

**Take off Your Shoes (Or Maybe Put Them Back On?)**  
**Exodus 3:1-6**

**March 27, 2022, Sermon by Rev. Alex Creager**

*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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> 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.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

A few years ago, I got to lead a youth group on a week of service to the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The first day we led a kids club for neighborhood kids, cleaned yards, painted homes, built steps, and chased away lots and lots of bugs. In all the places we went to, we quickly realized that the Eastern Shore has a very large Hispanic population, most of whom work far harder and longer days than we just did, with not great housing or pay provided. A lot of our food in Virginia comes from this area, and it's these people we met who make so much of it.

Like most service weeks I've ever been a part of, that first day was not the easiest. It was hot. The Eastern Shore gets very sticky in the summer. Bugs – huge bugs everywhere. And throughout the day, all of us began to wish that we spoke Spanish, as the language and culture differences became a real barrier, especially with the kid's club.

Finally, after a long day, we hit the showers at the YMCA, rested for an hour inside air conditioning, and then we headed back outside. That evening, our dinner was an outside cookout with a local Spanish speaking church that had was worshipping in an old factory building. I don't know how many of us were excited for going back outside, but as we got to the church, something amazing happened.

All of a sudden, the 95-degree temperature went down to 75. The humidity broke. And a perfect breeze settled in. As we hopped out of our cars, all of us caught our second wind for the day. There were hot dogs, hamburgers, baked beans, and watermelon. I grabbed my own food, expecting to gobble it quickly down, and then rush on to the next task for the day. But as I turned around with my plate, I just had to stop dead in my tracks.

On this huge field in front of me, were a mix of youth and adults of different languages, skin colors, backgrounds all playing soccer with one another. And lining the field were a lot of the kids I brought eating, talking, and laughing with the kids they met at kid's club earlier that day. Everyone had a huge smile on their face. Everyone. As the sun began to set, colors streaked across the sky, creating a panoramic vista. And as the cool breeze hit my face, I knew that this was a sacred moment. As I stood there with a hot dog on my plate, I could hear God whisper to me, "Look and see Alex. This is what the kingdom of God looks like." Laughter and stories being told across languages. Food being shared. Games being played. A moment for all of us, in God's wondrous creation to rest and play and know the great joy and beauty God made for us all.

I should have taken my shoes off. Because that field, that place, that moment, was holy ground.

A lot of us grow up being told that holy ground, sacred spaces are buildings made by us. Churches, cathedrals, chapels. But throughout scripture holy ground is often found not in the spaces we most expect, but in the places that seem least likely. Jacob meets God escaping his brother Esau, while he is sleeping with only a stone for a pillow. The Samaritan woman meets Jesus while just trying to get water that day from her local well. Zacchaeus meets him in a tree. Paul meets Christ on a dusty road on his way to arrest people. And Moses meets God in a desert, as a refugee

from his homeland, watching sheep, and seeing a bush catch on fire but not be consumed by the flames.

And the same is true for so many of us. Our holy spaces, our sacred moments don't just come in sanctuaries or church buildings. Our preschool director Jennifer told me that a sacred space for her is this preschool. Coming in and seeing the children, knowing their unique gifts and joy and care is a holy moment for her each and every day. Jill Duffield, whose book is guiding our Lenten worship, writes that a holy ground for her was working as a chaplain in the hospital, and being invited into the vulnerable stories and prayers and space of patients and families. For others of us, we find our holy grounds in walks outside, where God startles or surprises us in the work of creation.

We all have had those moments of sharing in holy ground, not just in this sanctuary, but out in the world. Time and again, God wants to meet us. God wants to show us something. In this messy and broken world, God wants to invite us to pause and rest and know that there is still beauty and wonder and joy in our world.

Our liturgy for this Sunday is guided by a collection of prayers called the Carmina Gadelica. The Gaedlica was a collection of local prayers from Scotland and Ireland edited and put together by a man named Alexander Carmichael around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These are not prayers written by priests or scholars, but by everyday women and men, seeking God's presence in all they did. What is most fascinating about these prayers is that there is one for every single part of the day. There is a blessing for waking up. there is a blessing for falling asleep. There is a blessing for milking cows. There is a blessing for fetching water. There is a blessing for going on a journey. There is a blessing for coming back home. The people who prayed these blessings did so believing that God was not just found in houses of stone and wood. But that if we were open and ready to notice, God may show up at any time, in any place, surprising us, guiding us, and filling us with love.

Each week of Lent, we've been invited to try a new spiritual practice. This week is a simple one. **Go for a walk.**

Get outside. Go someplace, and don't rush through it. But take your time, walking and looking around and open to God surprising you. You don't have to bring much with you or do much at all. Actually, the less you have planned the better. But take a moment this week to get away from work and tasks and the next thing to do. And go for a walk, trusting that God will meet you in surprising places, in surprising ways, offering you a word of peace, joy, and hope. Amen.