

Barefoot on Holy Ground

By: Meagan McLaughlin

August 30, 2020. When Moses sees the burning bush and hears the voice of God, he is told to remove the sandals from his feet, for the place on which he is standing is holy ground. Today, God is calling us too. And Pastor Meagan reminds us that, like Moses, we too are standing on holy ground.

Readings: [Romans 12:9-21](#), [Matthew 16:21-28](#), [Exodus 3:1-15](#)

*** Transcript ***

In case you haven't already figured it out from the children's sermon, I love going barefoot. The first thing I do when I enter my house is I take off my shoes and socks, so I can free my feet to feel the hardwood floor as I walk. And when we bring the cats out in the backyard, I go barefoot unless the wood and stone are hot enough to burn my feet. I love feeling all the different textures — the smooth wood of the deck and stairs, the knobby cement and stone of the patio, the tickly grass between my toes, and the air and sun playing on them as we sit. There's something really grounding for me about going barefoot. It helps me to feel connected somehow, to the world around me and to the god who created it all. And being grounded, I can be ready to start a new thing: ready to learn, ready for things like Sunday School and Confirmation and Adult Forums to begin for the year. Ready perhaps to hear God, like Moses did.

We all know Moses' story. He was a Hebrew, and he should have been murdered by the midwives, because Pharaoh had ordered them to murder all the Egyptian boys. But they saved him. Because those midwives, Shifra and Puah, they didn't follow the law of Pharaoh. They followed the law of God. So Moses lived, and was taken in to be raised in Pharaoh's house, as an Egyptian. For some years he doesn't realize who he is, and when he does, he can't take the pain of his people. In a moment of anger and grief, as he witnesses yet another injustice, he murders an overseer and then runs for his life.

In one sense, Moses creates a great life for himself. He finds community, he marries, he tends his father-in-law's animals. But in another sense, Moses has lost a great deal. He is cut off from his people, and his history. Even God. Then Moses sees the flame in the bush and he hears the voice, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground!" He takes off his shoes, and he walks closer to the bush, and he is grounded again. God reminds Moses of who he is, and who his people are. God tells Moses who God is: I am. The one who has always been, the God of all Moses' ancestors, the one who created all things, the one who is in that moment alive and present in the flame in the bush in front of Moses. Not just I was, or I will be, but I am.

And God tells Moses that he hears the cries of the Hebrew people, of Moses' people, and that he always has. Moses couldn't bear the pain, but God can, and does. And he calls Moses to return, promising to be with him, to give him the words he needs to speak, to claim God's justice for his people. In spite of his fear, his uncertainty about his abilities to take on this task, perhaps his shame about how he'd failed before, Moses goes.

Not just I was, or I will be, but I am. Throughout history, God has always heard God's people. God heard the Hebrew people. God heard the cries of Rizpah: the sons she had with King Saul had been murdered, and she stood watch mourning and wailing for months until they were buried. Mary, Jesus' mother, claims that God has heard her, and not only her, but the cries of all who suffer.

Not just I was, or I will be, but I am. In *Stand Your Ground*, the book about the history and pain of white exceptionalism and faith that a group of us at Christ Lutheran are reading together, author Kelly Brown Douglas writes, “In telling his poignant story of life in a concentration camp during the Jewish Holocaust, Eli Wiesel recalls ‘a most horrible day, even among all of those other bad days,’ when he witnessed the hanging of a child Wiesel heard a man cry out, ‘For God’s sake, where is God?’ To that question, Wiesel said a voice inside him answered, ‘Hanging from this gallows.’”

And this, as Moses learns, is where God always is, when people are in pain. God hears the cries of all of those wounded by the systemic racism in our communities. God heard the cries of Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and just this week in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Jacob Blake, who was severely injured in a shooting. God heard the cries of several others who were shot by a white supremacist while calling for justice in Kenosha.

God heard the cries of the more than 180,000 who have died from COVID-19 now, and he hears the grief of those who loved them, and those who are still struggling to recover from being ill. God hears the cries of those who have lost loved ones, and homes, and jobs, to the devastating wildfires in California. God hears the pain of those recovering from the destruction of the storms in Iowa, and the catastrophic hurricanes that have borne down on communities in the Gulf. God hears the cries of all the officers in the police and military, who face daily the pain and struggle of our community. God hears the cries of those who are unemployed, or not paid adequately, who can't feed and clothe and house themselves and their children. God hears the anguish of those living with mental illness and addiction, isolation and loneliness, and the despair of their families.

And then, family of faith, God sends us. But not without preparing us for the work ahead. God teaches us who God is — the god who is always present, the god who hears people's cry. God teaches us how to live in community. Moses is sent with Aaron, and we are sent with one another. Paul, in the letter to the Romans today, talks about persevering in faith when our life together is hard, and loving our enemies in concrete ways, making room for God to be God in our lives and in the world.

And as we see with Peter today in our gospel from Matthew, knowing that we will make mistakes, God continues to teach us. God reminds us that no matter what, above any nation, state, or flag, it is God who made and sustains us, our faith in God that guides us, and Christ whom we follow. As people of faith, every year we come together for Sunday School, Confirmation, Adult Forums, Bible Studies, so we continue to ground ourselves and learn more about our God.

Hearing Moses' story reminds me that we, like Moses, are standing on holy ground. God is calling to us too, and is right in front of us. Taking off my shoes, reading passages of scripture, lighting a candle, can all help me to remember that I am on holy ground. How do you “holy ground” yourself, so that you can hear God's voice?

*** Keywords ***

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