

## **IS THAT REALLY A BURNING BUSH?**

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Our reading this morning from Exodus is one of those, oh yeah I've read/heard this a bunch and we turn off our brains. Or you think I'll bet his going to talk about being called again. Click and we turn off our brains. Well you are right, I am going to talk about God's calling us, because it is so important to this congregation at this time in our life. You may not realize it, but 50 years into the life of a congregation is a critical point in the life of the congregation. Founding members are almost all gone or at least not able to take the leadership positions they have in the past. A transition must occur or the parish will struggle. So yes, I am going to preach about hearing God's voice and responding. Yes this is a story we have heard many times, but just like Moses, we must turn aside and look at this great sight.

The first step in listening to God is taking notice that a message is being sent. Moses turned aside and said, "I must look at this great sight." He was a busy man, tending his flocks, caring for his family etc., but he took the time to notice.

Speaking of taking time to notice, I had never noticed before that the flame is an angel. How many times have I read this story and yet this time I saw the word angel. Look at verse 2 "There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush." Now be honest how many of you ever noticed that it was an angel. This is a key point, not just that the flame is an angel, but that something new has been found in what we thought we knew so well. This makes perfect sense for an angel to appear as a flame for when else does the power of the Spirit show up as flame? The Spirit shows up at Pentecost in Acts in tongues of fire, a fire that heralds a huge change in the history of the church.

In today's world I sometimes wonder if Moses had been around today with all the distractions if he would have heard God. I watch people multitask and truly wonder if anything really productive is happening. Or it may be productive, but is it top notch work. There are times I watch people interacting with their phones in their hands and talking while texting. I wonder if that is even more dangerous than texting and driving? Dangerous to the way we relate to each other. That however is another sermon.

Listening to God takes time, energy and our complete attention. That is in part what times like Advent, Lent and in particular Holy Week are about. Taking time to listen to God is important and sometimes the "text messages" of life interfere with that focus. We need to take time to be intentional about our faith. Intentionality about our faith is something that is rare today as we multitask our way through life. So to hear God we first must be willing to listen.

God speaks to us in many forms. Very few hear a thundering voice, but we all can have our burning bushes. Not literally, but God speaks to us in ways that we can hear and can understand. God has spoken to all of us, but we may not have realized that it was God. Early in the Hebrew Scriptures, God speaks through angels. However these angels do not look like the Hallmark variety that are cute baby like creatures with wings. Angels that appear in the shape of men and converse with him meet Abram and speak God's word to him.

Today an angel appears in the form of a burning bush that is so extraordinary that Moses must turn aside. Alas most of the time the angels that speak to us are far more mundane. In my experience God most often speaks through other people. This can be a conversation in a parking lot, at the store just about anywhere. This may be something as simple as a comment that confirms something you have thought or wondered about. Have you ever felt a stirring to do something and then had someone who knew nothing about your thoughts told you exactly what you were wondering about. This is a great example of God speaking to us through others.

Angels in our lives can be God's voice. We have all had them whether we recognize them or not. These are people who tell the truth, plain and simple. They challenge us to consider what we are doing. They may confirm that yes you are on the right path or they may challenge us to travel a different path. Both calls are important. Br. Almquist in a sermon at the monastery for SSJE in Boston talked about discernment requiring the seeking of confirmation of a call, an affirmation that we have heard God correctly.

Seton House celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary just a little over a week ago. That means that sometime 25 years ago, God spoke to somebody and said, "I have seen my children suffering. I want you to help them."

Two people who heard this call were Fr. James Dorson of St. Nicholas and Mike Inman who is currently the chairman of the board. These two men responded and got things rolling with the foundation of a Mother Seton House 25 years ago. Mother Seton refers to Elizabeth Ann Seton who lived in the late 1700s and early 1800s and is the first American saint of the Roman Catholic Church. Her life was one of responding to the needs of the poor and eventually founded a girls school at the request of John Carroll the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States. Fr. Dorson used and expanded the rectory at St. Nicholas to house girls at risk. Fr. Dorson contacted other local churches and found that they too were aware of this issue. Bishop Sullivan of Richmond spoke of this as part of a Respect for Life program of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Richmond. Yet from the start this was an ecumenical program and many churches stepped forward to adopt and refurbish rooms for the girls.

Somewhere along the line God put a burning bush in front of this congregation and Peter Hogg. That angel called you to step forward to help open an additional shelter. As often happens when God asks us to act there were those who would stand in the way. Many of you know just how strong the opposition was to building this shelter, which originally was going to house the boys. As with any visionary idea, there was opposition and fear that tried to stop this expansion, but Peter, St. Aidan's and Seton House prevailed. The name

was changed to Seton youth Shelters in 2004 to more accurately represent the population they were serving.

As you will hear later this morning this population is far more than the boys and girls who live in the two shelters. I encourage you to learn more about the programs this morning. You are invited to go over to the shelter after the service and take a quick tour as well as enjoy our usual morning snacks. Yes you do have to go over there, the food will not be in the parish hall.

I hope this morning to put another burning bush, another angel, in the path of this parish to remind us that God calls us out of this building to do the work of the gospel in the world.

Let us pray: Eternal and gracious God, we pray that our eyes, our ears and our hearts will be open to the call to serve you. We seek your guidance as we the people of St. Aidan's walk this path that you have laid out for us. Lead us, show us the way of the gospel and of the cross. Help us to bring the kingdom to this troubled world. Amen.