

*Old Testament Exodus 3:1–15*

*Psalm Psalm 105:1–6, 23–26, 45c*

*New Testament Romans 12:9–21*

*Gospel Matthew 16:21–28<sup>1</sup>*

Our first hymn this morning set the scene for today's readings; Moses meets God in the form of a burning bush, Peter meets God in the stern words by Jesus to him. Both find themselves on holy ground, both find themselves in hot water!

Moses, whom likely only knows of the God of his people - remember he was brought up in an Egyptian household - suddenly encounters THE Living God and he is given a job to do. Though he live for some time in the household of his father-in-law, a Levite priest, that doesn't mean he knew God. We come to know God first then we experience the living God which changes our lives through the encounter.

I learnt of God in my childhood and I first experienced God on a bridge overlooking the Patea-on-Stratford river at about age 12. It burst out of me as I gazed over the magnificent scene that was spread before my eyes. It was like something shifted inside me and I went from knowing to encountering. The experience changed my life.

Most of us would react in a similar manner to Moses I suspect. What! Who me! Who's going to believe me! After all, here was an 'Egyptian' and who killed one disposing of the body and then attempting to settle a quarrel among those who didn't accept him as a child of the Hebrews.

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<sup>1</sup> *Revised Common Lectionary* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2009).

Hardly a candidate for the work of God in our modern world! And to be honest, I wasn't terrible forthcoming when God called me! I can totally get Moses here. I wonder, can you?

However, God provides and the answers that will be recognised by the Hebrew people are given him.

Likewise, Peter who had just acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and was probably feeling pretty pleased with himself, finds Jesus talking about his death in the hands of the people. Hardly surprising he steps in and says this cannot happen!

Again Jesus rebukes Peter. Like Moses was told off by God for failing to consider the heavenly things, Peter is told to let go of earthly values and allow God to participate fully in his life just as Jesus is doing.

Take up your cross, is one way of saying listen to the voice of God in the midst of the troubles of the world. They are not from God so focus on God and the heavenly things. Let go and deny your own perceptions and thoughts about what is going on in the world and then you can bring life into the death the world experiences so a form of resurrection occurs in our life and in others.

In this way we experience genuine love; love with mutual affection for one another. Have a love that cares beyond a physical or emotional level. It sees beyond and onto just as God sees us and every other human being. This is the higher calling we are to show.

We won't be understood, we won't even be loved but we are called to bless those who persecute us. We are called to sit with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. Above all, we are called to 'take thought for what is noble in the sight of all'<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, when we are persecuted we are to feed and give drink to those who do not understand us for in doing so we not only set an example, we 'pour burning coals on their heads'. Don't succumb to the same level as them.

Jesus invited questions and was prepared to help answering them, for questions lead to answers and new understanding which leads us to encounter the living God. It leads us to feed our enemies and overcome evil with good.

I invite you to ponder how the experience of the burning bush grabs your attention, to think of examples when you stand in God's way and how you can step aside and allow the love of God to enter into the world through your loving input so you can weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

May God inspire the experience of knowing God into encountering Him in your every day. Peace and blessings to you all. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Ro 12:17.