, seeing what you came to witness, one of the 7 Natural Wonders of the World, a once in a lifetime sight. How much less distracting would a burning bush in the wilderness be, to a shepherd watching over his father-in law's sheep? This summer is not yet over and how many fires have we had started by a burning bush ignited by lightning in the wilderness?

Fifteen years ago, the Washington Post conducted a study. On a weekday morning in Washington DC, they asked a man to go into the Metro Station and play the violin. The man played 5 pieces by Bach over a 45 minute period. They estimated over 1,100 people passed through that Subway station during rush-hour. After about 3 minutes, one man did slow his steps, stopped to listen, then hurried on his way. A minute later, a woman threw some coins into his violin case. The one person who paid the most attention was a

3 year old child; the mother pulled at the child's hand, but the child continued to stare back and to listen. In that entire 45 minutes, only 6 people stopped to listen. When he finished, no one applauded, no one seemed to notice as silence took over. Inside the case was \$32. The violinist, Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world. Two nights before he had played at a sold out theater where seats ranged from \$100-1,000. Moses questioned reality, questioned incongruities.

I want to thank Carla in the Church Office for her selection of the Bulletin image this morning, because growing up in the Presbyterian Church, the Burning Bush was simple symbol, a line-drawing like Alpha and Omega, but this image allows us to consider Moses being pushed back, pushed to his knees by the fire. Set aside Cecil B. deMille's Charleston Heston-version of Moses; or better yet recall that for Moses' brother Aaron, whom Moses wanted to speak for him, Cecil B. deMille cast Edward G. Robinson! When Moses questions what he should say about who this voice is, this was not just an innocuous question. Like Jacob's Wrestling before him, Moses here is an escaped Murderer wrestling for control of life with God! Moses was plotting insurrection against Pharaoh! Moses was considering, if he did this how he could go back again across the desert to Egypt without being caught? How could he steal the slaves that made Pharaoh powerful? Moses was questioning who this voice is, how powerful, whether for good or evil? God's reply to Moses, when Moses first encounters the bush as a conduit for God, is to tell Moses to take off his shoes because this is Holy Ground. Moses has been a man without a country, an alien in foreign worlds, whether in Egypt or Midian. So taking off your shoes is to be in touch in relationship with the ground beneath our feet. In many of our homes, taking your shoes off is identification "You are Home", you are safe in this place. I know several of us have begun allowing friends into our bubble. While we wear masks out in the world, coming into our home we are in control of allowing others to take off their masks.

I recall right after beginning Seminary, coming home for the first holiday and my father asking "What the latest ideas were at Seminary about the Name of God?" Never before had it occurred to me that there might be new ideas or interpretations of what the Name of God meant! I recall responding "I Am What I Am" and my father said "That's Popeye the Sailor! This is not about canned Spinach, What does the name of God mean to you?" To name something, means that you have relationship to it and power over that thing. In its simplest form, if I were to call out for Zedekiah and Rose, they might answer me, because I called you by name. In school and the Military when taking attendance, they called us by name and we replied "Present" or "Here" to denote that we showed up and were ready. But even more, a Name is a clue into the soul and being of that other. Diane said a few weeks ago, the spiritual name she loves is Caleb. Never before Judaism had there been a religion claiming there is only one true God. The word PAGAN in the Bible could mean that Canaanite or Roman or Greek peoples did not have any faith in God, or that they believed in a whole other reality of Gods. What does it mean to us perhaps 8,000 years after Abraham, that to us God is The Creator? Is God still creating today? What does it mean to us 6,000 years after Moses/ 2000 years after Jesus of Nazareth, that God is our Redeemer, Savior, Liberator, Messiah? What does it mean in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for us to believe in the Holy Ghost? Even more, because there is One God, the same God whom we pray to for Peace, for Hope, for Health and Comfort, is the scoundrel of a God who allowed the World Trade Center destruction, who created a Hitler. How do we reconcile that God is all of this?

Over time, with identification of a Priesthood and Temple Worship in Judaism, the name of God YHWH became identified as being so very sacred humans were never to pronounce it. When in Judaism the Bible had this name, they pronounced it Adonia. If in Latin, you combine the Consonants of YHWH with the vowels of Adonia, the result is Jehovah. In the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the publishers agreed that wherever the text had the name of God in Hebrew YHWH, they translated this as LORD.

The point of this Scripture, is we cannot philosophyze about who or what exactly God is. Moses, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before him, learned that "to know God you need to quit following sheep and follow God." Faith is full-contact participation, you have to take risks, reach for something unachievable. SO my question to you is "What are your Big Questions of God?" "Stopping on this Holy Ground, what do you need to Question?" "Where is God calling you?" And do not try to give me, I am 96 years old, what could I do, because you have accomplished miracles in your life. Where is God calling our church to go? Most of us do not see ourselves as Miracle Workers or Superheroes of Faith. But if we read our Bibles we recognize very few of the characters God uses are who we think of as heroes, most are scoundrels like us.