

13th Sunday After Pentecost, 3rd September 1017, Sermon by Br Luke efo

Last week we heard about Moses early life. His birth, the clever thinking of his sister and his 'discovery by Pharaoh's daughter. We know, even if it was the first time we had heard the story, that God something special for Moses to do. We have missed out hearing the part of his life that resulted in him fleeing Egypt and his marriage. Today we pick up the story when he has his dramatic encounter with God.

I'd like to just remind us of three things. Moses had met his wife defending her at a water hole. His father in law – Jethro, was a priest of Midian. There is some debate which deity the Midianites worshipped. Some say the Egyptian gods, the Canaanite Baal, and others Yahweh. I'd like to think Jethro worshipped Yahweh, as after the Israelites had finally left Egypt, Jethro and Moses worshipped together and Jethro acknowledged the pre-eminence of Yahweh.

And thirdly, Moses was working for Jethro as a shepherd. Have you ever noticed that all the major figures in the first testament, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David were shepherds, or were looking after flocks of sheep? And of course, Jesus tells Peter to 'look after my sheep', again a shepherd.

In today's passage Moses is looking for a sheep that has wandered off, when he encounters the burning bush. The Scripture says he went to look and see why the bush was not burnt. It was only then that God spoke to him. Instructing Moses to remove his sandals. Moses does and then waits. Imagine for a moment the impact this must have had on Moses. Now remember he had been raised as a Prince of Egypt, his father in law was a priest, so Moses would have been very familiar with religious rituals. Therefore, it makes sense that he didn't flee when the bush spoke and that he understood a holy place. But nevertheless, the divine had broken into Moses's life and it would never be the same again. He must have been alarmed, but it seems he was not frightened.

However, after God tells him he's to go to Pharaoh, Moses does what I like to describe as the pattern of their relationship, he asks questions, which do seem to challenge, if not, argue with God. In today's vernacular, we could almost suggest that he gives God a hard time. Why me? Who should I say sent me, read that also as 'who are you'? God answers with the puzzling 'I AM WHO I AM'. Say to them 'I AM', sent me. And Moses continues to have his debate with God, but we don't have the rest of the conversation in today's passage. But their relationship is founded in this encounter.

Their relationship is solid. Moses asks, he questions, and much later, he argues his case, points out why he thinks God's decision is wrong and manages to change God's mind. But the overriding responses from Moses are trust and obedience. He does what God asks of him. There is another facet to this relationship. Moses, in his encounters with God, highlights that Moses feels he is unworthy. I don't think this is false humility, but is Moses's genuine uncertainty that he is suited for the tasks given to him. Ultimately though, of all the prophets it is only Moses who sees God face to face and lives.

I can't help but wonder, what is it about this relationship that made it flourish? It is true that Abraham also debated with God, especially over Sodom and Gomorrah, and God made the covenant with Abraham, but it is Moses who received the law. I'd suggest the relationship is as important as Abraham's.

What then is the learning for us? If I was to select two words, and two words only – they would be trust and obedience. Moses trusted that God would do as he said, and that he would protect Moses. And obedience in that Moses did what was asked. I'd suggest it was not blind obedience, because Moses did argue and debate, but he did, eventually, do as he was asked.

And remember it was Moses' failure to fully trust God, that resulted in him not entering the promised land. Harsh? Perhaps, but by then Moses had had lots of experience that should have told him, he could have absolute trust. Difficult, maybe, but the example is there. We simply need to choose whether to follow it or not.

Amen.