

## Exodus 3:1-15

There are places we go where we stand, perhaps in awe and silence, because there is a certain sacredness about the place. A cemetery, a monument--such as the Lincoln Memorial or Mt. Rushmore. The Vietnam Memorial Wall was such a place when it came to our area. Even places like the Grand Canyon or a scenic overlook high in the Rocky Mountains demand a certain amount of respect, especially from first-time visitors.

Mt. Horeb in our text was not such a place. It was not breathtaking as some mountains are, rising up out of the desert at less than 7,000 feet high. Moses had been there many times, having lived in that area for forty years. It would not have been all that awe-inspiring to him. But on this day, as he was tending his father-in-law's sheep at Mt. Horeb, he saw something that nearly took his breath away. A bush was on fire, but was not being consumed. It was not a bush covered with brilliant red leaves as some still are around here, and so looking as if it was on fire. It was a bush with flames leaping out of it, and yet it was not being burned to a crisp. As Moses approached, God called to him out of the midst of the bush: *"Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*

It was not holy ground before. Forty years Moses had been all over that land and there was nothing sacred about it. But on this day Moses was standing on holy ground. What made the ground holy? It was not the curious bush. It was God in the midst of the bush.

Now we might argue that God is everywhere. He fills all things. And because God is in all places, why isn't all ground holy ground? But God specifically chose this bush as the means through which He would speak to Moses. This ground was holy because this was the place God came for the purpose of delivering His people. Moses was the man He chose. God would lead His people out of their slavery in Egypt through him. And so where God came to Moses to use him for this great task, that place became holy ground.

Like Moses, you are standing on holy ground. God is everywhere, but not in the way that He is in His church. In His church He comes, as He came through the bush, to deliver His people. There is no burning bush here, but there is Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the spoken Word, the Gospel. And God is in the midst of these holy things, just as He was in the midst of the bush, for the purpose of leading you, His people, out of slavery to sin, death, and Satan, into the Promised Land of heaven.

At one time in your life you were not on holy ground. You were living on unholy ground. That is where God's people were in Egypt. They had lived there on unholy ground for the Pharaoh was their master. They were living in his land, as his slaves, used for his unholy purposes. Everyone of us was born on unholy ground. Slaves to sin and the devil, we were at that time people without hope and without God in the world. But as God came through the burning bush to deliver His people from bondage, so God came through Holy Baptism to deliver you and place you on holy ground. And this is where you stand today. Out of all the people of the world, God has called you to Himself, delivered you, made you His people--people of hope who live by His Word of Promise. Because you are baptized into Jesus Christ, you are living on holy ground. Jesus is the holy ground upon which you live. He is your Rock and your sure Foundation.

And so you can be sure that Satan tempts you regularly to go and live somewhere else. He cannot move you back to unholy ground because he cannot undo your baptism. You are and remain saints of God--His holy people in Christ. But Satan does tempt you to live on dangerous ground. He did this to

Lot, Abraham's nephew. When Lot chose to live near the city of Sodom, he moved himself and his family onto dangerous ground. He placed himself and his loved ones close to wickedness, close to temptation. And you know what happened. As Sodom was being destroyed, Lot and his daughters barely escaped. His wife perished, turning to a pillar of salt.

The people Moses led out of Egypt were tempted to live on dangerous ground. Through Moses, God led them out of unholy ground and declared them to be His holy people--a people whom He was leading to the wonderful, promised ground of Canaan. But along the way they rebelled. Along the way they refused to listen to God's Word. Along the way they became selfish and proud. They were placing themselves on dangerous ground. And few of them entered the Promised Land.

Satan tempts us to go on dangerous ground, and he is often successful. He stirs up tension between families, tension among church members. He moves us to selfishness. He raises up pride within us. Through all of this, the devil distracts us from our journey with Christ. And so we take our eyes off our heavenly goal. We take our eyes off His Word of Promise. We live more like people of the world than like the people of God that we are. We become like Lot, moving deeper and deeper onto dangerous ground. We become like the Israelites, rebelling at God when He calls us back to Himself.

Friends, remember who you are. You were bought at a great price. Jesus was lifted high above the ground onto a cross for you. His blood was shed so that when the ground of this earth passes away, you will not perish with it, but will have a place with Him in heaven. Remember your baptism. You are sealed, claimed by God. You are His holy people. You are not of this world. Your citizenship is in heaven. That is the ground, the land God promises to you.

Today you are on holy ground. God is here. He does not have you remove your shoes. Rather, He removes your sins from you. He forgives you. Jesus endured a fire greater than what Moses saw. He endured the fire of God's fury in hell for you. You are forgiven...each and every one of you. And God knows how Satan tempts you. He knows how easily we move onto dangerous ground. So He is here, as He was in the bush, to deliver you from Satan's power. It's happening right now. You do not feel it, but God's Holy Spirit is working within you through His words coming into your ears. He is working to strengthen you in temptation, to keep you off of dangerous ground, to lead you back to Christ your solid Foundation, and to assure you that in Christ you have forgiveness, you have God's mercy, you have His promises. You belong to Him. Day after day walk with Jesus. In Him you live always on holy ground. And one day you will walk the ground of heaven. Amen.