

## Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Luke 13:1-9

During this season of the church, we are asked once again to change our hearts, and to turn toward God. That's what repentance is about. Jesus called on people to change their hearts in reference to recent events in Palestine. Paul called on people to change their hearts in reference to the Exodus. For both Jesus and Paul, this was an urgent appeal. People did not have the luxury of considering whether or not turning to the Lord was a good idea. Their change of heart had to come now, for there might not be another opportunity. It is the same with us, for who among us can say with certainty that we have all the time in the world for repentance and conversion, for coming close to God?

What, therefore, is this turning toward God all about? It's certainly about changing behavior. It's certainly about imitating Christ. But it's also about our awareness that there is more to life than what we can see right in front of us—even on t.v. or over the Internet. It's about our willingness to accept the existence of the divine, that which is the ground of our being. So we come to the story of Moses and the burning bush.

Since we do perceive things with our senses, Moses had to have a little help in his encounter with God. Any of us would have stopped in bewilderment in front of a bush that was on fire but not consumed. Any of us would want to understand what was going on. So Moses stopped and looked and listened.

As I re-read this famous passage from Exodus, four things were particularly interesting to me. Perhaps they will be to you.

First of all, the burning bush itself. The fact that it was not being consumed suggests that there was no point in time when the fire was first lit, and there would be no point in time when the bush would stop burning. It is a vision of eternity, and it tells us that God is eternal, and Jesus, eternally the Son. I find something comforting in this.

Secondly God commands Moses to remove his sandals, because he is standing on holy ground. I usually don't think of desert areas as being particularly holy. But God's words suggest that all of the ground we stand on is holy, because creation itself is holy, and the divine creator is ever present. Many of us think of the insides of our church buildings as holy places, and so they are. But do we think of our homes as holy? Our places of work? Our schools? Our agricultural lands? Our parks? Even, perhaps, our stores? Many folks do recognize the sacredness of natural surroundings. But it's perfectly natural for human beings to modify what we call "nature". The question is do we do this with reverence, or only with the desire to exploit and consume? If we are abusing the sacred ground we stand on, we are not turning toward God.

The third interesting point in this reading is the name of God. "I am who am" is a decent English translation of what God actually said to Moses. Other possibilities are "I call into being what I call into being," or "I create what I create." Here is where God reveals to us humans that God is Being itself, the ground of all existence. You have heard this before, I am sure. Creation wasn't something that God only did in the past. Divine creation is continuous, or the universe would be gone in an instant. How different this concept of God is from the traditional Greek divinities, for example, who appear to be little more than super men and women, with as many bad human characteristics as good. God, we learn from the burning bush, is all in all—infinately greater than any "thing" we can imagine.

And, finally, God doesn't just turn up just to say hello to Moses, or to announce the divine name. God has a particular mission for Moses. God calls him to an important task. Moses will be God's

instrument in freeing the Israelites from Egypt. We know that Moses accepted this mission somewhat reluctantly and needed his brother's help to accomplish it. Moses' turning toward God was never complete until late in his life, if it was even then. This too can be comforting, because our repentance and our conversion are seldom perfect. That's why we're called to them again every Lent, and that's why Lent arrives every year.

Let us, for a few moments, think about how and where we experience God's loving presence. Let's also think about God's call to us and about what a change of heart could mean, for ourselves, and for the life of the world.