



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan  
by The Reverend Maureen L. Martin, Associate Priest**

**The Third Sunday after the Epiphany  
21 January, 2024**

*In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

As we move through this winter and into spring our Thursday night book group is reading Ellen Davis's book, *Getting involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Ellen is sneaky: what the book is primarily about is God's desire for us to know, through the telling of Scripture, that God is already involved with us, and like William Holman Hunt's beautiful painting, *The Light of the World*, you know the one, where Jesus stands, lantern in hand, to knock outside the overgrown door of our hearts. (I have put it back up on my office door if you want to see it,) God is already involved in this world, waiting for us to say yes and open the doors of our hearts. God is that close. The ground we stand on is that holy.

And so, from time to time, over the coming weeks I am going to bring snapshots from Thursday evening into Sunday morning. Not merely as a plug for Thursdays at Christ Church, though there is always room to pull another chair up in Miller Hall, but that we as a parish grow in discipleship together, week by week.

And so, a recap and a connection to Jesus' calling of the disciples. We took a deep dive into the unburnt bush, and hopefully came out unburned ourselves. In the bush we find God peering out through the foliage longing to see Moses turn aside to investigate, so that God may invite Moses into the rescue mission that God has planned for the Hebrew slaves. Ellen uses the word *derailment*. God's friendship derails Moses so that his life will never be the same again. The best friendships are always like that. They take us off course. Additionally, Ellen points out that God is also derailed. He has heard the cry of the people and he has come down from the mountain to get involved and bring them to safety in the promised land.

This is God's pattern: he sees our derailment, rescues us, realigns us onto a new path: God's path.



You know, It is the saddest of human failures that God's derailment of the world is so often portrayed as some coming cataclysmic event that will destroy all those who shape up to the expectations of human power and control. This, my friends, is a message from the upside down. God's derailment of this world isn't a derailment of creation but a derailment of the powers of un-creation. A derailment of the gospel of scarcity, the gospel of nihilism that tells us that the only true story is that there is no story, that life sprung up on this insignificant rock for no reason whatsoever and in the end this rock will die and there will be no one who mourns its passing.

In the story of Salvation God is in the process of doing something beautiful God stoops down and lifts us up.

In our class we talk about dive flags in scripture. What stands out and invites us to slow down and take a longer look? Last Thursday what stood out to us as a group was God's command that the Hebrew women go to their neighbors and ask for their jewelry and fine clothes so that as the Hebrew children depart from Egypt they may wear these fine things.

It isn't a part of the story that gets a lot of mention, which is too bad because much later in Exodus when God instructs the people on how to build the tent of meeting, a place for them to draw near and get involved, that which has been plundered becomes that which adorns the tent and so each person in the community has something to offer up to God.

(In terms of narrative building, that which is plundered can be referred to as a Chekhov's gun. If it appeared earlier in the story, it better have meaning and appear again, even if in the beginning you have no idea what the import is going to be. Remind me to add it to our list of dive flags!)

Not just in material objects, either. Those who are deft with the needle will sew, those who cast precious metals for Pharaoh will cast them for God, and so on. God's plan for them was not only to free them from Pharaoh but also to teach them that they all had something beautiful to bring to their relationship with God. Through their involvement with God they were being transformed from objects: slaves, into subjects: the sons and daughters of the true King of this world.



In the building of the tent of meeting God is teaching them that the created order was intended to be beautiful, that resources are abundant, and that God's plan was for the whole world to be the temple in which God rests and abides with all God's children. It is not enough to survive when we have been called to thrive.

And so, thriving with God means that we plunder our own past when we turn aside and heed the call to holy derailment. That we learn to recognize that those things from our past which we might feel ashamed of contain within them gifts, knowledge, wisdom, and experience which we should not leave behind and that when we bring all the stuff inside of us out of captivity and into relationship God transforms them into the tools our trade. It is really amazing how God works. That experiences of our past which demeaned our personhood are to become those things which God uses to lift us up.

I hope that you can see the parallel between Moses at the unburnt bush and Jesus at the river side. The Kingdom of God has drawn near, and it is like the unburnt bush. Strange, beautiful and worthy of the soon-to-be disciples repentance. Worthy of dropping their nets, derailing their lives, walking away from countless generations of living the same humdrum life, catching the same meager fish day after day, surviving, but not really thriving. That is the invitation to them, as it was to Moses, and as it is to us now.. To drop the notion that we can fix this all on our own, that the way we have always done it, though it hasn't worked yet, is going to someday, suddenly and magically, make everything better without the help of God.

Seen through this lens it makes more sense to me, that last little bit about James and John leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men. They and by extension, us, are not just hired men, working for a buck, getting what they can from their time here on earth. Jesus does not pull them out of their father's boat to sever their ties with their earthly father in order to bind them with the same kind of ties to their heavenly father. When they repent and turn to the Lord, their derailment will set them on the new path, the one that teaches them to bring to all their relationships a love that is abundant, wild, and free. The love of God, not the love of servile obligation. Amen