

Do you put off things? I'm not asking if you're a procrastinator - that is a real skill I think: the professional art and expertise of putting things off but still getting them done. There is a such thing as a chronic procrastinator; and I hope no one lives with someone like that. No, I mean more of the, do you put things off, as in, are you good at making excuses? My kids are. "I was going to pick up those Barbies, but then I had to go to the bathroom and then I saw the nail polish and so, I went outside to paint my nails because you don't like it when I paint them inside, Mom."

Excuses, excuses.

Truthfully, we are all good at giving excuses. I just didn't have time. I wasn't feeling well. I must have missed your email. I can't, I'm washing my hair - that used to be an old one I think, but now in pandemic it's relevant again. I wish I could help but my washing machine overflowed in the basement. We know excuses, right? It isn't hard to connect with Moses in this story when he is as good as we are at coming up with excuses.

Apparently, "Winston Churchill [once] said, 'You can always count on Americans to do the right thing,' then he added, 'after having exhausted all other possibilities.' Most of us begin where Moses began - with excuses."<sup>1</sup>

Making an excuse is always easier than the task at hand. Rather than facing a truth or a reality, making an excuse has the tendency to make us believe we are really good at fooling others, ourselves ...maybe even at fooling God. It would have been a heck of a lot easier for Moses to stay in Midian tending the flock of his father-in-law... but as the drama in Exodus builds, God is no mood for Moses' excuses.

Why me, God? At first, God's responses do nothing to assure Moses that he is the right person. And what we assume - that God has been watching Moses and has groomed him for this task - isn't necessarily true either. In actuality, God's answers don't have anything to do with Moses, but have everything to do with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas D. Webster, Sunday, August 28, 2011; Exodus 3:1-15, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-08/sunday-august-28-2011?reload=1592848178695>

“Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring Israel out of Egypt?” Moses asks, *why me* and God’s answer is *why not you?* **I will be with you**, so why not you? **I will be with you**, is all the promise Moses and the people should need. This God who promises to accompany this reluctant leader, **observed** the misery of his people who are in Egypt. This God who promises to be near, **heard** their cry on account of their task masters. This God who promises to be with this people, **has come down to deliver** the people from the Egyptians and bring them into a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

God’s promise of **faithfulness** should eliminate the excuses. God’s promise of **steadfastness** should stop Moses’ perceived shortfalls. Yet Moses will keep coming up with roadblocks and God’s answer will be the same ...I will be with you; I will show you signs; I will put words in your mouth. **Moses’ excuse to God of who am I**, turns into the question asked of God, **who are you?**<sup>2</sup>

In the ancient world, to know the name of a god meant to hold some of the power of that god. Is Moses scheming? Or does Moses not know who God is having been raised in Pharaoh’s household? What is ironic is that even as Moses asks for God’s name, God has already given it.

“If I come to the Israelites and say  
‘The God of your ancestors  
has sent me to you,’  
and they ask me,  
‘What is his name?’  
what shall I say to them?”

God has already answered that question Moses. In trying to get out of God’s call and claim, Moses doubts God’s promise... I will be...I will be with you. God’s name is God’s promise; “I am who I am; I will be what I will be. The name of God is a revelation of is God’s character and God’s covenant. The revelation of the divine name tells Moses, “my nature will become evident from My actions.”<sup>3</sup>

“What kind of God is promising to get [the Israelites] out of Egypt?”

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<sup>2</sup> Doug Bratt quoting Terrence Fretheim, Exodus 3:1—15, <https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-17a/?term=exodus%203:1-15>

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Second Ed. Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation (Oxford University Press, New York, 2014)

Yahweh is a God who will be there, who will be with them, who will be whatever is necessary to be in different contexts to achieve that purpose announced to the ancestors.”<sup>4</sup> Only a God of proximity can observe, hear, and come down to deliver God’s people.

For now, God’s nearness of presence is most felt for Moses, as he stands, barefooted before a familiar and strange sight; the burning bush. It would not have been an unusual sight for Moses to see a bush that has caught fire in the region of Mt. Horeb. It is arid out there. You’ve got to really search for grasses where you flock can graze. It’s rocky and hot and dry. Spontaneous ignition of a dry thorn bush was nothing out of the ordinary. What catches Moses’ attention however is that the bush was aflame without being consumed. The Jewish Study Bible reads, “Moses, said, ‘I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why does the bush not burn up?’

I think the burning bush isn’t just meant for Moses but also holds a witness to God’s character for God’s people too. I’d like to think that after all that will come next, the plagues, the crossing of the red sea, the manna and quail, that as Israel settled into its wandering Moses found time to tell the story of how he first heard God’s call in a bush that was on fire but not burned. I’d like to think that he sat around the campfire and told Hebrew children every so often about that time when he saw that bush, and he knew it was a holy and life altering moment. That he knew in Yahweh, who spoke from that miracle, that he was encountering the God of his ancestors and the God of all. That God’s presence, in the bush that was on fire and yet not scorched is all about the transforming power of God not the destroying power of God. Because the “flame of fire is the glory of God’s presence which transforms but doesn’t consume.”<sup>5</sup>

Think of the mount of transfiguration; Jesus was *transformed* before the disciples. His person wasn’t consumed or taken over so that God’s glory could be seen, rather Christ’s was transformed to show God’s glory in him to the disciples. God’s intention in saving this people is transformation: not only a freedom from, but also, a freedom for. God’s purpose is to save the people from their Egyptian taskmasters and transform them into a nation of blessing and witness to God’s name and promise - that Yahweh is a God of presence; this God is a god of faithfulness.

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<sup>4</sup> John Goldingay, Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) pg.20

<sup>5</sup> H.L. Ellison, The Daily Study Bible Series: Exodus (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1982) pg. 16

God's revelation of who God is in the burning bush that is **not** consumed but transformed shows that nature isn't, 'a barrier to exclude God, but merely a veil to [pull aside and see] the working of God's power throughout life around us.'<sup>6</sup>

**It will have us ask the question of**, not just *who is this God*, but *where is this God?* Was the bush always burning and Moses just happened to turn aside and see it? Is the world aflame with God's glory, presence and faithfulness and we but need turn and see it?

Monday, Barcelona's Liceu opera opened for its first concert since Mid-March. The Gran Teatre del Liceu filled its 2,292 seats... **with plants - shrubs and bushes!** The performance was livestreamed and announced as the prelude to the 2020-21 season. The plants came from local nurseries and will be donated, along with a certificate from the musicians, to health care workers particularly in the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona.<sup>7</sup> The artistic director and curator did this as a reminder to our essential connection to nature.

The world is aflame with God's glory. These plants heard beautiful music and now will give a beauty all their own to health care workers - surely the glory of God is radiating from this flora and fauna.

If we believe what scriptures tells us, that creation is aflame with God's glory then we ought to turn aside and see it every once in a while.

**Listen to Psalm 96,**

Let the heavens rejoice  
and the earth exult;  
let the sea and all within it thunder,  
  
the fields and everything in them exult;  
then shall all the trees of the forest  
shout for joy at the **presence** of the Lord,  
for he is coming,

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Treisman, Barcelona Opera Reopens With An Audience of Plants, NPR  
[https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/06/22/881943143/barcelona-opera-reopens-with-an-audience-of-plants?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_campaign=npr&fbclid=IwAR1AivfxqZxzKCV54U0c1-OnV-IBhLhMoEPmcOgW-1KkqfvZAdgZHbqxg18](https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/06/22/881943143/barcelona-opera-reopens-with-an-audience-of-plants?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_term=nprnews&utm_campaign=npr&fbclid=IwAR1AivfxqZxzKCV54U0c1-OnV-IBhLhMoEPmcOgW-1KkqfvZAdgZHbqxg18)

for He is coming to rule the earth;  
he will rule the world justly  
and its peoples [with] **faithfulness**.

The revelation of who God is, of God's name for all generations and therefore, God's steadfastness is joyously shouted to us in nature; in rose bushes and boxwoods who listen to opera; in blazing bushes that are on fire but not burned up. God's promise to Moses is a promise of commitment, a promise of fulfillment for an ancient covenant, a promise of faithfulness, a promise presence. In that moment, it is as though God were saying, "If you want to know my name, come with me and spend the rest of your life finding out."<sup>8</sup>

So, I know we all have some excuses; it is too humid; there's sand from the Sahara Desert coming; we're too busy; we're so tired of being at home; I'm not a biblical scholar; I don't read my Bible like I should.

But God's promise is God's nature and this God is faithful.

So, it is time to put all our excuses on hold. And instead, it is time to be transformed; stand barefooted on the ground and turn aside - hear God tell us, **I will be with you** - and look for the world is aflame with God's glory and presence.

### **Benediction**

Br. James Kester writes,

We often discount the ordinary in our lives,  
forgetting that God is as likely to send angels when we are doing the dishes,  
working at some task, or having coffee with a friend,  
as when we are engaged in some grand and mighty scheme.  
The challenge for us is to pay attention.

No more excuses, turn aside and see, this God is faithful. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> William L. Hawkins, A Questionable God: Ex. 3:1-15, Matt. 16:21-28, Romans 12:9-21  
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2002-08/questionable-god>