

Reflection on Exodus 3:1–15

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Fleeing the tensions of Egypt, Moses had settled into country living. His marriage to Zipporah, the daughter of the priest and prince of Midian, gave him a sense of belonging in this regional town. Portrayed as a somewhat reserved man who was slow of speech and uncomfortable in the spotlight, Moses was no doubt content tending his father-in-law's flock. Nevertheless, he put his usual shepherding duties on pause and deliberately stepped off the well-worn path when he turned aside that day to look at a bush that burned but was not consumed. In the trajectory of Moses' becoming, this turning aside opened him to the mystery and calling of God.

This turning aside is another theme in our journey towards freedom, love and life. It is a moment of reorientation and redirection, a seeing of new possibility or, like Moses, the hearing of God's prompting to act. In speaking about the nature of such happenings, author Virginia Woolf once said, "The great revelation never did come [to me]. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark." I wonder if we can identify with Woolf's experience, and yet, no matter how little or daily, our noticing and attention to the match struck in the darkness does seem to matter somehow.

Sometimes our turning aside draws us out of our self-absorbed preoccupations so we can glimpse a wider, more wholistic world. The Spiritual Direction course I attended by Zoom last week is located in Victoria, meaning all my fellow students are in stage four lockdown. As they spoke, it became obvious they are moving through a season of communal challenge and trauma. The difficulties they are experiencing were not minimised or dismissed but, as many of us might remember from our own weeks in lockdown, the solitude also amplifies our experiences of simple beauty and delights close to home.



So, in response to their present situation, one woman from our group filled the screen with daffodils she collected from her garden that morning. Another shared her experience of seeing a wedge-tailed eagle during our lunch break. Another, after noting the changes brought on by the warming weather, marvelled at how "Creation reminds us every day that God's love persists... *life does go on.*"



What my colleagues brought forth—Jenny's daffodils, Cath's story of the eagle, Jack's profession of faith—are not examples of simplistic positivism or avoidance of lament. Instead, I see in them an intentional turning aside from pure self-concern toward larger, deeper, more eternal perspectives. How easy it is for us to travel the lifeless path, following those demanding voices into familiar yet dead-end destinations. But all the while, God beckons us to turn towards the everlasting love that is here and now, in our midst, embedded even within the unlovely and challenging.

- **What enables you to notice and turn aside to the sacred love in your midst?**
- **What difference does it make for you?**

Sometimes our turning aside leads us to make changes in our lives. During one of our break-out sessions last week, I shared with the group my visceral reaction to seeing images of the wildfires burning in California. Together we mourned our lack of responsiveness and communal amnesia when it comes to many things, as a country but also personally. It seems we may be reticent to look at suffering, the destruction of creation and injustice *at all*. Or, our turning aside may lead to a brief season of shared concern and outrage, but our determination often recedes into the background when the crisis—whatever it is—passes.

Moses' willing response ("Here I am") opens him to the invitation to be part of God's activity in the world. But like many of us I suspect, Moses had to transcend doubts and insecurities. In order to be an instrument of God's liberating love, Moses needed to leave behind the comfort of his current position and all the security (and happiness) it brought him. He would also need to face his past—his share in the oppression of the Hebrew people—and the ways he was shaped by family and culture. This is not a small ask for any of us, but a necessary part of the road to freedom.

- **What might it be for you to say, "Here I am" to God, with openness and courage?**
- **What small steps are you being invited to take to participate in God's liberating activity?**

Finally, and this is perhaps the greatest gift, our turning aside reveals more of God and God's love to us. When Moses asks for the name of the One he encounters in the burning bush, he is presented with what is essentially an unpronounceable, untranslatable combination of letters: YHWH. This tetragrammaton (four letters) includes the Hebrew root meaning "to be" or "become." It is in moving with this ever-becoming-God, then, that we glimpse something of God's mystery and experience the profound love that is with and for us always.

A story I heard recently is a good example of God's slow, on-the-go, self-revelation. A friend spoke of her experience of visiting Niagara Falls. She said she was quite overwhelmed by the mounds of water falling over the edge, pounding on the pool below. She was amazed but wanted to move away at the same time. From her place on the platform, she closed her eyes and felt the gentle sprinkle of mist on her face. She was moved to tears by a strong awareness of God's love enveloping her that remains with her still. Even speaking of it now, brings a quiet warmth to her voice.



Franciscan priest and founder of The Centre for Action and Contemplation Richard Rohr notes that "God hides in the depths and isn't seen when we stay on the surface of things." Though our encounters with God might be "little" and "ordinary" as Virginia Woolf observes, they have a way of tapping into hidden places within—dark wells of memory and longing, of love and mystery. Therefore, when we experience movements of heart and soul, we do well to turn aside, look closely at them and reflect deeply upon them for therein God is revealed, opening the way towards freedom, love and life.

- **When have you been moved recently?**
- **What might this experience reveal to you about God and love?**

A Pilgrim's Progress

I do not have to go
To Sacred Places
In far-off lands.
The ground I stand on
Is holy

Here in this little garden
I tend
My pilgrimage ends.
The wild honeybees
The hummingbird moths
The flickering fireflies at dusk
Are a microcosm
Of the Universe.
Each seed that grows
Each spade of soil
Is full of miracles.

And I toil and sweat
And watch and wonder
And am full of love.
Living in this place.
For truth and beauty
Dwell here.

—Mary de La Valette