

Sermons at the Anglican Church in Luxembourg

Text: Exodus 3:1-15

Sunday 3rd March 2019 (Evensong)

A man stands in the desert, on a holy mountain called Horeb – a misfit, a runaway, a murderer, a refugee and his name is Moses

Earlier in life he'd stood in the desert many a time, especially as he stood as an adopted Egyptian prince watching the Israelites labouring and toiling in the desert sun to build Pharaoh's cities and memorials

Torn between the two worlds - his roots as a Hebrew, saved from the orders for execution of all male babies by his quick-witted mother and then ironically adopted in Pharaoh's court – he has killed an Egyptian slave driver who was bullying a Hebrew, but then finds himself rejected by his own people

The ultimate 3rd culture kid he has fled for his life to the desert and started the life of a nomad, which finds him tending his new family's flock

All that is to follow flows out of this encounter in the desert– you can see it's imprint on Moses' return to Egypt to declare that God is freeing His people, his showdowns with Pharaoh in Egypt and then at the Red Sea, the formation of a people through 40 years in the desert, the giving of the Law and finally the arrival on the edge of the Promised Land

How God uses Moses in all of these events flows out of this encounter

An encounter firstly, in which God takes the initiative

Moses' interest is awakened by the burning bush, then: READ 3:4

The Lord addresses him by name and the relationship begins

Or better “continues” – for this is just a part of a far bigger initiative by God that has at it's heart a rescue mission – not only for the Israelites, but for all humankind, in which they and now Moses will play a part

Secondly, this event is one in which God reveals Himself, not just His existence, but His character in a way that will grow and grow until He makes His ultimate revelation in Jesus, fully God, fully Man

The revelation isn't in the bush – that God can do miracles, but it is in the name: READ 3:14

Names in Semitic culture are far more than labels. They describe the nature, the character of the person

“I am Who I am” (3:14a) - ponder that for a moment

- as human beings we make sense of the world around us by comparisons, precedent

When we ask how big something is we answer it relative to some existing measure – feet and inches, grams, past experience of distance, weight, time

But the living God is incomparable. So His name takes us to the edge of infinity: I am Who I am

That is who He truly is – something far beyond our puny ability to comprehend: but graciously, tenderly He accommodates Himself to us: like a tall adult kneeling down to be at eye level with a little child God says this: 3:15

In other words, the unknowable God chooses to make Himself known in ways that make sense to us; through what He does in love for His people, the concrete saving actions He now performs for them in the story of the OT and which find their high point in Jesus

Thirdly, God draws out faith from Moses – and this will be a recurring theme in his history – standing foolishly before Pharaoh, surrounded before the Red Sea, without food and water for the people in the desert, tempted to hold back from entering the Land

And this is how God does it: as Moses asks for a sign, something tangible to hold onto, God answers Him like this

READ 3:12

The sign will be that one day you will worship on this mountain

That's in the same league as "I am Who I am"

Moses wants a sign now, before it all happens

Instead He gets something far more wonderful: READ 3:12a – I will be with you

In English we might say something like: the proof of the pudding is in the eating

Faith is being sure of things as yet unseen and taking God at His word, and the reality of that can only be discovered as we step out

God's initiative, God's revelation, God's sort of sign – it all adds up to the one word: Relationship

Moses' ministry marks the time when God's desire for relationship with His people really begins to become clear

Through a later prophet, Hosea, God puts it like this: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my Son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me... It was I who taught (him) to walk, taking them by the arms.. How can I give you up? How can I hand you over Israel.." (Hosea 11)

A man stands in the desert – often the place of life-changing encounter with God

When a man or woman is prepared to do likewise, whatever that desert is made up of – sadness, bewilderment, loss, the sense of wanting more of Him in the season of Lent but unsure how to reach out for it – whenever we stand in the desert He will come