

Exodus 3:1-15

Reflection

Before we begin, I'm going to suggest that you take off your shoes and socks. If it's possible, anyway, and feel the difference it makes in how you feel.

Why do you think God, speaking to Moses from the burning bush, tells him to take off his shoes? I always used to think it was a sign of reverence, after all, God says "for you are standing on Holy Ground."

But in doing some studying of this interaction between Moses and God, Moses does not seem particularly reverent, even after he removes his sandals.

God says "I have heard the cry of the Hebrews in slavery, and I am going to rescue them from Egypt, I will send you to Pharaoh," and the first thing out of Moses' mouth after hearing about God's world-changing plan for liberation, is basically, "God, you have made a bad choice, I am not the right person for this job."

And then, when God reassures Moses, saying "I will be with you", Moses goes even further, he asks a very irreverent question, one we don't necessarily see as being as bold as it is "What am I going to say if these people ask me what your name is?" Names are very meaningful in scripture. Moses asking for God's name is his attempt to have some control over God, and almost bargaining with God, that he can't go and do what God has asked of him until he knows this. And God answers him in a mysterious way, not really giving a name, but a promise "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be"- it's a promise for the future presence of God.

Even though this is where our scripture reading today ends, Moses' hesitations do not end yet, he continues to argue with God, saying "They won't believe me", so God offers him signs he can show, "I can't speak eloquently", so God tells him I will give you the words to speak, and finally Moses comes right out and says "Please God, send someone else". So if the bare feet are supposed to signify reverence, I think Moses misses that cue a bit.

Some of us really like being barefoot, but I know to many people it feels uncomfortable to take off our shoes anywhere but home. Think of another story in the Bible with bare feet- when Jesus washes his disciples' feet, and Peter at first says, "No way Jesus, you are not doing this for me," and I think we can understand his hesitation. When we celebrate this action of Jesus on Maundy Thursday, we generally do hand washing instead, because it is understood that most people would be too uncomfortable to have their feet washed. And yet, having attending a Maundy Thursday service where we did that, I can say there is something beautiful and powerful in the vulnerability of taking off our shoes in the church, and allowing someone to see and touch our feet, even if they are dirty or smelly, and receiving the

grace of having them washed for us. I think that vulnerability and grace hits close to what Jesus was trying to show on that night before he died, and I also think it gives us a clue into what is going on here with Moses and God.

This whole interaction is Moses putting up barriers to what God is asking him to do, and God sweeping them aside over and over.

So what if God asking Moses to take off his sandals isn't to get Moses to show God some respect, but to get him to begin by removing one barrier- the one between Moses' feet and the holy ground on which he is standing. What if it is to encourage Moses to be vulnerable in God's presence? God already knows Moses inside and out, God knows the things Moses feels inadequate about, and God sends him despite them (or perhaps partly because of them- our inadequacies are part of who we are, after all). But Moses doesn't really know this about God yet- Moses doesn't know God yet. So perhaps by making him take off his shoes, God wants Moses feel closer to his Creator, to feel more vulnerable. And if that's the case, it works, because Moses puts voice to the things he thinks gets in the way of God sending him, saying "God, I'm not good enough, I don't know enough about you, I can't do enough, I can't speak well enough, please, send someone else."

And God says, "I see you, know you- you- standing there, with your feet on my holy ground. And I see and I hear the pain of my people, your people, and so, yes, I am sending you to help them, and I will be with you." And maybe this reassurance after this vulnerability is what helps Moses to go and do all he does.

I wonder how you all feel sitting there in your bare feet right now. And if you're not in bare feet now, or even if you are, perhaps take a moment sometime this week, and put your feet on the ground, and see how it feels, do you feel closer to God? And take some time to do what really draws us close to God- pray, and by that, I mean have a conversation with God, be vulnerable. Tell God how you are feeling, the things that worry you, tell God about the things you wish were different, in the world, in your life, in yourself. Tell God the things you don't want to tell anyone else, the things you have done that you're ashamed of, even the things you want to hide from God. And know that, like Moses, God already knows you inside and out, God knows everything you can say, but sometimes, we need to be vulnerable, and tell God these things anyway, so we can grow closer to God. And like any conversation, speak, but also listen. Listen for God's reassurance, "I see you- I know you- standing there with your feet on my holy ground. And I will be with you, no matter what."

Thanks be to God. Amen.