

"Moses looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed."

Burn-out, we sometimes call it.

More than just missing-a-good-night's-sleep-tired but
bone tired, *soul* tired.

We're busy, but it doesn't seem to add up to much.

And no matter how long it lasts, it feels like forever.

I suspect most of us have experienced something like this at some point(s).

Frankly, I wouldn't be surprised if many of us are feeling this right now.

Today we read the passage from the Book of Exodus

with the famous story of Moses and the bush that burns yet is not consumed.

The bush burns, but doesn't burn-out. But -- what about Moses?

This winter, Adult Forum joined the Good Book Club reading Exodus.

So we have a good number of people here who could probably tell us
the context of what we read today.

They could tell us that Moses was born to a Hebrew mother
under slavery in Egypt.

He's among the generation of male babies threatened at birth by Pharaoh.

He's left in a basket by the water only to be rescued and raised
by the oppressor's daughter.

He grows up, sees the injustice toward his people, and
witnesses an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew.

Moses kills the Egyptian and goes into hiding. Just when he thinks it's safe,
two of his own people confront him about the murder.

He tries to flee and narrowly escapes being killed by Pharaoh.

Once safe in the land of Midian, he meets seven sisters by a well,
marries one of them, and tends his father-in-law's flock.

[Sigh.] That's just the first two chapters.

Can you imagine that Moses might be a tad exhausted,
maybe even what we might call *burnt-out*, after all that?

You may know where this story goes next.

Moses rallies to become the prototype of all the great Hebrew prophets.
 He leads the people Israel for forty years in the wilderness
 en route to the land promised by God.
 Christian theology sees Jesus as a “new” Moses (as in today’s epistle)
 leading God’s people to liberation.
 This whole cosmic chain of events is unleashed when Moses notices
 that bush which burns yet is not consumed.

Growing up, I must’ve had a Children’s Bible with a lurid picture of this
 for it’s forever burnished deep in my psyche.
 But let’s look at what else is going on in this section of the passage.
 It says that Moses is “beyond the wilderness” –
 meaning that he’s already endured trials and tribulations,
 confirming what we know from those first two chapters.
 He goes up a mountain, a place where even Jesus goes to be closer to God.
 An angel, whose job it is to tell folks not to be afraid, shows up.
 And then Moses encounters the Lord God
 who commands him both to come no closer to the burning bush AND
 to take off his sandals to stand with naked feet on “holy ground” --
 inviting at once both awe and intimacy with God.
 Who then calls him by name, “Moses, Moses.”

I think it was Archbishop Tutu who wondered how many young girls
 the angel Gabriel had to ask before he found Mary who would say “yes”
 to bearing God’s son.
 You gotta wonder if the same might be said of Moses and the burning bush.
 How many people would be too distracted or busy or *burnt-out* themselves
 to even notice?
 It makes you wonder what we might be missing.

This scene by the bush that burned yet was not consumed
 is the beginning of the “call” of Moses.
 It’s the classic story of prophets who question their worthiness,
 followed by the assurance that God who calls them *into* service
 will be with them strengthening *for* their service.

Answering God’s call sent Moses right back into Egypt and
 ultimately the wilderness.
 We read throughout Exodus of times when Moses is frustrated
 with himself, the people, even God.

But he never turns away – and God never turns away either –
once Moses turned to see the glory of the bush that blazed
yet was not consumed.

We as a parish have suffered a heart-breaking series of losses recently,
with three funerals of parishioners in the past ten days.
I'm hearing of people losing loved ones outside of the parish too.
It's been a brutal time for those who mourn.
This, as we approach a million U.S. deaths due to COVID
that we as a country have scarcely mourned.

This comes at the two year anniversary of the beginning
of this global pandemic which shut down life as we knew it
and forced us to adapt in ways we never could've imagined.
It feels like we've all been working twice as hard for half the results –
and if that's not a recipe for burn-out, I don't know what is.

We as a culture are yet to deal with the unresolved racial injustice
which came to the fore at the beginning of the pandemic,
and now we're stunned by Russia's invasion of Ukraine,
conjuring fears of World War III and nuclear devastation.

It's almost that if you're not exhausted, not feeling burn-out,
then you're not paying attention.

I wish I had an easy answer to make it all better,
to sweep away that sense of being bone tired, *soul* tired.
But for now we may just have to settle for naming it for what it is,
acknowledging that that's where we are in this fraught, historic moment.

In the meantime, it wouldn't hurt to be gentle with yourself,
and the rest of us, too, please.
This Lent I'm enjoying our simple parish walks in the woods,
and a little time on Zoom discussing things that matter.
For me it's feeling like less really is more.

I'm liking our timely Lenten devotional booklet with the theme of
"Letting Go With all Your Heart, Soul, Strength and Mind,"
urging us to practice "letting go" as an active, intentional spiritual discipline.
So far we've read about "letting go" of control, of hurt and disappointment.

Let go of the noise and psychic clutter.
Let go of waiting for an idealized pre-pandemic past that's never coming back.
"Let go, and let God," as our friends in AA say.

Trust that God who called Moses to lead his people through the wilderness,
who sent Christ Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
is with us in whatever wilderness we find ourselves today.
Trust that God has used the wilderness throughout history
to form God's people and
prepare them for where God needs them to be, next.
Trust that the wilderness may last long, but it's not forever.

There is for us a bush out there, blazing yet not consumed,
bright with the passion and promise of God
eager to get our attention.
To invite us into both *awe of* and *intimacy with* God.
To help us see that where we are now, even now, is holy ground.
That we may be led by God's Spirit to rest and respite
when God knows we need it,
and a renewed sense of purpose and healing love.

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