

# **“Renewing Holy Ground”**

**Exodus 3:1-15 and Romans 12:9-21**

*(The scripture readings are within the sermon)*

**Pastor James York**

**August 28, 2011**

**North Presbyterian Church**

Where and what is your holy ground? Where do you perceive God, receive forgiveness, learn, grow and renew your passion? How do you perceive God’s hope for your life? How are you inspired to live God’s hope?

Over hundreds of years the Egyptians became more and more afraid of the immigration and robust birth rate of the Israelites. As the Israelite population grew the Egyptians felt more and more threatened. They were afraid they would lose their power and affluent lifestyle so at first they discriminated against the Israelites giving them the poorer jobs, later they made them slaves. The Israelite population continued to grow. Pharaoh afraid of riots and rebellion showed his country’s power by genocide, by killing all the Israelite baby boys. Miraculously Moses, an Israelite baby boy, was adopted by Egyptian royalty.

Moses grew up in luxury and was given every material want. The Holy Spirit placed thoughts in his mind. At first it caused him to wonder was it just for one people to have all this wealth and power and not share it with those in need? Over time Moses realized how his lifestyle exploited and oppressed others. Eventually Moses became passionate in working for human rights, justice and sharing resources. Moses had an inkling God was asking him to be a social justice leader.

Moses lived in a household and society where whenever you wanted something you took it by force. Moses’ passion for social justice got distorted from advocacy to anger. Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Israelite so he killed the offending Egyptian. Moses immediately realized his mistake and fled from Egypt to Midian.

Moses stopped at a well to drink and rest. Moses saw some female shepherds being harassed by some male shepherds. Moses came to their aid, this time peacefully. Moses helped the ladies water their sheep and protected them. In time Moses fell in love with one of the lady shepherds, Zipporah, and they got married. Together they established a home, cared for a flock and eventually had a son.

We think Moses lived in Midian for forty years. How do you think God was working in Moses’ heart and mind over those forty years? Was Moses angry that God didn’t help him establish justice in Egypt? Was Moses overcome by guilt? Aware that he wanted to be in control, that he took matters into his own hands, that he didn’t trust God enough to let God work through him, that he was impatient and angry so he killed the Egyptian. How many years do you think it took for Moses to let go of all that guilt and accept God’s grace?

Forty years is a long time. Forty years ago there were no personal computers or cell phones. Richard Nixon was president. James Cook was pastor here and I was 2. For forty years God worked in Moses, preparing him to hear and follow God’s plan.

Moses went from being the prince of Egypt, to a revolutionary with a dream, to a fugitive on the run. God immediately worked in Moses to redeem his life. God gave Moses a small success in the area of his passion, social justice, as he peacefully stopped the harassment of the female shepherds. God revealed to Moses love by blessing Moses with a wife, in-laws and eventually a

son. As a shepherd Moses had plenty of time to worship God, ask God questions, wrestle with God and be angry with God for the injustices of the world. Moses learned how to let go of his regret, of his longing to be back in Egypt enjoying luxury. Moses learned how to guide wandering sheep, navigate in the desert, find water, food and shelter which in the next forty years as he leads the Israelites across the desert will all be essential skills. Moses learned how to be a loving husband and father. God was molding Moses into a patient person who would wait for God's instruction before acting, who could listen to numerous compliments and yet inspire trust in God. God was busy helping Moses become the sort of person who could walk into the court of the most powerful man in the world and say "Let my people go." God was preparing Moses to be the kind of person who could deal with the bellyaching, mistakes and rebellion of a newly liberated people. God was preparing Moses to be someone who knew what it was like to depend on the work of God and walk deeply with God. Do you think Moses perceived all that God was doing in his life?

God is working in your life, my life, everyone's life. Whether you are royalty, a fugitive or somewhere in between, God is redeeming your life. God is nurturing your passion. God is teaching you. God is developing your gifts. God is forgiving you, loving you, molding you into the beautiful masterpiece you were created to be. God is preparing you to make this world a better place.

Forty years have passed since Moses left Egypt. Moses is enjoying life and God's blessings. Moses has a loving wife, grown son and the satisfaction of knowing he created a just working environment for lady shepherds. Through prayer Moses has let go of his guilt over his anger, control issues and murder. Moses has discovered how to perceive God and savor God's grace, love and joy. Moses is pondering retirement.

Exodus explains what happens next. **Exodus 3:1-4a** "Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. Moses led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of God appeared to Moses in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. Moses looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up. Moses said, 'What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?'" The text suggests that God had been trying to get Moses' attention for awhile. How do you think God tried to communicate with Moses earlier? How many times do you think Moses missed God's communication? God's love is steadfast and everlasting. God never gives up on any of us. God keeps communicating always hoping to get our attention.

Exodus continues **Exodus 3:4-5** "When the Lord saw that God had caught Moses' attention. God called to Moses from out of the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' Moses said, 'Yes? I'm right here!' God said, 'Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground.'"

Normally we do not think of a remote scrub bush in desert sand as holy ground, yet wherever we perceive God there is holy ground, a way to listen to God. Removing one's shoes is a gesture of respect and honor, for Moses it was an act of worship.

Where and what is your Holy Ground? Where do you perceive God, receive forgiveness, learn, grow and renew your passion? How do you perceive God's hope? How are you inspired to live God's hope for your life?

It could be holy ground when you are taking a walk when an idea occurs to you about some change you need to make in your life.

It could be holy ground when you are reading a book or watching a movie when something suddenly comes alive for you.

It could be holy ground when you are in the midst of an argument with a family member and are quite angry when something clicks inside your head and you remember that you love this person you are so angry at. That realization can cause the ground to shift under you, and there is suddenly a holy opportunity regarding your relationship with that person.

It could be holy ground when you are snowed in and unable to get to your workplace. You are frustrated because you've got so much you need to accomplish, but then it suddenly dawns on you that you have been given a gift - a day to find yourself again.

It could be holy ground when you are busy with the responsibilities of the day when a child asks you to read her a story.

It could be holy ground when you are in the midst of trouble or are depressed over the course of life, and receive one of those "I'm thinking of you" notes from a friend.

It could be holy ground when you go off to college, but you are not self-supporting. You may call that opportunity, but then it comes to you that your presence on campus is only possible because of financial sacrifices made by your parents and by those who set up scholarship funds.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes, "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; And only she who sees takes off her shoes—The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries." Holy ground is all around you. God is working in your life and speaking to you.

Exodus continues **Exodus 3:6-11** "Then God said, **"I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."** Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God. God said, **"I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. "The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I've seen for myself how cruelly they're being treated by the Egyptians. It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."** Moses answered God, **"But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"**

God calls and we often say why me? Moses wants to retire. Moses feels he has done his fair share. Moses is a good husband, father and shepherd and made the community better by his establishment of equal opportunity shepherding. Moses doubts himself. Moses is suppressing his passion for social justice. Moses' questions, why me, and what makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt are silly. Why, because Moses you are so passionate about social justice that you risked everything and killed an Egyptian to protect a Israelite, because when you were alone, unemployed and hungry in a strange land you stood up against discrimination, because you love people, because you have learned to accept God's grace and forgive yourself, because you have learned all the skills to lead Israel through the wilderness, because you have learned to trust God, because you have learned to recognize holy ground, listen to God and live God's guidance.

God knows Moses knows the answers to his own questions. The critical element is that God will guide Moses. God answers **Exodus 3:12-15** "I'll be with you," God said. **"And this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain."** Then Moses said to God, **"Suppose I go to the People of Israel and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What do I tell them?"** God said to Moses, **"I-AM-WHO-I-AM. Tell the People of Israel, 'I-AM sent me to you.'"** God continued with Moses: **"This is what you're to say to the Israelites: 'God, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This has always been my name, and this is how I always will be known.**

A humble Moses does go. This time Moses listens to God, lets God be in control and together they lead the Israelites out of slavery into the Promised Land.

All of us are standing on holy ground wherever we live, learn, work and play. Whenever you perceive something good, pure loving, pay attention for it is likely God calling you. Be patient as you follow God's direction. It took around 90 years for Moses to realize his hope, to accomplish God's call.

Being patient is really hard for most of us. A few weeks ago the workcampers shared with us God's desire for us to remain in God, for us, the branch, to remain in Jesus, the vine. We watched a three minute silent video encouraging us to remain. I got feedback that some of you found it difficult to be patient, to remain in silence for just three minutes. Moses had to remain over 8 million times more patient.

Being patient is hard because we often do not want to spend time in the wilderness developing our gifts, discovering God's grace, deepening our trust in God and learning how to let God work through us. Moses spent forty years in the wilderness.

Being patient is hard because if we are praying and working for good, loving ways that are in accordance with God's will then why do we need to wait and remain. Moses remained for about 90 years from his first dream for liberation to the entrance of the Promise Land.

In the story of the Karate Kid, Danielson is eager to learn karate. Danielson becomes impatient and does not see how wax on, wax off, painting the fence, sanding the floor, painting the house, balancing on a post, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth and other mundane tasks have anything to do with karate until one day his karate master shows him that all of these are karate moves. The repetition of those mundane tasks taught his body instinctive karate moves.

I hope you see your holy ground and hear God's direction in your life. As you look for your holy ground and listen for God's voice the Apostle Paul commands us to love. Paul is taking the greatest commandment and Jesus' beatitudes and listing them as mundane tasks. The way of love is overwhelming. None of us have the ability to love in all of these ways. As I read the tasks of genuine love, pick one, and practice it.

**Romans 12:9-21 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord. Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.**

Nurture genuine love. Demetrius Dumm writes, "Sometimes I think that the only question that we will be asked at the last judgment will be, quite simply, Did you let my people go? In other words, Was the overall effect of your presence in the world to liberate or to hold in bondage? Were you a Moses, friend of God, or a pharaoh, holding others in slavery?" Amen