

Home Worship Service August 30th, 2020

Opening Words

"The common things glitter uncommonly"

[Geoffrey Hill, poet, from "Scenes with Harlequins]

"Among navigators there are some who discover worlds, who add new continents to the earth and new constellations to the heavens.. I am the obscure and patient pearl fisher who dives deep and comes up empty handed and blue in the face"

[Gustave Flaubert from his letters, translated by Francis Steegmuller]

Opening Music

Open Your Ears, O Faithful People

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7Bp1JLcZU>

Words from the Talmud sung to a Hasidic melody [found at VU 272] here sung by First Plymouth Choir, Lincoln, Nebraska - there are many other versions on Youtube, some in Hebrew, some with words less audible than these but with very interesting instrumentation and even dancing]

Prayer for Illumination

As we pause from the life we once knew, as we savour the last days of summer, as we ponder the world around us, as we wonder what is to come, let us open our eyes and ears, let us look to the light we need, let us seek direction from Spirit. May we turn aside to discover; what is the true treasure, what is the true calling, worth everything we can give, everything we can do, everything that can be- for the sake of God's people, for the sake of God's world. May it be so!

Readings

readings read by Sharon Hannan

Exodus 3:1-15

3:1 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.

3:2 There the messenger of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

3:3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this remarkable sight and see why the bush doesn't burn up."

3:4 Seeing that Moses had turned aside to see, Yahweh called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

3:5 Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

3:6 "I am the God of your ancestors" the voice continued, "the God of Sarah and Abraham, the God of Rebecca and Isaac, and the God of Leah and Rachel and Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at the Holy One.

3:7 Then Yahweh said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cries under those who oppress them. I have felt their sufferings,

3:8 and 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.

3:9 The cry of the Israelites has reached me and I have watched how the Egyptians are oppressing them.

3:10 Now, go! I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

3:12 God answered , "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign by which you will know that it is I who have sent you: after you bring my people out of Egypt, you shall all worship God on this mountain."

3:13 But Moses said to God, "When I go to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is this god's name?'" what shall I say to them?"

3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

3:15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'Yahweh, the I AM, the God of your ancestors, the God of Sarah and Abraham, the God of Rebecca and Isaac, and the God of Leah, Rachel and Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this is the name you are to remember for all generations.

Matthew 13:44-46 Two little parables

44 'The kin-dom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. The ones who discovered it hid it again, and then, rejoicing at their discovery, they went and sold all their possessions and bought that field.

45 'Again, the kin-dom of heaven is like a merchant's search for fine pearls. On finding one pearl of great price, the merchant went and sold everything else and bought it.

Contemporary Reading

"The Bright Field" by R. S. Thomas

[1913-2000, a Welsh poet and rural Church of Wales priest - a tribute from the Archbishop of Wales at his funeral commented that Thomas :continues to articulate through his poetry questions that are inscribed on the heart of most Christian pilgrims in their search for meaning and truth"]

***I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.***

Music

Go Down Moses

[sung by Paul Robeson]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3OjHhLCDs>

Reflection by Jane: What happened in that bright field

[quoted portions are from Rev. Hugh Farquhar, formerly minister at St Paul's Riverview, once a student of Jane's father and one of Jane's babysitters before she could remember].

What happened to Thursday night baseball, tennis etc?

Thursday night I thought I'd take a break from the news.

And what better way than to tune into the Blue Jays and Red Sox ball game?

Among those of you who enjoy baseball,

Some of you are Blue Jays fans, some of you are Red Sox fans-

you know they had split the two games, and so tonight was the night to see who would win the series.

Well, it wasn't to be.

No sign of baseball, just a bunch of guys talking-

And I soon found out, a whole bunch of players, of baseball, tennis, hockey, basketball, you name it,

A whole bunch of players were not playing,

why?

Because Black Lives Matter, enough was enough, and it was time to send a message.

Here was a wake-up call for millions of sports fans.

We can get along without our ball games for a night or two.

We cannot get along without a better world.

What does this have to do with Moses?

First the back-story

Last week we heard about the baby Moses, how 5 women conspired to save his life-but to save his life he had to be raised Egyptian.

He could have passed as Egyptian forever, but one day he saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite, Remembering who he was, he sided with the Israelite.

He got into a whole pile of trouble and had to get out of Egypt, fast.

He got married and reinvented himself as a shepherd.

One day "while leading his flock to pasture on the side of Mount Horeb, known as the mountain of God, Moses saw a wondrous sight:

A bush ablaze that did not seem to be consumed".

My father once asked me what this meant.

He was a very learned man and he must have had some idea.

But he never told me, and I never figured it out.

Nor has anyone else.

There are many explanations,

Even if we knew which one to pick., "what of significance would we really know"/

The appropriate question is not what happened to the bush",

But "what happened to Moses?"

Somehow, he had "a very profound experience of the holiness of God ",

Taking off his shoes because this was holy ground.

Somehow, he felt a call from God.

And as the poet R.S. Thomas surmises, turning aside to see the lit bush is like the experience in today's two little parables-

Life-changing,

You drop everything,

You totally redirect your life,

To the one thing needful.

So, what changed for Moses?

First, let me tell you a modern burning bush story.

“While a lecturer in Sociology at the University of Toronto, Shirley Endicott worked with a group of battered wives.

She began to realize that the feminine virtues taught to women – submissiveness, passivity, fidelity, patience, endurance, kept them in invisible chains so that they couldn’t break away from the very situation that threatened them.

She described her experience this way in her book Facing The Tiger: “A flame of rage began to burn. I became a burning bush – the flame of rage burned but the bush did not burn up. This was unlike any anger I had felt before. Usually I would write a letter, make a phone call, sign a petition. Then the flame flickered and went out . . . This was different.”

And indeed, it was, as she became and remains a powerful advocate for such women.

So, it was with Moses.

He didn’t just see a burning bush.

“He became a burning bush.

Something out there in the desert lit a fire in him that would not go out.

It caused him to feel immense empathy for people suffering under an oppressive regime.

It drove him back to Egypt.

He did things he never thought he could do- like take on the Pharaoh, not once but again and again, as many times as he had to,

And then set out with a “fractious” people, God only knew where or how long.

The fire within -

That’s the Spirit, at work,

In Moses, in Shirley and countless others,

Awakening them to the fire within them,

Their passion for justice and fairness,

Their longing for a better world-

That’s where the ball- players come in

A fire got lit inside those ball players, those athletes.

Why now?

Because this is when they decided “enough is enough”

Why now?

Violence against women, gender-based violence, was around long before Shirley Endicott was around,

Longer still before she listened to the stories, and thought “Enough is Enough”

And a fire lit up inside her,

A fire that would not go out.

Why now?

The Hebrew people had been suffering under oppression before Moses was around,

And long before Moses listened to God’s call, and realized “Enough is Enough” and a fire lit up inside him

A fire that would not go out.

Spiritual awakenings happen when they happen.

The fire within lights up when it lights up.

And when it does, it changes everything.

It costs, like the buried treasure, the pearl of great price.

Shirley Endicott could tell us that.

Justice for women is a long time coming.

Endicott is 90 now- she won't live to see the end of violence against women.
But this fire, this passion, will keep burning, because of all who still want justice for women and girls here and everywhere,
Including, I hope, every one of you!

The fire within cost Moses too.
Setting his people free- that was 40 years of hard work, dangerous work, discouraging work .
And he glimpsed the promised land but never got there.

Any more than Martin Luther King Junior got there.
Or many seekers after human rights have got there,
Not even John Lewis who died just a few weeks ago.
The fire keeps burning, and so it must, as God's children still need to be set free.
Free from fear, free from oppression, free from violence.

And that is why basketball players and baseball players and tennis players and hockey players sat down and would not play- at least for a day or so.
And that is why thousands marched in Washington two days ago-
Because even after decades, after generations, of justice-seeking,
Black people still experience a knee on their neck.
Black people still cannot breathe freely.

How is this our story?

You and I, may not have received a dramatic divine instruction:
Set my people free.

But perhaps God is speaking to us through those we can see and hear and watch today,
Lighting within us the same fire,
A fire that will not go out
Until black lives matter, indigenous lives matter,
Until all the oppressed go free.

The Rev. Al Sharpton tells us " you can kill the dreamers but you cannot kill the dream"

What dream?

That ancient dream, awakened in Moses, and even before him, awakened in the midwives of the Hebrews-

A dream for all God's beloved-

a dream which says Enough is Enough and gets us marching towards d freedom and justice and wellbeing for all God's children.

May that dream live in you and me and our children and our children's children,

A fire that will never go out,

Until the dream comes true for all who dwell on this earth.

May it be so!

Reflection Music:

If Not Now

[Carrie Newcomer]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bY585-fzSs>

Minute for Mission

Unique Teachers, Unique Students

Many of the Plains, Dakota, and Nakota peoples have a sacred connection to the horse. For them, the horse holds immense cultural and spiritual significance, and its energy is a powerful catalyst for change.

The spirit of the horse was certainly present among Indigenous youth from Plains Presbytery in Saskatchewan Conference during the equine-assisted learning (EAL) program at Cartier Farms in Spruce Home, Saskatchewan, a Healing Fund project that's also supported by Mission & Service. Ten young men participated in the week-long leadership program in July 2018. The tools and strategies the EAL facilitators and Traditional Knowledge Keepers used would help the young men grow into strong Indigenous adults.

By interacting with these incredible animals, the young men brought innovation, strength, and energy to everything they did at the farm. Despite the injustices that Indigenous youth face every day, the skills these young people took home helped them understand their place in the circle of life and equipped them with the inner resources to strengthen it.

The EAL program acknowledges the need to support young people as they deal with difficulties in life stemming from systemic racism and intergenerational trauma. For Indigenous youth, the trauma from colonial oppression continues to reverberate powerfully in their lives and circumstances. The impact from the Indian residential school system and other colonial practices is still felt today. The EAL program is a place for Indigenous youth to begin their healing.

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of everything we do.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/CartierFarmsEAL/photos/?ref=page_internal

Offering Prayer

Now is the time to give what we can,

From what we have, from what we are,

To bring good news to the poor, the disadvantaged, the suffering,

And to keep this beloved community alive

As a support to one another

And a sign of what can yet be in this broken but beloved world.

May our giving be richly blessed, as we seek to bless each other and all who most need blessing. May it be so. Amen.

Prayer

quoted part from Rev. Kaji S. Douša, Senior Minister of Park Avenue Christian Church (DOC), New York City.

“Holy One, you are made known to us in the rustling wind that blows,
in the blazing fire that does not consume,
in the face of the good,
in the deep of the unknown.

We meet you here. We accept your greeting. We welcome your inspiration.

We await the change you have in store for us.

Draw us in to you. Inhabit our spirits. Focus our attention.

Bring us to you – you who are already with us.

Help us to be as you would have us be. “

May the inward fire burn on within us, and within all who seek justice and peace for our time,
Within all who speak and march and act for the lives which need to matter more,
Within all who open doors for those shut out,
Who offer a hand-up to those disadvantaged,
Who continue your work of setting the oppressed free.

And as we pray for a better world, we pray also for those close to home,

Those enjoying a last summer holiday with grandchildren,

Those who are missing their children and grandchildren in these times of closed borders and restricted travel,

Those who are weary of the “new normal” we are learning to live,

Those returning to school or about to,

And the families and teachers and other staff who are anxious about what this school-opening might bring.

We pray for ourselves as we discern prayerfully our way forward in this provincial election,

Seeking the good of our community and our province as best we can,

And considering how and where we may safely gather as beloved community in weeks and months to come.

We remember also those who are ill, those who are grieving, those who are without work, and all who carry burdens perhaps known only to you-

In a moment of silence, we hold in love and light those who need our prayers...

These and all our prayers we offer, as we treasure and tend beloved community, and say together the prayer held in common by those who continue the beloved community Jesus began: Our Father. [or Mother or Creator]

Announcements, Joys and Concerns

We Sing

MV 169 When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MNijTqA_cl

by Keri Wehlander, sung by Andrea Leblanc

*When hands reach out beyond divides and hope is truly found,
Each chain of hate will fall away and bells of peace shall sound.*

*When fear no longer guides our steps and days of war are done,
God's dream for all shall live anew; our hearts will heal as one.*

*When race and creed blind us no more, a neighbour's face we'll see,
And we shall dance the whole world round, for love will set us free."*

Blessing

Go forth with God's dream in your heart, with Spirit's passion for justice in your bones, with your mind stayed on freedom for all God's children. Trust this: the great I AM is with you every step of the way. Know this: you are always and forever held and upheld by Holy Mystery, as you march in the light of God!

Music for The Road Forward

Siyahamba

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGOiANtGmhE>

[we are marching in the light of God] sung by Angel City Chorale

Prayers when not otherwise indicated by Jane V. Doull