

Written Service Sunday September 10th
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev'd John Wiseman

Charity number 1134226



Using the familiar story of Moses and the burning bush we ask the question what is 'Holy Ground'
If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are
sharing this act of worship with you

**Let's begin by sing a new song to the tune 'What a
friend we have in Jesus'**

God, the mountains tell your glory,
lifting praise to you above!

In your Word, each mountain story
shows your presence and your love.

Noah built as you commanded;
soon the waters swirled around.

Those you saved, Lord, safely landed;
you set them on mountain ground.

Lord, when Moses was returning
to the mountain that he knew,
There a bush was brightly burning.

There it was he heard from you.

Later Moses felt your presence;
in the heights he knew your grace.

He brought down the Ten Commandments
from your holy mountain place.

Christ, you taught upon a mountain,
showing us God's kingdom view.

In the heights when you were praying,

God's own glory shone on you.

Climbing to a quiet garden,
in your grief and faith you cried.

On a hill for our own pardon, you,
O Lord, were crucified.

Thank you now for blue-green mountains,
red-brown mesas, high peaks, too.

Here may we enjoy creation,

know your presence, learn from you.

Here may we sing out your glory,
hear your call and find your grace.

Risen Christ, we'll tell your story,
from these heights to every place.

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Opening prayers

Loving God as we gather for worship whether than
be within a church building, in our home or in
another location, we do so knowing that we are
joined together with others in and through this
worship that we offer and the faith that we share.

As we sing or read through the hymns, as we
encounter scripture as we receive a message, as
we offer you are prayers we do so in the
knowledge that your love surrounds us, holds us
and enfolds us

We are disciples of your son Jesus and it is in his
footsteps that we follow, in all that we say, do and
be. Through our service and our witness we have
tried not just to proclaim but also be 'good news'
in the communities in which we live.

We realise we do not always get that right and so
we come to seek your forgiveness for the times
when we got it wrong. We repent of the ways we
have walked away from you and as we turn back to
you we promise to try to do better in the future.

Listen to the words God speaks...you are forgiven.

Let us acknowledge and receive those words as we say the words that Jesus taught his closest followers to say....Our Father..

Bible reading: Exodus 3:1-12

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ⁵ Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶ He said further, '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.

⁷ Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from 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 country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹² He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

**Today's Message:
Moses remembers....**

'Count sheep' he said to me. 'If you can't go to sleep, it will help'. That was my father-in-law Jethro for you, always ready with a piece of helpful advice.

But that's what I did for a job, count sheep all day every day. Still, it was worth a try if it meant I could get some sleep. Sadly, it never worked.

Laying there on my back, staring at the stars, the hard ground pressing up against my body. as wide awake as could be. I tried counting sheep, the trouble was I never ended up end up with the right number. Then was always one less than there should have been, and it meant I couldn't sleep at all.

Or maybe it was something else keeping me awake, something niggling, irritating, knowing. Maybe it was my conscience, remembering what I had done, wishing I couldn't remember it so clearly.

What caused me to react like I did? To raise my hand in such a way, to deliver such a blow, to strike down one of my fellow Egyptians Fellow Egyptians....that doesn't sound right does it. Is that really who I am...an Egyptian?

Well, I have been brought up in Pharaoh's palace, brought us as Pharaoh's daughters' son. But in truth it was not her that raised me. It was my own mother, with her actions, her words, her memories. Of where I had come from, of whom I really was, of whose I really was.

So, when I saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew labourer, one of my own kinsfolk, it was too much. It was in my DNA to intervene, to protect, but not to kill....no that's not me. That isn't who I am at all.

It was a tragic mistake, one that meant the loss of a life and the end of my life or at least the one I had known. Especially when word began to get out, especially when my own people started to be scared of me, of what I might do. And then when

Pharaoh finally heard well, I had no choice. I had to run, had to escape.

And this is how I have spent my days, here in these hills, here on this mountain side tending sheep. I have settled down, I have married, I have offspring. Yet even my son's name acts to remind me of my past....Gershom...because you had been an alien in a foreign land.

So perhaps it's not surprising that I can't sleep. Or was I asleep? Was it all a dream?

I was just about to lie down across the open doorway of the sheep fold when I saw....Well at the time I couldn't quite believe what I was seeing. All this time out in the desert, sometimes the mind starts to play tricks you know.

None of the others had seen it, not even the sheep stirred.

I stood transfixed to the spot. That bush was alive.... that one over there, it was on fire right there in front of my eyes. Flames leaping out of it from all sides.

Now I know what my friends and family are going to say. Too much midday sun for an old man. Or that that out here in the desert where everything is as dry as a tinderbox, trees and bushes do catch fire, do burst into flame, flash...a blaze of fire and it's all over

But this... and I know others will never believe this. This was different. That bush was on fire and yet it didn't burn, it didn't get any smaller I mean. The flames didn't get any less intense, didn't die down.

It was only as I got near that I heard the voice.

"Moses, Moses" it said.

Now burning bushes are one thing but burning bushes that speak, tell, that's another matter altogether. I was about to run, about to run down that mountain as fast as my legs would carry me, but with those words I suddenly realised who it was.

It was God.

That bush was alive with the glory of God. All of heaven crammed into that single bramble. A single

moment. And as much as I wanted to run away, as much as I tried. My legs simply would not move.

And God said to me "take off your shoes, Moses".

Now as everyone knows I have never been the most articulate of speakers, not with my stammer. but not a sound escaped from my lips.

"Moses" the voice said again. "Take off your shoes".

"Take off my shoes, why should I do that?" I replied.

God laughed. Laughed out loud. A deep belly laugh that rolled like thunder across the hillside.

'Because Moses,' God answered, 'if you don't take them off, how on earth with I ever be able to stand in them!'

Even now years later, if I close my eyes, I can still see those flames. Still see that bush alive with the glory of God. I can still hear it in my head...that voice...like deepest velvet. After all this time

People have often said to me, 'Moses what did you think when you met God in that bush?'

And I answer them. It wasn't what I heard to be honest or even what I thought. God is not a think, not even a feeling. It was a sense, a realisation, a knowing that I had of standing on sacred, holy ground. With God present, God active, God wanting me to be part of his plan.

It was the realisation that God was so close, so close that I could have just reached out and touched him. And probably got burned in the process.

But then that's the problem with most people isn't it. we try to understand God here ...in our heads, instead of experiencing him here...in our hearts. Sometimes that's the greatest distance any of us have to travel.

We remain unaware when God is standing right there in front of us. Sitting down next to us. Just being with us. We look but are unable to see. Surrounded by, but unable to feel. We are awake but asleep.

We are too busy doing, to simply be, simply to be still. Be still and feel the presence of the lord, moving in this place.

Let us continue this act of worship by joining together in a well loved worship song...STF 20

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

@David Evans 1986 Thank You music

Now I wonder where might you think of as Holy ground? For Moses well it was the vicinity of the bush. Perhaps later on it was within the tent of meeting or on top of a mountain. Lost in the clouds, thunder and lightening

For Jewish people I suppose it would be the temple...with the level of holiness increasing the nearer to its centre you got, until eventually if you were the high priest you might reach the Holy of Holies

As for Jesus...well I guess Holy ground was wherever he was, whoever he was with whatever he was doing

So what about here and now....asking people where they feel closest to God and more often than not the answer would be in nature.

In Atlanta I once had a professor who took off her shoes every time she stepped into a pulpit...for her that was Holy ground

Perhaps Holy ground isn't as restricted as we might think. Perhaps Holy Ground is any place where God is at work and where we are invited to join in

Wherever we....Pray, Worship, Notice, Care for creation, Learn more about our faith, Offer and receive hospitality, Serve, Care for one another, Challenge injustice, Tell others, Share and live as authentic disciples.

And that could be in anywhere....in a café, a food bank, a community meal, a GP waiting room, a supermarket queue, a school, on a bus, an office ,a football ground, a pub, in a shop....even within a church!!

Perhaps Holy Ground is any ground. It doesn't look different, we just need to see it as Holy, as a place where God is currently at work and where we can join in and play our small part in bringing about God's kingdom into being right here and now in this very place. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Think about the different places you have been this week...the different kinds of 'Holy' ground.

What did you see there?

Who do you meet?

What did you encounter?

What did you experience?

What did it make you think?

Now simply spend some time offering those things to God in prayer...and listening to what God has to say to you in response.

**We are going to finish this act of worship with
another new song, this time sung to the tune for
'The Churches one foundation is Jesus Christ our
lord'**

Our God, you called to Moses
to set your people free.
What wrongly some suppose is:
he answered easily.
"I'm not the one you're seeking!"
he seemed instead to say.
"My strength is not in speaking;
God, find another way!"

And yet, O Lord, you told him
to trust in what you said.
Your strength would surely hold him
through all those days ahead
Though many would oppose him,
by your own name he'd know:
You were the one who chose him
to help your people go.

You call each congregation
to serve those lost and poor.
We doubt our own vocation;
we ask, "Lord, are you sure?"
Yet you give gifts for sharing,
you show us what to say.
Your Spirit gives us daring
to serve Christ every day.

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Blessing

Go from this place and out into this day and this
community, with eyes, ears, hearts and minds
open to see wherever we are as holy ground and
to view those we encounter as daughters and sons
of God. Amen.