

Scripture:
Psalm 26
Exodus 3:1-15

“Something different is happening here.”

Different places have different rules.

Different spaces carry with them different expectations ---- assumptions --- and realities.

What is perfectly acceptable in one place is frowned upon in another.

What you can do freely in one place --- can land you in deep trouble in another.

Step into a dojo --- a place where martial arts are practiced --- and it is o.k. to twist limbs and joints ---- throw ---- and even strike people --- under certain conditions of course.

Something different happens in a dojo than on the street ---- do what happens in a dojo on the street and you will be kicked out of the club and also likely arrested.

Something different is happening in that place.

Go to a hockey game and you just might find yourself watching players punching each other in the face --- not part of the game --- at least as originally intended ---- but it happens from time to time --- thankfully less and less --- but it does happen.

No one is arrested --- or even kicked out of the game necessarily ---- when people fight in the middle of a hockey game ----- something different is happening there.

If a player is in possession or about to be in possession of the puck it is perfectly legal --- accepted --- and even expected by other players and coaches --- that you will hit the person --- body check them to try to knock them off the puck so that you can pick it up for yourself and make a play.

Perfectly played there would be very few body checks in hockey because nobody would hold on to the puck long enough to be checked --- it would be pass ---- pass --- pass --- shoot ---- score.

In hockey --- if you hang on to the puck too long you can expect to get checked.

Something different is happening there.

Imagine Tim Horton's or Starbucks if body checking was allowed ---- that would make for some interesting coffee orders ----- I'll take a ... ---- body checked to the back of the line ----- the biggest people would always be served first --- everybody would be body checking their way to the front of the line.

But something different is happening there --- in line for coffee at Timmy's.

Imagine a hockey player ---- stepping out on to the basketball court --- never having been told how basket ball works ----- and body checking the other players every time they held on to the ball too long.

There is a whole different kind of thing happening on the basketball court than on the rink.

There is a whole different kind of thing happening in the dojo than there is in line at Tim Horton's and Starbucks and so on.

There are different rules ---- different expectations --- different accepted behaviours for different times and places.

In the book of Exodus today ---- something different is happening.

And this something different comes with certain expectations.

God appears to Moses from the burning bush.

And when Moses replies ---- "Here I am." ---- in verse 4 --- this is what God has to say.

Picking it up at verse ---- "Do not come any closer --- take off your sandals."

And then the reason for stopping and removing your sandals is given ---
 “For the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

“Do not come any closer ----- take off your sandals.”
 “For the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

Clearly something different is happening here.

Clearly the rules --- the expectations ----- are different than elsewhere.

And then God speaks ---- verse 6 ----- “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

And then Moses responds --- also verse 6 ---- “At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

Something different is happening here and Moses knows it.

God tells him to do a few things ----- stop ----- remove your sandals.

And then Moses ---- full well aware that something totally different is going on here ----- hides his face in respect and reverence for God.

This is a Holy encounter ---- this in fact may be THE Holy encounter --- the one after which all others are compared.

Moses knows something special is happening here so he changes his usual way of being.

So it ought to be when we encounter God.

Yes God is our friend ----- and so there may be room for some familiarity of sorts ----- but He is also our sovereign Lord --- unlike any other.

To approach God frivolously ---- lackadaisically ----- without humility ---- shows a great lack of respect.

We are not really to approach God casually like we would anyone else.

He is our sovereign Lord after all.

When we come to God's house --- here --- our place of communal worship -
---- we are to come something like an invited guest before a King.

Something like an invited guest --- before our King.

There is preparation --- adjustment ---- leg work that ought to be done before
approaching God.

That is certainly what Exodus 3 seems to be saying to us today with Moses
and the burning bush.

Yes --- God accepts us as we are ----- but God also expects us to show some
reverence and awe in coming into His presence.

Stop ----- He says to Moses.

It's not that God will ever say to us --- "Go away."

But He just might say --- "Stop." ----- like He did to Moses today.

"Do not come any closer." ---- "Stop where you are."

And then it's ----- "Take off your sandals." --- or --- "Make an adjustment ---
change a little something before coming any closer."

And then the reason for this stopping and adjusting is --- "For the place
where you are standing is holy ground."

"For the place where you are standing is holy ground."

God expects us to take a moment and make an adjustment before we come
into His presence.

Something different happens when we come into God's presence.

We're here ----- greeting one another --- talking --- shaking hands -----
sharing what has happened to us over the last week or so ----- and that is
good and necessary and faithful.

But --- something different than just this is also happening here.

There is a Holy encounter taking place.

So ---- stop --- pause for just a second --- or two ---- or maybe even more ----
---- and like Moses make an adjustment --- show some respect --- and
reverence ----- we are in the presence of God.

At some point we need to transition from the world ----- to the sanctuary.

At some point we need to transition from us --- our needs and wants and
desires ----- to God --- and His will for our lives.

From us to God ----- not just an hour or so a week ----- or pockets of time
here and there ---- but our whole lives.

It happens in our prayer lives.

It happens in our attitudes.

Our desires --- our concerns and so on.

And this transition ---- from us to God ---- happens over and over and over
again --- many times within a single day even.

And it is especially important to adjust our attitude so it is suitable and
pleasing as we come into the presence of our sovereign Lord.

And it isn't just at heightened moments like communal worship --- or
personal devotions ---- or prayer time before a meal or bed that we pause
and take a moment.

God may come to us in the most unexpected of times and places --- and we
have to be prepared and be humble enough to stop and make the necessary
adjustments.

God spoke to Moses from an unexpected source --- a bush.

A bush was on fire but was not actually burning up --- it wasn't turning into ashes and dust as one would expect it to.

That's a pretty unusual place to encounter God --- by a bush all alone in the wilderness.

It caught the attention of Moses that's for sure --- so he goes to investigate.

Picking it up at verse 3 today ---- "So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight --- why the bush does not burn up."

This is most unexpected.

God often uses the unexpected when communicating with us.

We have to be willing and open to God's surprises.

Moses could have simply walked away --- or he could have run away in fear --- he could have thrown water over the bush ---- he could have thrown his cloak over the bush ---- he could have done a whole number of things.

But somehow he knew that something different was going on here so he went to investigate.

"So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight --- why the bush does not burn up."

The burning bush reminds us that God --- Yahweh --- "I am who I am" ----- our sovereign Lord ----- cannot be contained.

And the burning bush reminds us that God --- Yahweh --- "I am who I am" - ----- is not subject to deterioration or decay ---- nevertheless the bush was not consumed.

Something different for sure --- is happening here at this bush in this desert.

And then God speaks ----- only after Moses has stopped --- paused and removed his sandals --- only after this does God speak.

God has revealed Himself --- regardless of how Moses presents himself God has revealed Himself ---- in the bush ---- but only after Moses shows some reverence and awe does God speak in words that are not simply commands.

I don't know about you but I don't just want God to reveal Himself ---- as wonderful and beautiful and majestic and awe inspiring as that is --- I also want Him to peak if it be His will.

If all it takes is a little reverence and a little adjustment on my part ---- something like taking off my sandals --- changing my attitude --- showing a little respect to God for Him to speak --- then I think it's worth humbling myself.

God is forever revealing Himself ----- and God is forever speaking if only we are humble and sincere and reverent enough.

“For the place where you are standing --- Moses ---- Jonathan --- insert your name here ----- is holy ground.”

Something different is happening here.

And then this in verses 7 and 8 ----

“The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...”

“I have seen the misery of my people” ---- and ---- “I have heard them crying out.” ----- and ----- “I am concerned about their suffering.”

That's the very nature of God.

The loving --- compassionate ---- gracious --- nature of God.

He appears to Moses because He sees that Moses and His people are suffering greatly.

God is distressed and so He comes to Moses and the rest of His people

He sees when things go miserably for us --- individually and collectively.

He hears us when we call to Him.

And ----- He is concerned about our suffering.

“The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering”

God cares.

And then God acts.

Verse 7 ----- “The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”

And then it's ----- “So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egypt.”

“And so I have come down to rescue them.”

God is not only concerned --- but He acts.

That is the great comfort that we have as people of faith.

God sees ----- God hears --- God is concerned --- AND_--- God acts.

And God establishes this right at the very beginning of His Word ---- early on in His great love letter to us ---- The Bible.

Something different is happening with these Words --- His Word.

Sometimes we are rendered helpless when people suffer --- often we feel as though there is little we can do.

A loved one is dying --- or suffering from a great calamity or disease --- we can feel helpless.

A child slips and breaks an arm or a leg ---- we can feel helpless.

A tyrant or group of tyrants slaughter people senselessly on the other side of the world --- we feel helpless ----- what can we do?

Just because we feel and may even be helpless doesn't mean God is.

Just because we may feel as though there is little we can do --- doesn't mean God isn't doing something unseen --- miraculous perhaps even.

God says to Moses ----- to all the Israelites ---- to all His people --- us ----- "I have indeed seen the misery of my people. I have heard them crying out --- and I am concerned about their suffering."

And He also says ---- "So I have come down to rescue them."

That's the great comfort of Exodus 3 --- that's the great comfort of God ---- "I am who I am" ---- and that's the great comfort of Jesus Christ.

Something different happens when God acts.

Somehow the bush doesn't burn up --- it just keeps glowing.

Somehow good triumphs ----- it just hangs in there longer than evil.

Something different is happening with that bush in that desert with God and that man Moses.

And this story continues to live on today.

Something different is happening in the hearts and lives of each and every one of us who believes in the God of the burning bush --- the great "I am."

That's the great comfort of the gospel for us all gathered here today.

God hears our cries and our struggles and our concerns --- AND ----- God acts --- He is there for us when we need Him most.

There for us each and every day ---- whether we feel great relief --- or great despair.

Maybe today you're sitting here delighted about something in your life ----- maybe you've waited for what seems like forever for something --- and it has finally arrived --- that is the God of the burning bush --- the great "I am."

Or --- maybe --- you're in the midst of a great struggle --- a dry spell --- a desert experience ----- maybe you feel like you've waited and waited and waited --- and you can't wait any longer ---- don't worry --- be at peace ----- - the God of the burning bush --- the great "I am" --- is with you.

Or maybe you feel as though you're just beginning what you know will be a long and arduous journey.

Whatever the case --- whatever you're reality.

The God of the burning bush is with you ---- the great "I am" is with you.

Something different happens ---- something good happens ----- whenever we put our trust in the God --- the great I am of the burning bush.

Any place that we stand --- can very quickly become Holy ground.

The God of the burning bush --- can come in an instant and in the most unlikely of places --- a sight --- a smell --- a thought --- a triggered memory - ----- a newly forged memory.

A flower ---- a cloud ---- a drop of rain ----- a thought ---- a cup of coffee --- a telephone call or e-mail -----and on and on the list goes.

Our day can be interrupted ---- just like that --- by God --- the great "I am" -- ---- of the burning bush.

God is with us wherever we go ---- and God is at work in our lives --- and the whole of creation --- nothing is beyond His grasp.

And so we give thanks.

"Do not come any closer ----- take off your sandals."

“For the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

Amen.