



Exodus 3:4-5

God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Exodus 3:4-5

Hymn 651

*Take, take off your shoes,
you're standing on holy ground;
take, take off your shoes,
you're standing on holy ground.
Well, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof
from the waters beneath to the heavens above,
so take, take off your shoes,
you're standing on holy ground,
you're standing on holy ground.*

Which is the way towards life?

The question rings down through the ages.

Give thanks to God, and be faithful!

What will we hold precious and who will we commit to?

Give thanks to God and be faithful!

What name will we recognise as we search for true holiness on our life's journey?

Give thanks to God, and be faithful!

Through our acts of worship, we recognise Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, one God of all.

Give thanks to God, and be faithful!

Yes. This one God is with us in the celebrations
and the testing times of life to the end of time itself.

So may we see and know you in this time of worship once again, O God.

Amen.

Hymn 657

*God of freedom, God of justice,
God whose love is strong as death,
God who saw the dark of prison,
God who knew the price of faith:
touch our world of sad oppression
with your Spirit's healing breath.*

*Rid the earth of torture's terror,
God whose hands were nailed to wood;
hear the cries of pain and protest,
God who spread the tears and blood;
move in us the power of pity,
restless for the common good.*

*Make in us a captive conscience
quick to hear, to act, to plead;
make us truly sisters, brothers
of whatever race or creed:
teach us to be fully human,
open to each other's need.*

Shirley Erena Murray

Confession

Christ of eternity, yet also one with us, we grieve that we are not always those who follow you in spirit and in truth;
when you call upon us to lose our lives in order to gain a greater, fuller life our hearts so often shrink with fear as we wonder what that may mean for us.

Have compassion on us, loving God. Draw us on into your promised life in all its fullness, Lord Jesus Christ.

When we decide that the easy and safer way is the pathway to such fulfilled life and cannot trust that challenges will lead through committed struggle to true life in all its fullness:

Have compassion on us, loving God. Draw us on into your promised life in all its fullness, Lord Jesus Christ.

When we push away the example of the faithful of earlier days and their prophetic words, opting instead for a gospel of prosperity and worldly reward and disdaining holiness:

Have compassion on us, loving God. Draw us on into your promised life in all its fullness, Lord Jesus Christ.

Assurance

**For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?
Or what shall a man give in return for his life.**

Matthew 16:26-27

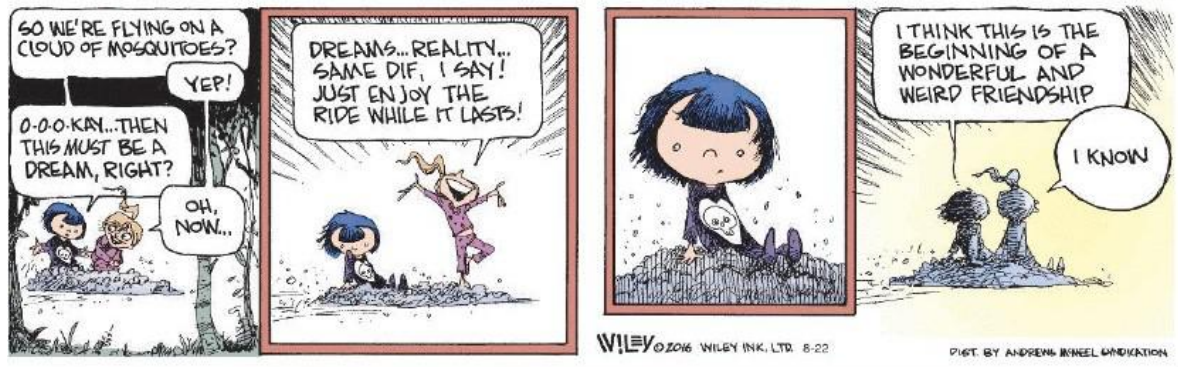
Thanks be to you, O Christ, for you lead us on into life which spreads out in meaning and purpose before us.

Thanks be to you, O Christ, for life which carries us into the heights and depths instead of a costless way.

Even as we have brought to you our fears and failings we know in our hearts that the holy ground you would have us tread is lit by the martyrs and faithful disciples of every age and time who invite us to share their greater dream of life in all its fullness.

Thanks be to you, O God. Amen

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Reflection

Dreams...Reality... As we have focussed on Isaac, Jacob and Joshua in recent weeks we have seen how the Hebrew Scripture often blurs the line between dreams and reality, seeing both as bringing about insights into human experience and the understanding of humanity's relationship with God. So we saw Jacob caught between earth and heaven but linked with both by a ladder used by angels; and then there was Jacob's struggle with an angelic adversary who gave him a new identity as Israel, the Prince of God, because he had engaged successfully with God through the night-time encounter. But then the importance of dreams in the human experience gained new prominence through Jacob's son, Joseph, and his amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat and the saga that saw Israel advancing its history on a path to a new future; a future to find particular fruition in Moses, the Hebrew man raised by an Egyptian princess and who found himself encountered by God in a sacred engagement which proved to be a new moment of epiphany, blurring the lines between reality and the sacred in a bush that was burning but not consumed. Was not this the beginning of a wonderful and weird relationship with far reaching consequences for the outworking of the ancient promise to the Patriarch, Abraham, and the fulfilment in a crucified man and his resurrection life in a far off future. So we listen for the word of God in the Hebrew Scripture for today.

Exodus 3:1-15

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. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 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 surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Periz-zites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.' " God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

This is the word of the Lord "I AM WHO I AM."

Hymn 102

*Praise to the living God,
all praise be to his name,
who was, and is and is to be,
and still the same:
the one eternal
God before what now appears,
the First, the Last, beyond all thought
his timeless years!*

*Formless, all lovely forms
declares his loveliness;
holy, no holiness of earth
can his express.
Behold the Lord of all
creation speaks his praise,
and everywhere, above, below,
his will obeys.*

*God's Spirit freely flows
high surging where it will:
in prophet's word he spoke of old,
is speaking still.
Established is God's law
and changeless it shall stand,
deep written on the human heart,
on sea, on land.*

Gospel Matthew 16:21-28

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Hymn 440

*Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
perfecting the saints below,
hear us, who your nature share,
who your mystic body are.*

*Join us, in one spirit join
grant us still your help divine;
still for more on you we call,
you, O Christ, fill all in all.*

*Move, and animate, and guide:
various gifts to each divide;
placed according to your will,
let us all our work fulfil;*

*freely may we all agree,
touched with loving sympathy;
kindly for each other care;
every member feel its share.*

*Love, like death, has all destroyed,
rendered all distinctions void;
names, and sects, and parties fall;
you, O Christ, are all in all.*

Concluding Reflection

Moses was a very reluctant collaborator with God, fearful that he would not be taken seriously by his fellows. And why would he not be confident of their acceptance with his credentials? A Hebrew, yes, but identified with the Egyptian overlord and, therefore not really one with them: yet ultimately to be the greatest of the Hebrew leaders in their origin: a sanctified man who was to be entrusted with God's sacred Law itself and the translation of his chosen people to their place of destiny, the land of Israel.

We who are to be God's faithful in our time often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and the inability to translate the call to commitment to the Christ on the faith journey with Jesus. Do we not also hear the penetrating rebuff of our preferred understanding of where the sacred path lies? **"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."** And what are the things of God for us? Are they not, ultimately true personal integrity in all our living. The integrity that makes us one with Jesus above all else. **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For**

whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?" Yes, a daunting challenge indeed; but it is the challenge to enter into life in all its fulness and be an enabler for others to do likewise.

Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord's Prayer

O God we identify with those who know your story, who watch from our particular place in history your journey through the way of the Cross and on into resurrection life. We pray that we may truly believe and realise what we have heard and seen in the ongoing witness of countless faithful down through the ages that we may move in faith to counter the life denying powers which would take life from others in the sustaining of injustices and oppressions.

In resurrection hope we bring you our heartfelt prayers for all who suffer because of humankind's inequities and selfishness.

We ask that you will raise up in us the courage and wisdom of our particular crosses at this time in human history, making our stand for a different world.

As we own the reality of the challenges of our world and live with tough questions and decisions unimagined before this time of pandemic and upheaval we pray for the presence of your Spirit, O God. Stay with us in our anxieties and walk with us as we tread with trepidation the holy ground of our time and place to undertake our tasks as your faithful people now.

Strengthen us, Holy Spirit. Take our hands, Lord Jesus Christ and hold us in your thrall, God of the prophets and martyrs and faithful disciples in every age who would share a greater dream for all creation.

And so in confidence we pray together

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen***

Hymn 604

Make me a captive, Lord,
and then I shall be free;
force me to render up my sword,
and I shall conqueror be
I sink in life's alarms
when by myself I stand;
imprison me within thine arms,
and strong shall be my hand.

My heart is weak and poor
until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure,
it varies with the wind.
It cannot freely move,
till thou hast wrought its chain;
enslave it with thy matchless love,
and deathless it shall reign.

*My will is not my own
till thou has made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne
it must its crown resign;
it only stands unbent,
amid the clashing strife
when on thy bosom it has leant
and found in thee its life.*

Benediction

May we know the warmth of God's love,
the life gifts of the Spirit
and the compassion and grace of the Christ.
Go back to the everyday world to walk in the shoes
of faith.

Reverend Graeme Kerr