

Reflections for Lent 2026: Week 3.

Wednesday March 4th: Exodus 3,4-14

God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ⁵ Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶ He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' ¹² He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

¹³ But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' ¹⁴ God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'^[a] He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you."'

God's call to Moses was both intimate (called him by name) and intimidating - he challenged Moses to leave the safe and familiar behind and take on huge responsibilities.

We don't know what Moses expected to find when he went aside to examine the bush that was "on fire but not burning" but we can be fairly sure he didn't expect to find himself charged with the task of persuading Pharaoh to let the Israelites go! God still calls men and women to change the direction of their lives and perform specific tasks for him. Like Moses, we might be taken by surprise, when God calls us. Also like Moses, we might want to argue with God, to deny that we have the skills necessary to take on the role we are assigned. At such times, we need to remember that just as God went with Moses and gave him everything he needed to fulfil his task, so God will also go with us and equip us for a life that may be daunting and challenging, but which will also be rewarding, fulfilling and more joyful than we could ever have imagined.

Prayer.

Faithful God, thank you that you have a plan for each one of us and a role for which we are uniquely suited.

Please forgive us when we are reluctant to obey your call on our lives. Take away our fear and awareness of our own weakness, and fill us with faith and trust in your transforming and empowering might. Amen.

Thursday, March 5th: Exodus 24,12-18

The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.' ¹³ So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴ To the elders he had said, 'Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.'

¹⁵ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. ¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

We have jumped several years. The Egyptians have suffered many plagues, culminating in the death of the first born in every household. Now the Israelites have left Egypt, are travelling towards the Promised Land, and God has summoned Moses up the mountain where he will receive the Ten Commandments.

What is interesting here is that, although Moses went at God's bidding and expecting to meet with God, when he approached, the mountain became shrouded in cloud. Does that sound familiar? Do you sometimes feel that the more you try to approach God, the more distant he seems? Do you long to discern his will and find yourself just growing more confused; less certain?

Strange as it sounds, perhaps you're trying too hard! Perhaps you need to relax more and simply trust God to reveal his plans - to break through the cloud - in his own time, rather than in yours! All* you really have to do is be open to hearing him when he does speak!

* I use the word "all" advisedly. It can be incredibly difficult to do!

Prayer

Loving Lord,

Thank you that you love each one of us with a perfect love and long to draw near to us. Please give us grace to wait on your time and, when you seem distant from us, to trust in your unfailing and constant presence with us. Amen.

"Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all laud we would render; O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee."
(W Chambers Smith. 1 Timothy 1,17).

Friday, March 6th: Exodus 33,12-23

12 Moses said to the LORD, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." **13** Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' **14** He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' **15** And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'

17 The LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' **18** Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' **19** And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The LORD";^[a] and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. **20** But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' **21** And the LORD continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; **22** and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; **23** then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

"There are more questions than answers and the more I find out, the less I know!"

These words from the song by Johnny Nash came into my head as I read today's passage and Maggi Dawn's comments on it.

It seems that Moses is being drawn into a relationship with God, being given glimpses of Divine Glory, yearning for more, but not being allowed into a full and perfect knowledge of God.

That can be said for all of us on a journey of Christian faith. The more we learn of God's love for us, revealed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the

more we will come across things we didn't know before or struggle to understand. That makes us want to know more - to dig deeper, to explore and question. We feel we're drawing closer but then come up against something else - new, perplexing, exciting or confusing. The whole cycle begins again and always, just out of reach, is the back of God, tantalisingly close, allowing us just so much, but not the complete picture. Why?

It's not that God wants to tease or torment us. It's not that he doesn't want us to draw near to him. It is simply that his might, his power and his glory are more than we can ever fully understand. So we go on seeking, taking on board - or seeing - only as much as God knows we can absorb or bear until, finally, at the end of our lives, when we see him face to face, in all his glory, we will not only bear it, but rejoice in it - for all eternity.

Prayer

God of glory,

We long to know and love you fully, as you know and love us. Keep us faithful in our seeking for you and trusting that you will reveal to us as much as we can understand and bear, until that day when we behold you face to face and knowing you perfectly, will worship you perfectly. Amen.

Saturday, March 7th: Exodus 32,1-14

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ² Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' ³ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould,^[a] and cast an image of a calf; and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.' ⁶ They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

⁷ The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸ they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"' ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰ Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.'

¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, 'O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of

Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever." ¹⁴ And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Nostalgia for "the good old days" is something familiar to most of us. When we were young, the weather was better, the roads were safer, people were friendlier, bills were cheaper etc etc. We conveniently forget the aspects of life that were not so good!

The Israelites in today's reading had also fallen prey to nostalgia. Despite the hardships endured in Egypt and the eagerness with which they left, now they seem to yearn for those days. The journey to freedom has proved longer and more arduous than they anticipated and they have grown weary and disheartened. Does that resonate with your faith journey? Do you sometimes feel that, no matter how hard you try, you never quite meet your own expectations of how you should live as a Christian, that the joy and peace you think you should be feeling evade you and the life of faithful witness you want to lead is never quite "there." Perhaps you feel that life was easier when you just did things your own way, without trying to live according to a Christian faith? Do you fall into nostalgia for "the good old days" and feel tempted to give up with the Christian way of doing things? Take heart! Jesus was also tempted; also had times when he felt weary and disheartened. He understands these feelings and will help you to overcome them. We have his promise: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown." (Revelation 2,10b).

Prayer

Loving and faithful God,
Forgive us the times when we grow weary and are tempted to turn aside from following you. Give us courage and steadfastness to remain firm in our discipleship and fill us, we pray, with the grace, faith and strength we can only find in you. Amen.

Sunday, March 8th: Luke 15,8-10

Over the next three days we will be thinking about three "lost and found" stories related by Luke. In today's reading, we have the parable of the lost coin.

What woman having ten silver coins,^[a] if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

This story reminds us that Jesus understands the daily round of small achievements, worries and anxieties. He knows - and cares- about sleepless nights spent fretting over things which are not world - changing, but matter to you. Jesus knows the small things that matter to ordinary people and here he puts the kingdom of heaven in amongst those small, everyday things. The Kingdom of God, Jesus tells us, recognises what is small but personally important to each and every one of God's children.

Prayer.

Lord Jesus, you teach us not to worry, yet you understand and share in our worries and concerns. Thank you that your love for us embraces every area of our lives and that we can bring everything to you in prayer. Help us to remember this and to grow in love and trust. Amen.

Monday, March 9th: Luke 15.1-7 The lost sheep.

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

This parable is often interpreted as teaching about the importance of each individual to God. It also often causes people to debate the wisdom of the shepherd who puts 99 sheep at risk in order to search for one. What is often overlooked is the fact that the one really at risk was the shepherd!

First - century shepherds in Palestine did not work alone, but in groups - for mutual protection. So when the shepherd went in search of the missing sheep, the rest of the flock would have other shepherds looking after them. The shepherd, on the other hand, was in danger from attack by bandits or of having an accident. He put his own life in danger in order to save a single sheep.

God is that shepherd; he took unimaginable risks when he came to earth, in the form of Jesus Christ, to rescue humankind. However much we may feel called to sacrifice for God, he has sacrificed infinitely more for us.

Prayer

Loving Lord,

Thank you that you sacrificed yourself for us. Fill us with such love for you and for each other that we may willingly give ourselves in service, not counting the cost or looking for reward, other than knowing that we do your will. Amen.

Tuesday, March 10th: Luke 15.11-32 The Prodigal Son.

Then Jesus^[b] said, 'There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. **13** A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. **14** When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. **16** He would gladly have filled himself with^[c] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. **17** But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! **18** I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" **20** So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. **21** Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."^[d] **22** But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; **24** for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. **25** 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. **27** He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." **28** Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. **29** But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" **31** Then the father^[e] said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

With which character in this story do you most sympathise? In which do you most see yourself? Are you the wayward, generous but reckless and naive younger son; the dutiful but resentful elder brother, or the father, open-handed to the point of recklessness, a holder together of family and healer of rifts?

Traditionally, of course, the father in the story is seen to represent God, who, though open-handed and generous, is certainly not reckless. The wayward son had to come to his senses and be prepared to return to his father in a penitent way, but

when he did so, he found his father looking out for him and running down the road to meet and welcome him. Such is our God; generous, merciful, welcoming. The father wanted both his sons to join him in celebration and God, our Father, wants to welcome all of his children into his kingdom. He is willing to look for us and to meet us. Where will he have to look for you – amongst the cold, judgemental and resentful; amongst the insensitive, wayward and reckless; or amongst those who recognise their failings, repent and return with humility and gratitude to the arms of their loving Father?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that when we are far away from you, you come to find us and are ready to welcome us back.

Give us, we pray, humility to see when we need to repent and turn back to you. Give us compassion and a spirit of forgiveness towards others, so that the mercy we receive, we may also give. Amen.