

---

## *Turn Aside and See*

**A sermon by Canon Cathy Zappa**  
**Lent 3 – Year C**

Don't you just love this story from Exodus? It's got so much high drama in it: the burning bush that doesn't burn up, the divine call of the hero Moses, and the revelation of God's holy name. When I read it, knowing that these big moments are coming, I usually rush through the passage to get to them.

Admittedly, I've been doing a *lot* of rushing these days: rushing from one thing to another, rushing through my to-do list, rushing to get home in the evening and "relax." All this rushing may be why I found myself lingering this time over a very quiet, undramatic detail in this reading: Moses turned aside. He turned aside from his day's work and from his ordinary, comfortable life, at least long enough to hear God speaking and to recognize that he's standing on holy ground.

His life hasn't always been so ordinary or comfortable, of course. He's the one who was set afloat in the Nile as a baby so that we wouldn't be killed by pharaoh or his people; who was raised in that same pharaoh's house by pharaoh's daughter; and who in a fit of righteous rage killed an abusive Egyptian. Now a murderer on the lam, he fled to Midian, where he has settled into a respectable life, with a respectable wife and a respectable job.

As he's going about his respectable daily business, tending his father-in-law's sheep, an angel appears to him in a flame of fire out of a bush. A bush! An everyday, humdrum bush, except that it's burning, and burning, and burning, doing everything it can to get some to notice it.

There's no telling how many bushes have burned like this, or how many angels have popped out of them; but this time, someone is paying attention. This time, Moses looks, and sees that the bush is blazing yet is not consumed. Intrigued, he turns aside for a closer look, to "see why the bush is not burned up." And it's only then, when he turns aside, that he hears God calling from the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am," Moses says. "Here I am, Lord. I'm not dwelling on my checkered past; I'm not worrying about the future. Lord, I am here, now, with you."

You know the rest of the story: God tells him to deliver the Israelites from slavery and promises to be with him. Moses demurs, God prevails, and off Moses goes, to confront pharaoh and set God's people free. All because Moses turned aside to see, and answered, "Here I am."

Any talk of "turning" should get our attention in the season of Lent, this season when we talk so much about the "turning" of repentance. Sometimes, it's a dramatic about-face. Other times, it's simply turning aside, like Moses, from routines, from busy-ness, from whatever blocks us from knowing and trusting in the presence of God.

I say "simply," but it's not really that easy, is it? There's the worry that we'll fall behind or miss out on something. There's the mistaken belief that our value is tied to our productivity. And there's the fear of the emotions and questions might catch up with us, if we stop running—questions like the ones Moses asks: "Who am I, God? And who are you?" These are hard questions, and the answers rarely come easily and almost always require some kind of change.

But then again, maybe it's quite simple after all.

I had a busy week last week, running from one thing to the other, and almost always running behind. I woke up on my day off scattered and exhausted, with a dozen to-dos hanging over my head. I knew I should get straight to work. But I didn't. Instead, I decided to go on a walk with my dog. Now, usually when I walk, I'm focused on covering a respectable distance in a respectable amount of time. My dog, however, is not; so usually, I set the pace and pull her along. But this time, I let her lead.

She turned out to be a good guide for this particular walk, which was also a prayer. Not at all concerned about keeping a schedule or qualifying our excursion as exercise, she kept turning aside, to smell the roses—and every bush, tree, mailbox, trashcan, pile of poop, and other dog on the way.

And as I slowed down with her, I noticed that the ground she was sniffing, the ground we were walking on, was sacred ground, indeed; and I was blown away by divine epiphanies all around us: the warm blue sky, deep pink buds outlining the arms of redbud trees, a hawk sailing above me, peace in my own soul.

I saw how much I'd been missing by rushing through my tasks, pursuing some imaginary state called "being caught up" and trying to earn my right to rest--instead of allowing myself to rest and trust in God's love and care, here and now. I saw how this simple walk—this slow and unproductive and mindful walk-- was a statement of faith, too: faith that I'm more than what I get done; faith that the fate of the world doesn't rest on my shoulders, after all; faith that God's got me and the whole world in God's hands.

What about you? How is God trying to get your attention? And will you turn aside—to see the holy ground under your feet, and to hear the God who is calling to you?