

Third Sunday in Lent  
February 28, 2016  
The Rev. Denise Trogdon, Rector

### **Who Am I?**

"O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

You may not have actually encountered a burning bush in your life but I imagine that you have asked the question that burns in most of our hearts: Who am I? One of my favorite icebreakers I experienced while doing small group training was a list of 10 "I am" statements, where we were asked to fill in the blanks. Now the first few were easy. I am a mother and a grandmother, I am an Episcopalian, I am a priest, I am a military brat. But as I got further down the list, I had to really ponder what is important enough to me, that it has become an intrinsic part of my identity. Who we are is often expressed in the shape of our lives. Yet it can be a lifelong journey to discover what really gives us purpose and meaning.

The same questions of identity could be asked of our faith community. What is intrinsic to our congregation and how do our actions convey what we believe? These are not just questions of definition, but of formation and discipleship. Whose we are and what grasps our hearts ultimately shape our actions in the world.

This morning we hear the story of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. Now just to review, Moses was born an Israelite. You may remember how he rode down the Nile in a basket made of bulrushes, how he was the object of a well-planned rescue and how he ended up in Pharaoh's palace. Living in Egypt when the king oppressed the Israelites with forced labor, Moses' true identity placed him in peril. When we come across Moses today, he had long fled from Egypt, claimed his Israelite origins, married and settled into a quiet, shepherd's life. He had no ambition other than finding tender grass for his hungry flock.

When God called Moses and commissioned him to lead his people out of bondage, his immediate response was to question his adequacy for the task, "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" What is striking in this passage is that God did not answer his question with a list of skills that Moses could use to complete the mission. God simply stated, "I will be with you." Moses was left to trust that God could use one who feels so fallible, so ordinary, to do extraordinary things. But Moses pressed God to identify who was sending him. At least that would give him some authority. God gave Moses yet another elusive answer, "I AM Who I AM," also translated as I am who I will be. Perhaps what qualified Moses for the job the most was his sense of vulnerability, and his willingness to live a yielded life.

We may not consider ourselves the stuff of which Biblical heroes are made, and I am pretty sure most of us would ask the same question; who am I that you would send me? I am not holy enough, learned enough, whatever enough, to follow God's calling. So we forge our own paths, set our own goals and priorities believing that we can be self-made. We work awfully hard to

prove our adequacy instead of remembering our intrinsic worth as beloved children of God. But what if we could lean into our limitations, to open our hearts to a God that has promised to go with us and empower us? God stands elusively out in front of us, calling us forward into a future we cannot see or imagine. It takes great courage to make ourselves vulnerable to God's plan.

The gospel today speaks of a fruitless fig tree that the gardener wants to tend and nurture. Like the landowner, our culture wants to tear down anything that doesn't produce, you know, return on investment. But our gardener wants to dig around us, throw in a little manure and wait to see what happens. Maybe some of the stuff we have been through is that manure preparing the ground of our hearts. We cling to security that has an irresistible pull to keep things as they are. Trouble often turns the heart from what is, to what could be. I AM who I will Be, tells us that we are enough, always becoming if we allow God to work in and through us.

This weekend your vestry spent time together asking the question who am I, who are we as a community of faith that God would send us into the world? We took some time away from busy lives to dig around our roots, to tend the soil of our hearts, so that our community will continue to bear fruit for God. If only we can remember to lean into our limitations, to trust that God will empower us, even when we feel like a fruitless fig tree. If God can transform a humble shepherd into the deliverer of a nation we too can be that gardener sent to tend others. God's call for each of us envisions so much more than we can imagine. But it is a scary prospect to yield our lives when we don't know the outcome. I take comfort in the words of Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry:

“We plant the seeds that will one day grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that need future development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. Being freed from managing the results of our actions enables us to do something and do it well. We may never see the end results. We are prophets of a future not our own.”

Our burning bush calls us to ask Who am I? How can I bear fruit for God in my life? I invite you to live these questions in a personal and communal search for meaning. And I pray that our lives will become an offering of grateful response. Amen