

Honoring the sacred in our lives

A sermon preached by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on the Third Sunday in Lent, March 7, 2010.

Then he said, "Come no closer; remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Exodus 3: 5

When I was a boy, there was a Moslem mosque not far from where I lived. When our church youth group visited there, we were asked to take off our shoes before we entered. When we asked why, we were told that it was because it was considered holy ground. It also helped to keep the oriental carpets clean as well!

If you ever experienced something profound while you were just minding your own business that is what happened to Moses when he was out tending his flock of sheep. He is confronted with the strange and fascinating sight, a burning bush that is not consumed. Though the bush is not consumed, Moses is consumed with curiosity. How can this be? A bush is aflame and yet is not burning up? And if that were not enough, the very voice of God speaks to him, telling him to remove his sandals because he is standing on holy ground. Moses hides his eyes, for he is afraid to look at the very face of God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. God calls Moses to lead the Israelite people on their long journey out of slavery in Egypt into the land of promise, hope and freedom. Moses doesn't feel up to it. He protests, as might any of us, "You're asking the wrong person; find someone else; someone more qualified, better prepared, more articulate. I can't do this!" But God always knows better than we do and doesn't take "no" for an answer. So Moses accepts the responsibility, even though he is sure that there are many others better qualified than he.

On April 12, 1945, after only 82 days in office, Vice-President Harry Truman was summoned to the White House only to learn that President Franklin Roosevelt had died suddenly and that he was now the President. Truman honestly believed that there were many others better qualified than he for the job and there were many who agreed with him. Though the critics and skeptics underestimated him, he joined with such powerful world figures as Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin in the waning months of World War II to bring it to conclusion. What surprised everyone is how Truman overcame his doubts about himself and rose to the occasion. In the same way, Moses overcame his self-doubt and proved equal to the enormous task of leading his people out of slavery in Egypt in their long journey into Palestine.

Think about the holy places in your life. For me, the holiest and most sacred place is right here at the altar. But there are other more ordinary places where we encounter God. It may be the kitchen table where we eat or the desk where we study or the comfortable chair in which we read. It may be wherever we interact with people in special moments and at places that have particular meaning and significance such as a garden or workshop or studio or coffee shop. Keep those sacred places in your life. God's sacred presence is any place of warmth, intimacy, solitude and peace. We need those times and places, whether we are alone or with others, especially when we feel under pressure. The holy is found wherever and whenever we encounter God's grace.

It is understandable that we try to understand God in our own human terms. Being made in God's image does not mean that we look like God, but that we are created in the way God intends for us to be. We imperfect beings cannot create anything in language or art that can come close to describing the perfection of God. It is only in knowing the life and person of Jesus that we

begin to imagine the sacred image of God. In Jewish tradition, the very name of God is so sacred that devout believers feel it is disrespectful even to speak it. A variation of God's name is Jehovah or Yahweh and when you take out the vowels, Yahweh reads YHWH which is how God's name was written. When Moses wants to know by what name he should refer to God, the response is, *I am who I am*. God is who God is.

God is revealed to us even when we are not thinking about sacred things. God has a way of calling us to certain tasks when we feel least prepared for them. God's call inevitably comes at inconvenient times when we have what we think are more important priorities. That is when we need to know that we are on sacred ground.

We need to recover a sense of the holy in our lives. Whenever and wherever God is present, there is the sacred and the holy. How often we are caught off guard and don't realize God's presence in our midst. The farthest thing from Moses' mind was expecting to meet God in such an ordinary place. He had other things on his mind and was caught completely off guard. God often approaches us when we our minds are on other concerns. Whenever and wherever we encounter God, we have to be ready to recognize and honor that sacred time and place. We must cherish the moment and ponder it in our heart. It is at those times and places when we are distracted and preoccupied that God is trying to get through to us.

Sacred times and places are where and when we get serious about our studies and get better results. We walk on holy ground when we are faithful to our marriage vows, especially when tempted to stray. It becomes a holy moment when we reach out to people who are in sorrow or bearing some burden.

When you feel God calling you to a task and are reluctant to respond, think about what qualities you may have that you have never realized. God has a way of calling us to tasks for which we may be better equipped than we think. Never underestimate your self or the qualities and gifts you have. Just because you've never used them doesn't mean that God can't use them. What God calls us to do isn't always what we like or want to do. That isn't the point. What is important is that we recognize and respond to God's call when and where it occurs. And when that time comes, we can be certain that we are on holy ground.