

## ***The Burning Bushes In Your Life, Lent 3 (C)***

*(Reverend Canon Sue-Ellen Chilvers)*

It's what people call "the good life" — a steady job, a comfortable home, loving friends and family. Moses has it all once he settles down in Midian.

The years go by. Moses seems content with small pleasures and accomplishments. He never talks about his past or dreams about his future. He lacks any true passion, any sense of adventure. He simply lives the good life.

And then there comes a day, a day that starts out like any other. Moses gets up early and leaves for work. Off into the countryside he goes, leading his father-in-law's sheep. Hours pass without incident. The landscape is still except for the grazing of the flock. Then, in the far distance, something interrupts this tranquil scene. Moses sees a bush blazing! For several minutes he watches the flickering flames; then he realizes that the leaves and the branches show no sign of being burnt. The leaves and branches have not been blackened by the fire.

Perplexed by this sight, Moses decides to investigate. He starts walking toward the bush. Suddenly, a voice fills the air, calling "Moses! Moses!" The sound of that voice fills all the open, empty countryside. Then he hears his own response, small and weak and tense: "Yes, I'm here." The voice tells Moses that he is on holy ground and should remove his sandals. He does so, and then drops to his knees in the dusty soil.

The voice identifies itself: "I am your ancestors' God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Now Moses falls flat on the ground, his face in the dirt. If he wants to live, he dare not look.

Childhood memories return to him, stories he heard of how this God had intruded into his ancestors' lives. He knows of this God from old stories, but had never encountered him before — not in dreams or visions, and certainly not in broad daylight here on the job! Moses feels a thumping inside his chest. His heart is racing.

Full of emotion, the voice goes on: "I have seen the misery of my people! I have heard their outcry against their taskmasters! I have come to rescue them from Pharaoh! I will bring them into a broad land, a fertile land, a land where milk and honey flow. And you, Moses, will lead my people out of Egypt!"

More memories confront Moses. He knows Egypt. He was raised there as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Although an Israelite, he did not suffer along with his people. He was both an Egyptian and an Israelite-and yet he was neither.

One day the young man Moses had left the palace grounds, curious to learn about life. He entered a world of oppression, where Israelites, his own flesh and blood, were beaten every day, and died long before their time. Filled with rage, he assaulted and killed an Egyptian overseer who he found

beating an Israelite, and buried his body in the sand. Word of what he had done spread quickly. It was the Israelite he had rescued who betrayed him, and so he was forced to run away to Midian.

There, Moses married and began a family. Home and work kept him busy, made him happy. He forgot about his people. He no longer felt as they did.

But now the God of his ancestors tells him to leave his comfortable nest, return to Egypt, and deliver his people from bondage. The God of his ancestors, in fact, tells him to become a hero!

Moses offers first one excuse and then another. None of his excuses can silence the insistent call, the voice from the blazing bush. God promises that God will not desert Moses, and that someday the free Israelites will worship on this very spot. God even reveals to Moses God's awesome, earth-shattering Name, God's Name as Lord of every age, past and future, and as the God who meets us now.

It's here that today's reading ends, but not the story of Moses, and not your story or mine.

Moses accepts God's call to him. No longer will he be centred on his own ego, his own satisfaction. Instead, his concern will be for the purposes of God, what God wills for the world. No longer will his life be safe, secure, and devoid of growth. He will give himself up to a life of faith, and receive a great reward.

Yes, Moses must bear the people's grumbling, their addiction to slavery, their readiness to flee from freedom. All this will make him feel stress and strain, and turn his hair white before his time, but Moses will become a person able to act for others. Often, he will feel dry and brittle, swept up in the powerful forces of divine mystery like a leaf on the wind, yet in the end he will be remembered as God's own friend and confidante.

But remember — bushes don't just blaze for Moses. Bushes blaze for us. And when a bush blazes, we must respond, must turn from our preoccupations and discover what awaits us. Perhaps it is some terrible burden that makes us investigate the blazing bush in hope of a better life. Perhaps it is some sense of wonder that leads us there, our desire for the eternal.

In any case, we must turn aside and draw near if we are to hear the bush call out to us and set us on our way.

What are the blazing bushes in your life? A bush blazes when some person or place or moment reaches out to you, calling you insistently by name. A bush blazes when your life's glory and pain and challenge and patience and laughter and grief together speak to you with heaven's voice. A bush blazes when something demands that you put aside your mask, and live from the center deep inside you. A bush blazes when you take what action you can for others, and find in this risk your abundant freedom.

Such bushes blaze forth in every life. Dare to listen to them!