

Exodus 3:1-12

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. ²There 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. ³Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴When 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.' ⁵Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶He 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.

⁷Then 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, ⁸and 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. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' ¹¹But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹²He 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.'

So, here we are in week 4 of our Rise Up worship series; we've talked about how we can hear God speaking to us all the time if we take the time to listen. We've talked about how God's most important message to us is that he loves us (and he certainly proves that to us in Jesus Christ), and how God sometimes speaks harsh words to us (as Eli learned through his apprentice Samuel) and how God often moves us into uncomfortable places (like Jonah who was moved to confront his own prejudices by declaring God's word to people he didn't like), and also how may surprise

you when people actually listen to you and change because of the things you say and do (as the people of Nineveh did in response to Jonah's words). I think we feel foolish telling people to repent and believe in Good News of Jesus Christ, but God moves people to respond to that message). All these factors help us to RISE UP to our vocation as Christians and declare that God's kingdom has come if you choose to dwell therein (no, the world is not a perfect place, and there's lots of evil out there, but you can choose to dwell in the presence of God every minute of your life and so face the challenges that come at you).

Today I want to talk to you not about how God speaks to us or moves us or ministers to us, but about how we answer God. In today's scripture lesson we have a familiar story to most of you, about Moses and the burning bush, and when we think about where the story leads us, we can recount a lot of things: the plagues that come upon Egypt as Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go, the miraculous parting of the Red Sea as the Hebrews escape the pursuing army, the 40 years that the Israelites spend in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land, and of course the receiving of the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai. But there's a very important fact mentioned in today's text that we often overlook, and I think it is very relevant to our lives; at the end of verse 12, God says to Moses, "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

We had this meeting earlier today on church realignment and revitalization, and the question was asked, "What is the mission of the church?" And lots of answers were given: to care for the most vulnerable, to cultivate personal growth and excellence, to address the needs of the community, etc. But I noticed one that was omitted that I felt had to be mentioned, namely *to worship God!* When we think of all the things God does for us, like communicating his love for us, like pointing out our "growing edges" and moving us to minister to the needs of others so that we can build a more loving and caring community here on earth, we often forget that worshipping God is vital to our own lives. To give God praise and honor and glory for all God has done and continues to do.

The Rev. N.T. Wright writes that people have an unusual way of praying to God. How many of you know that Lord's Prayer? Rev. Wright says that we often pray this prayer backwards. In other words, we often neglect to pray until we are in a real mess, and then our first petition is "Deliver us!" Get me out of this mess that I'm in! And when God does deliver us, we often forget what he has done and never pray anything else, but if we do pray after our deliverance our prayer is often "lead me not into temptation." In other words, *keep me from making that same mistake that led me into the mess in the first place.* Then we ask God to forgive us and help us forgive others, etc. But how does the Lord's Prayer start?? *Hallowed by thy name! Holy are you, O God! You are the greatest! You are the best thing in my life!*

And that really does beg the question, "Is God the most important thing in your life?" I will be the first to say, "Not always." Sometimes I feel a lot like Moses, at the beginning of the passage that we just read. Life was going along okay for Moses before his encounter with God. He had a job, he had a family, he was part of a community where people were friendly. God wasn't a part of his life – at least there's no mention of Moses going to church or attending Sunday School. But then he sees this amazing sight, and he goes closer, and before you know it he's having an encounter with God! And he's scared; he can't look at God. And God really tells Moses what God is all about; relieving suffering and freeing people from slavery, and then comes the clincher; "Moses, you're going to do this for me." And that's where I start to feel a lot like Moses, because Moses starts looking for a way out; "Who am I that I should go and speak to the most powerful man in the world and tell him what to do?" God can certainly find someone else. No, it's not always easy to do what God asks us to do. It's not easy to make him our priority. Moses probably had some regrets for going close to that burning bush. He might have wished he had turned back and forgotten all about it. He could have kept shepherding sheep and raised his kids and been quite content in his in his little village. But God reminded him that somewhere people were suffering. Somewhere people were enslaved. Somewhere there were people longing for deliverance. And God said, "You will be my spokesman."

Now not everyone has an encounter with the way Moses does, but for children of Israel could see what God was doing through Moses, and they experienced that freedom that God had won for them through Moses, and so they could truly worship God for his great works, and they could tell their children of God's great works so the children too would desire to worship God. So we're doing a Bible Study on the book of Revelation, and you come these parts where the author is describing heaven with multitudes of people worshipping God day and night and my first thought was, "well that sounds kind of boring." I mean, can't they take some breaks and play some games or go get a smoothie? But I think if we truly know who God is and see what he has done and what he continues to do, and what he will do, we too would be worshipping God day and night. That is how our hearts react to God's goodness, to his love and to his grace. God does what God said he would do through Moses, and the people worship God on that mountain.

So my question to you is, "Do you have a heart that desires to worship God?" Because a heart bent on worship makes all the difference in a church. A church can have a Sunday School and a food pantry and a choir and a missions team, but if the hearts of the members of the church are not driven to cry out "hallowed be thy name!" then they're not going to have the zeal to let thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. There needs to be at the root of our being a desire to worship God on this mountain, at this church, and on our jobs, and in our schools, and on the hockey field. How do worship God in all those other places? By having a heart full of thanksgiving and praise. By knowing what God has done, what he can do, and what he will do.