

Lent 3, Year C  
March 20, 2022  
Church of the Ascension  
Meghan Murphy-Gill

“Here I am!”

“Here I am!”

Who says these words in the text we hear today? Is it Moses? Or is it God?

In the English translation it’s not clear. But if we consider how others respond to God throughout scripture—Abraham, Jacob, Isaiah, and Samuel—all respond to God, “Here I am,” we’d be safe to assume it’s Moses who speaks these words.

But when I read the first lesson earlier this week, I heard them as the endearing words of God to Moses. Moses, who is going about his business tending a flock of sheep that belong to his father-in-law, when he is caught off guard by strange sight: a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire.

God shows up in the strangest ways. God shows up right where we are.

Now, when I read this text, I don’t hear in my mind, the booming voice of God as portrayed in the Charlton Heston film, *The Ten Commandments*, but something more akin to how I might comfort my own son were he to lose sight of me. Or if he were in need of a hug to soothe more than the physical pain of a scraped knee or bruised elbow.

Here I am. Here I am. You’re safe now.

In the arms of his mother, my son feels at home. He finds rest and replenishment.

I can’t help but think that Moses, upon hearing God’s voice, “Here I am,” experiences something similar. He doesn’t run away in terror, but draws close to God at that burning bush.

God then instructs Moses to remove his shoes. Where you are standing, God says, is holy ground.

In the presence of the burning bush, where God has met Moses, right where he is, in sacramental fashion, that is, in a way that both reveals and conceals the immensity of God, Moses is told to remove his shoes. This encounter is a holy one. This place right here where I have met you is sacred.

And it is also home.

This story of Moses and the burning bush is a story about a homecoming, in a larger story of yes, the Exodus from Egypt, but also a return home.

Earlier in the story of Exodus, in chapter 2, Moses declares, “I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.”

And indeed he has. Born of a Hebrew woman and raised by Egyptian royalty, upon his self-discovery, thanks to his upbringing, Moses is rejected by the Hebrews while Pharaoh, once Moses wants to claim his Hebrew identity, seeks to kill him.

Things don’t get better for him once he flees Egypt and finds himself among the Midianites. He marries one, but even then, he’s considered an Egyptian.

In other words, Moses is without a true community where he belongs. He doesn’t belong to anyone. That is, until now.

\*\*\*

A friend and I were discussing just this past Friday the traditional practice of removing one’s shoes when entering the home. She is Asian and is fairly strict about this practice. But across the entire globe, you’ll find the households who practice this tradition.

St. Francis is said to have walked barefoot. A sign of his vow of poverty, but perhaps also it conveys his deeply incarnational spirituality, that he was always at home with God in nature.

Outside my own front door are two mud trays lined with the shoes of my family. I grew up with this practice and even have special shoes I wear indoors.

There is obviously a practical outcome of removing shoes. Frankly, it prevents the outside dirt, whether snow, mud, or sand, from becoming inside dirt. (Though, why do I have to vacuum so much?!?!)

But if you’ve ever been to a mosque or a Buddhist or Hindu temple or other places of worship in more Eastern traditions, you know that removing one’s shoes is a sign that you are treading in holy spaces.

Moses is at once treading on holy ground and coming home. As one Old Testament scholar puts it, “[H]ere at the foot of the mountain of God, Moses the ‘alien,’ has at last found a true ‘home.’ Moses finds his true home not with humans but with God, the God of his ancestors, ‘the God of Abraham ... of Isaac ... of Jacob’ (Exodus 3:6).”

God meets us right where we are, whether we’re climbing a mountain, walking the lakefront, or even sitting at our own dining room table.

Our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, of Jacob and Moses, is always self-disclosing, “Here I am,” and calling us back home.

\*\*\*

In the sweeping tale of the Exodus from Egypt, we’re still in the beginning. God then tells Moses that he has heard the cry of his people who are still in the land of Egypt, not living the full and flourishing lives that God promises. Instead, they are enslaved. So God tells Moses that he will be the one to lead them out of the land of their oppressors. Moses, the one who now stands on holy ground, *at home* at last, in the presence of God, who has met him on the side of a mountain, is to bring these people out of the land of oppression to a land that flows with milk and honey.

In other words, God wants Moses to bring his people *home*. A land of rest and replenishment. A land where they can fully be themselves, as they are, the people of God.

Of course, Moses, as so many of our Biblical heroes do, responds, “Who am I, to do this work?”

And God responds by reminding Moses of his true home in God: “I will be with you.”

Here I am.

In me, the God of your ancestors, you are always at home.

And when Moses, seemingly accepting his call with reluctance, asks God who he shall say sent him, God says, “I Am who I Am.” (Now is when I hear the voice of God from the movie *Ten Commandments*.) “Tell the Israelites that ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ The God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

God's response to Moses here, again is sacramental, by not fully revealing the divine in a name, but concealing it as well.

And it is fundamentally about self-disclosure and belonging. The God of your ancestors wants to be with you. Is with you. Has, is, and will dwell in and among you.

*Here*, is the I am. Right here in this church. Right there on the altar. Right here within us.

We are on holy ground.

So let us remove our shoes, and make our dwelling place with God.