

Exodus 3 + Matthew 16
standing on holy ground
The 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time September 3, 2017
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We are all familiar with the saying: “God’s ways are not our ways”. Or “God works in mysterious ways.” We use it to explain what is beyond our understanding and especially beyond our control. It helps to explain those things that occur that we can’t explain. Often it’s with a chuckle : How did those two ever get together? “God works in mysterious ways!” We say this about all kinds of things even when they don’t have much to do with God. Who would ever think that crazy kid would ever amount to anything much less a pastor? “God’s ways are not our ways!” Mac the Mattress Man in Houston, known for screaming at you, did what? Opened all his stores to flooded out neighbors, fed and clothed them and used his trucks to pick them out of the water?

“God works in mysterious ways!” Funny or not, it’s a helpful reminder, and nowhere is it more true than with the stories of Moses and Peter.

After all you know the background of Moses, right? The little baby floating in a basket is saved by those courageous, deceptive mid-wives and equally courageous loving daughter of an evil King who adopts the little Hebrew baby as her son, against all convention and at great risk. Indeed. “God works in mysterious ways!” But we are not done. The young man Moses comes upon an Egyptian assaulting an enslaved Hebrew. His roots Hebrew roots flair up with violence and compassion. It’s a murderous combination that leads Moses to kill the oppressor and send him forever in a new direction. “God’s ways are not our ways.” But **still** we are not done with Moses - or God.

Living in exile now far from his pampered life as Pharaoh’s son, Moses has settled into a different life, tending sheep and wandering the hills quietly. Who knows what passed through his mind that day when the bush appeared as if on fire. In fact, for all purposes it was on fire - spiritual if not physical fire, or both - and the fire did not go out. Perhaps he blinked a few times. Still it remained aglow. Wonder of wonders Moses did not walk away, dismissing it all as a delusion on a hot day. What he did was pay attention, full attention. And once he was locked in, God began to work with this murderer, raised by God’s enemies, now tending sheep. And of course we can only say “God works in mysterious ways!” ***You are standing on holy ground, take off your shoes.***

It all begins when Moses dares to pay attention and listen. God speaks and Moses not only listens, but engages God in a struggle to understand - not only who God is but what is this encounter all about. This we know is the heart of calling for each of us. First, you pay attention. Then you listen. Then you engage mightily with all the questions that rise up in your heart, including God! Who are you? And Moses wants to know who am I - to be with you on this holy ground?

I am who I am says God - which is an unsettling answer that leaves us in awe. This God - who defies our control - is the one who hears the cries of the people in misery. Then comes the call. It seems to me that whenever you pay attention for God and listen carefully, it leads to a call into the world filled with God’s people in misery. There appears this inextricable relationship between

God's deep compassion and God's call for you to join in that compassion. Frederick Buechner once said *"the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and world's deep hunger meet."*

It's not clear that either Moses or Peter were glad initially in the calling they received. Neither will that be true initially for you and me, but I do believe that there is no greater gladness than living in tune with your calling from God. Moses went where he never imagined possible and the result was the liberation of a people. "God works in mysterious ways." If God can work with a murderer, who doesn't speak so well, and often doubts himself, then don't you think God can work with you?

And Peter! He wants no part of Jesus' path. The only ways that Peter knows are human ways and he dares to tell him so. If you ever want to know how Jesus' puts a person in his place, this might be a good place to start. Get behind me Satan he tells his friend Peter. Your eyes are set on the wrong things. My way is an upside down way. When you lose your grip on the ways of this world; when you cease to believe that your security is your success, when you let go of plans and trust wholly in me - then you will find your life rich, full and overflowing with joy. How is this even possible, you might ask as Peter did? "God's ways are not our ways!"

Indeed, Peter like Moses before him, is baffled by the inscrutable ways of God. He cannot understand that the way of Jesus includes deep suffering, even death as the path to the world's redemption. Both of them discover what is deeply disturbing about the life of faith in a God who refuses to follow our plans. For both of them - and I believe for you and me - when you pay attention to those burning bush moments and listen deeply for God's voice, you will be led into compassion for others. And compassion means: to suffer with. This way of compassion is God's way in the world, it always has been and always will be.

God's ways are not our ways. What is wonderful is that you and I, like Moses and Peter, are called to join our lives to Christ's life in the world. This joining with Christ is where our gladness and the world's hunger meet.

Won't you join me?

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.