

The Burning Bush

"... the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush." ~ Exodus 3:2

The world needs more burning bush moments. Times of vision, a great job to be done, and God talking to us about how to do it.

We get so caught up with the events of life that we cannot see beyond the moment, or the day. We are so busy raising children, doing our work, accumulation things we want and doing things we want to do that there is no wonder that God is not heard.

Or we relegate the burning bush experience to history, and think that God no longer speaks. What small people we are to think that God doesn't do the great, the miraculous, the holy! God, who created the world and watches over it, God who makes us able to be more than we ever thought we could be, God who calls us out of obscurity and ordinariness to save our people, this is the God we must come to know.

Mark Twain, a highly intelligent man who grew up in a religious home, thought himself too smart to be a Christian, and often made fun of them in his writing. "You believe," he writes, "in a book that has talking animals, wizards, witches, demons, sticks turning into snakes, burning bushes, food falling from the sky, people walking on water, and all sorts of magical, absurd and primitive stories, and you say that we are the ones that need help?"

Yes, we do. We believe in God's word, the Bible, for it offers answers that we think we can find out of our own limited intelligence and imaginations. God alone can call us forth from what we thought was powerful and world-changing to a life which leaves it so far behind that we wonder how we ever thought that way.

The burning bush was and is unforgettable. It called Moses from a life of retirement with his grandchildren to save the nation of Israel and lead them to the Promised Land. Moses was not a public speaker or a great king, even though he had grown up in Pharaoh's palace. He was just living his life, much as all the rest of us, and God had his eye on him.

But as Moses was tending his sheep, he walked by the burning bush, and the rest is history. God spoke to him, his life was transformed forever, and the burning bush found its way into our world, our literature, and our faith story. Even those who don't believe know about the burning bush.

The God I know speaks to his people. He places "burning bushes" in our path. Millions walk on by without seeing or hearing. But those who stop, like Moses, and take off their sandals when they hear that the place they are standing is holy ground, hear.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the powerful poet, with a deep faith, said it this way.

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."

Now plucking blackberries is not a bad thing. Fresh blackberries right from the bush are a delicious treat. God has provided them for us and the birds and animals. But it is a human experience. The burning bush moment calls us to the spiritual, the sometimes spectacular and sometimes un-understandable experiences.

The thing about burning bushes is that we sometimes wait for a huge explosion of the divine, or a mountain literally rising and being cast into the sea. God can speak in the midst of life in ordinary burning bushes, the moments which remind us to be surprised and amazed.

Knowing of Moses and the original burning bush experience, we can seek them, pray for them, long for them. Woody Allen put it humorously one day when he wrote, "If I could only see one miracle, just one miracle. Like a burning bush, or the seas part, or my uncle Sasha pick up a check."

When the angel of the Lord spoke to Moses, and told him to lead his people out of 500 years of bondage, he was at first unwilling. But God had called him, and gave him the help, the gifts, and the faith to carry it out.

Interestingly, Moses, and all of us, could be so caught up with a bush that was on fire and not burning up, that that is where we stop. But he looked beyond the burning bush to see God.

When God makes His presence felt through us, we are like the burning bush: Moses never took any heed what sort of bush it was—he only saw the brightness of the Lord. ~ George Eliot

He became, in a way, a burning bush himself. He told others about God. God spoke and still speaks through the event of that day and through the life and example of Moses. Let the image of the burning bush be seared into our minds as we seek to see, be, and hear the burning bushes of today and tomorrow.