

Lent III: Year C: 23/24 March 2019

St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

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**“How Is G-d Calling you to be a Moses....
What glows and sparkles for you, as G-d calls to you?”**

Exodus 3:1-15

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Psalm 63:1-

Hear O' Israel, the Lord our G-d is One:

Blessed be G-d's Name forever.¹ **Amen**

Good morning / evening. As many of you know, I am a lay preacher in training. Karen Anderson, the other lay preacher at St. James, along with Deacon Beverley Jones, give homilies from this pulpit at various times during the year. Generally we compared our calendars, look for times that work well for us, times when we are not too busy, times that mesh well with our Rector's schedule and vacation times. We did not look at appointed readings, or at least I don't. So our Rector and I decided several weeks ago that this would be the weekend that I would preach. Perhaps the Holy Spirit was spreading Grace in the selection of this date. You see, two Saturday's ago, the Learning Communities Initiative committee of St. James joined representatives for other parishes of the Diocese of Central New York for the 2019 kick-off of the Learning Communities Initiative. After some introductory remarks and a prayer given by our Bishop, we did our “Dwelling in the Word” exercise.

Perhaps you remember this “Dwelling in the Word” process; the committee introduced it to this parish last spring. Someone reads a portion of scripture. After a brief pause, someone else reads the same portion. We reflect on what words caught their attention and we share: “What is G-d saying to me at this time, through these readings?”

¹ From Deuteronomy 6:4 and a version of Shema Yisrael, שמע ישראל. Following chumrah, this homily writer uses G-d for the written name.

Dwelling in the Word is a lot like *Lectio Divina*, the Benedictine practice of scriptural reading. Both are ways to promote communication with G-d, to increase knowledge of G-ds' Word and to make scripture an active part of one's life. All Learning Communities Initiative committee members have been tasked to take up the habit of Dwelling in the Word. We urge you to take up the habit also...and it turns out that the scripture reading the Learning Community Initiative committee members are dwelling upon for the entire year of 2019 is precisely the Exodus reading we heard today. So what words caught your attention? What images came to mind? Or as prompted by our Bishop, "What image shimmer for you?"

Perhaps what sparked your attention was the burning bush: Moses sees a bush, blazing, but not being consumed. Maybe you were caught up by G-d calling Moses to deliver G-d's people from the land of oppression, "to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey," of G-d calling Moses to free and give hope to the oppressed. And the passage lead you to recall the words of another great person, who gave hope and had a dream: that all people would be treated as equals, who spoke of a dream of when all people would be judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin, or how much wealth they had accumulated or the power they hold, or by hold agile, or young, or beautiful...

Or maybe, inspired by the promise that G-d's people would worship on the mountain, and knowing the all too familiar Moses story, your mind fast forwards to an image of Moses, white, standing tall upon a mountain, hair flowing, head circled by rays of light as clouds part: Charlton Heston as Moses

There are many things that may have sparked for each of us. There may be some in common, or some of us may have noticed something overlooked by everyone else. There is a good chance that sometime later, if you re-read this very same passage, something else will glow, because scripture is one of the ways G-d speaks to each of us. If scripture really is the Word of the Lord—and remember this is something each of us confesses at worship service each week when after the Lectionary Reading, the reader says "the Word of the Lord" and respond "Thanks be to G-d" — if scripture is the Word of the Living G-d, than each time we read it, the passages should speak to us, now, in our present reality, the here and now. In the

words of one Gospel writer, these words are written so that you might believe and have ever lasting life.²

For the evening service:

Or in the words found in our Book of Common Prayer, we are to “Hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them”³ - inwardly digest, the way a ruminant animal – the goat, the cattle, the sheep – continual chews upon its food. That is a pretty earthy image. “Dwelling in the word – make them your home and your shelter – same idea...maybe a little less “messy” sounding.

For the morning service:

Scripture is the continual communication of G-d to each of us, through the words of the prophets, disciplines sages and saints.

So Dwell in G-d’s living Word.

But I was told I was giving a homily, and many folks expect the homilist to give a teaching, to somehow open up the lectionary reading and give it meaning, to unpack the words for the listener. Well I have just told you that the work of the Learning Communities Initiative committee is to facilitate each member of St. James to grow spiritually and that your own good work of “Dwelling Upon the Word” is an important part of this process... Each of us should find what sparkles for us in G-d’s word.

Here is what caught me, in this reading, at this time.

G-d hears the cries of the people.

G-d calls upon Moses to free his people, G-d’s people, Moses’ people.

And Moss asks “Who am I”

² Paraphrase of John 20:31

³ Proper 28: The Sunday closest to November 16, **Book of Common Prayer**, page 239.

Moses was the foster child of Pharaoh's daughter, raised in a surrounding of riches and luxury but still a foster child, not really part of the family. Moses is a criminal refuge. He is in Midian because he fled Egypt after killing another human being. Yes, Moses is now the son-in-law of the chief priest, but Moses is tending sheep, one of the most lowly, humbling of tasks. Moses, at this time, has lived a life on the fringes of power and status, at the pleasure or charity of others. So he asks G-d why me? Questioning, ill-defined, sort of like that almost childish half sketched but so insightful etching by Marc Chagall that appears on the front of your worship bulletin today. And yet G-d says yes, Moses, you, because I have made a covenant with you, and with your ancestors and, to your descendants, because all humanity will be part of my saving covenant, baptized through you, Moses, lifted up through Jesus the Messiah. G-d's arms are stretched out to encompass all of us, through Christ whose arms were stretched out on the hard wood of the cross. So each one of us is called to be a Moses. Now who of the oppressed will you give hope and freedom to today, this week, this month, and during this time that G-d has given to you in his kingdom of Earth?.. Anyhow, that is the vision and image that sparkled for me at this time, when dwelling upon this passage of the living word of G-d.

What glows and sparkles for you, as G-d calls to you?



Moses and the Burning Bush, Marc Chagall (1877–1895), etching, intended to be an illustration for an Old Testament Bible from the Robert and Sandra Bowden collection, available at <http://bowdencollections.com/Chagall/chagall.html>