

## **Moses at Burning Bush**

This church should always be searching for ways to break through everything you have organized as your religious understanding – to try to see if, in fact, we can build a window on your world and allow you to have a fresh encounter with the Mystery of Life. Religion is only valid to the extent that it comments on the Truth. And the bodies of organized religious thought must always understand that the moment it is organized, it has hints of the Truth, leases on the Truth, but it is always less than the Truth.

I am not really interested in how you state your understanding of God. You as a person have to continue to struggle to know the Presence, the Nature of God. It may mean one thing this week; next week it ought to mean another. This place should be the place where we attempt, not to indoctrinate you, but to free you from indoctrination.

First of all, when we hear the words of Jesus, we arrive at a simple conclusion that to really understand what He was talking about, one has to be involved. Jesus wasn't talking to the passerby. He said there are some secrets here. One of the ways to get on to them is to make some primary statement of commitment to searching out the intention of life, or what we call in Christian language, the Will of God. And to the extent that we have been attempting to do it, maybe we can understand what the Psalmist said: "I know that you know. You have kept account of my tossing." I don't think this is language for the outsider. This is language for those who have been struggling with the doing of their perception of what is the Will of Life. The Psalmist says, 'I have discovered that Life has deeply embedded in it caring, and a record of my tossing is registered there; indeed my tears have been stored in a bottle.'

Then you remember the other interesting text: "When I think of Thy ways ..." He didn't say, 'When I go to church / when I feel good, that all may happen.' He says, "When I set my foot to do Thy bidding."

And so, this morning's invitation is to figure out how your life can begin to reflect your attempt to give witness to your perception of what God's Will is. And when you do that, you are struggling to give utterance and exposition to what you believe to be the reason for your being here. That is a beginning step in religious consciousness. For there is hidden, always, in the mind of the religious spirit, the hope and the promise that, "If with all your heart you truly seek Me, ye shall ever surely find Me" – the promise of encounter – of a meeting place. And the discipline of commitment and work in this world is preparation, is the opening place, so that if Life meets you face to face, you at least might recognize It.

A part of every religion that I have ever heard of is that these opening places of your life into Life are everywhere. That is what is meant by our doctrine of Omnipresence. The opening places, the windows, are everywhere. Why then do we seem so distant from God? It probably has very little to do with God and a lot to do with us.

I would like to read a familiar story from Exodus:

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.' When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here am I.' Then God said, 'Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy.' And He said, '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. Then the Lord said, 'I have seen the affliction of my people ...'"

Let's start with the end of the text first. A precondition for religious experience is something that is not popular to talk about today. It is not popular to talk about the fear of God. This text said Moses hid his face. He was fearful.

So perhaps part of our problem is that we have become so psychologically secure, so analytical of all things, that there is nothing before which our little lives stand with fear and trembling. We have become successful in reducing the whole

religious province to our own size and we have arrived at the conclusion that, indeed, if God did look at us, we would look back and say, "Hi." It is a mood that keeps us from acknowledging that there is a mystery in life. We have spoken before about the fact that awe of the Holy is a healthy psychological stance. But we are children of an age that says you should have awe of nothing.

It seems to me that this attitude of awe is necessary as we attempt to probe behind what appears to be, and gain some sense of deep respect for that which we don't yet thoroughly understand.

And so it was that this precondition was met by Moses in the wilderness. Moses looked and he saw something he hadn't seen before: a bush on fire but not being burned.

Here was a strange contradiction. It made Moses raise questions beyond the event. Why? And then he became arrested by the very power and force of Life, and the genius of Life. He almost said to himself as it were, 'You know, Life can do just about anything it gets ready to do. Look at this. One thing becomes clear. What I thought were the ground rules don't appear to be the ground rules. The way that bushes have behaved through all of history seems not to square with the way this bush is behaving.' That much is true. He saw that. He was just like you and me – a person out there taking care of business, trying to make some money, and he saw something, contradictory on its face; a paradox, a dilemma.

And it became clear to him that he had cause for alarm. Terror. And it is not the terror of the Holy yet, it is the terror of the unknown, of that which seems inconsistent with Life – something that doesn't seem to conform to the laws of nature. The bush was burning but something beyond his own imagination, beyond his own knowledge was going on.

Then he said to himself, 'I had better stop and examine this thing.' There is no record that when he said, 'I think I had better stop,' that anything happened.

But the minute he actually stopped... (You see, that is the commitment step. It is one thing to talk about, 'I think we had better look at this.' The minute he stopped. The minute you stop and look at those contradictory realities of life, even your own, you stand in a moment of commitment, you stand in candidacy for something new. The trouble with most of us is that we never stop around the contradictions of our own existence long enough.)

The scripture says, "When he turned aside," what happened? "When he turned aside, God decided then to talk to him." When he made the stop, God said, 'He is ready.' For God saw that he was stricken with awe and wonder and terror of the Holy. For God knew that it was Holiness that Moses perceived. It was the Holiness of Life that made him wonder, for wondering is a province of the Holy. It always and always causes awe. And whenever, for any moment, tragedy or beauty or ugliness or whatever causes you to stop a moment in awe, you are at the edge of the Holy Place. And Life was aware that he stopped at Its threshold, and Life respected this. Let's translate the text. If, at the apparent contradictions of existence, you stop in wonder, Life will respect your stopping.

What I am trying to say is this: Just look at our own selves – the most beautiful contradiction that Creation could issue forth – embedded with splendor and endlessness – like timelessness itself. You are fighting like everything to keep it in a manageable unit called 'yourself' – under control, so that it won't ride you off into anything that you haven't decided to get involved in.

Where is the burning bush? Moses' story is a story that affects all of us. Moses wasn't planning on getting involved in strange things, but Moses said, 'I am going to stop here. Something mysterious is happening.'

Now, what did he hear? What did God first say? "Moses, Moses." Moses heard his name. At the moment when the awe-arresting phenomenon of the Presence of Life issues forth in ways that are contradictory to what had become

the normal expectation of the culture; in the middle of that which was capable of arresting the normative mind, there is called the name of any who would stop.

In other words, the key to your personality is not what you put together. It is locked in the abiding mystery of Life, and in all that that mystery would spill upon history. That is where the key to your self is. And if around that mystery you stop long enough, you will hear your name like you have never heard it before. And it will not necessarily be the name your mother and father gave you. But it will be one you know, because it will be your essence speaking to you in most intimate terms. "Moses." Moses heard Life speaking.

Here was Life issuing forth in ways that were totally inconsistent with the ways it had always been done before. The vastness of the creative energy of God was doing a new thing because it was trying to make a new statement about its Presence. It is always doing new things trying to make a new statement about its Presence, and it is always searching for new statements to be made about its Presence. That, perhaps, is the definition of beingness. It is the search of the creative energy in Life for new possibilities of the expression of the Presence.

And here it was. And when Moses heard his name – you talk about being accepted and respected! You are talking about being known. There is no significance like that which comes from understanding that in the middle of a mysterious surfacing of the Presence of God, when you get close enough you hear your own name. That is about being known and accepted.

What religion ought to be about is to try to get you to stop long enough at the mysteries of existence in which you participate every day, long enough to hear your name – sounded from the very center of Life itself – so that you might know who you are and know that you are, indeed, known by the vast purposes of history and Life itself. Life that goes beyond all that you can conceptualize. Life whose purposes are printed beyond earth, even into eternity – into futures yet

undreamed of. You are known. They can fly a ship to Mars if they please, but in the mystery of the soil of Mars, your name is registered.

Nothing has been made in isolation. It is not the nature of Creation to create isolated items. All of you belong to all that is, and at the core of that Creational Intelligence, all are known by their real name.

He called Moses. And what did God say? He didn't say, "You know, Moses, you killed a man and you know I let you off, but Moses I want you to serve me." No, He didn't say that. After He called his name, He simply said to Moses, "You know Moses, I am God." That is amazing. "I am the God of your father; I am the God who brought them over; I am the God who was with them. I am God." He identified himself. It is an ecstatic moment – that moment when you become aware that there is connective tissue between you and the Creator. You are lodged in Life itself. But God said, "Wait a minute. That is not all I want to say." "Moses, I have seen the affliction of my people. I have heard their groans by reason of their taskmaster's whips. I have come to deliver them. Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?"

He asked Moses for commitment to what he had experienced. I have arrived at an interesting conclusion that most of our life is spent keeping ourselves from grand experiences to which we might have to commit ourselves. And I think if we had been Moses, we would have just gone on home and said we saw something out there in the field that didn't make any sense. It was strange and interesting but we had to get away from it in a hurry because it had nothing to do with us.

He heard the Voice, and then he heard his real name, and then he was told about a problem. God said, "There is a problem." He said, "There is slavery in Egypt and I want somebody to help me with it."

The great issues of life are locked up with your identity. There was Moses standing before a bush and because of his response to it, and his commitment in

searching out its meaning, he was there, literally stripped of everything he had brought to that place, but knowing for the first time, his true identity.

The events are endless. The bushes are burning and the mystery is reciting itself over and over again. And hidden in your response is your identity, your call, your sense of mission.

I told Jesus it'd be all right if He changed my name. Jesus said if you change your name, your mother, your sister, your brother, your wife, your lover won't like it. That's all right. I want to change my name.

“When I think of Thy ways, I put my feet in the way of Thy testimonies. I put my feet in the way of Thy testimonies. I hasten, I do not delay, to do Thy commandments.”