**Sunday 3rd September**

**Proper 17 | Ordinary 22**

**The Rev’d**

**Andy Braunston**

**Call to Worship**

Today we hear again the ancient story of Moses’ encounter with God through a bush aflame yet not consumed. We hear in a world which is burning, where the flames do consume. We look at the story and realise aspects have been hiding in plain sight – just as we hide from our eyes the harm we do to Creation. So with our fears and our praises, our penitence and our sorrow, our hopes and our despair we come to God in worship.

**Prayers of Approach, Confession and Desperation**

O Most High,

we give thanks for our world and the beauty that surrounds us,

for bird and fish, animal and flower, tree and bush,

for the insects that delight in their smells,

for the harvest that sustains us,

for gentle rain and refreshing breeze,

for majestic mountain and peaceful loch,

for bustling city and quiet village, we thank and praise You.

O Risen Lord Jesus,

in the midst of this beauty we see the ugliness of greed and exploitation.

As we raid our future and pillage our planet,

the Earth groans, eager with longing for a new age,

and fights back as we burn her.

We reap what we sow, Lord, and there is little health in us.

We fail to see what’s in front of us,

distracted by possessions and fake news.

Give us time to change our lives, that Your people and planet will not perish.

O Most Holy Spirit

You hide in plain sight, longing for us to see and follow You.

Give us compassion for Your people on the move,

fleeing war, persecution, poverty, and climate change.

Give us compassion for the earth, our mother,

the grace to learn how to live in harmony with her,

and time to make a difference before it’s too late.

Help us to seek true forgiveness and change, not cheap grace which lures us to Hell. Amen.

**Prayer of Illumination**

Holy flame of God’s love,

burn within us as we hear the Word read and proclaimed,

that we may understand, follow, and change,

that our world may not burn but thrive. Amen.

**All-Age Activity**

When you are in school and there’s a new teacher how easy is it for them to teach when they don’t know your names? Is it easier for you to misbehave if the teacher doesn’t know who you are? In the Bible there are many names for God: sometimes there are just titles like The Lord or The Most High or Father. In the Old Testament the Hebrew term Elohim is used a lot – it simply means “God” or “gods”. In the Hebrew the rabbis wrote down God’s name as YHWH leaving out the vowels so it couldn’t be pronounced – God’s name was too holy to be said aloud. Putting vowels in makes people guess what God’s name was – that’s why many hymns name God as Jehovah – where vowels have been put in. Jewish people won’t say God’s name as it is seen to be too holy for humans to use.

In today’s story Moses asks for God’s name but God refuses to give simply saying “I am who I am” (which could also mean “I am who I will be”) Why might God not have wanted others to know God’s name? (Think about why teachers need to know the kids’ names). Many people think that God didn’t want people to know God’s name as that meant that others would have power over God rather like a teacher has some power over the kids if she knows their names.

So in our tradition it’s often the case that we describe God by saying what God is like rather than using a name for God. We say that God is like a father. Jesus said that he was like a Mother Hen who gathered her chicks under her wings. What ways might you use to describe what God is like?

**Reading**

*Exodus 3:1-15*

**Sermon Notes**

*Exodus: A Familiar Narrative Hidden in Plain sight*

There are three interconnected themes fruitful to explore in this passage:

* Moses was at work in the ordinary things of life – tending his father in law’s sheep in and beyond the wilderness – and here, in the ordinary everyday things he encountered God.
* The land promised to Moses was, in fact, inhabited by others and Moses’ objections aren’t about those poor people to be driven off their land.
* That image of the burning bush is both intriguing and frightening in an age where the very Earth itself is on fire.

*God in Ordinary*

Humans are good at dividing land into settled land, cultivated land, and wilderness which we see as being in need of either settlement or cultivation. Jethro lived as a nomad, following his animals to new pastures to ensure their survival. Selling or slaughtering what was needed but with minimal impact on the land. We might see the Native American and Canadian peoples as living similar lives – nomadic and recognising how to live in harmony with creation. The Egyptians had built great cities and had many farms to sustain those cities with the food they needed – just as we do. The early European settlers in the Americas saw the land – which they called the new world - as a wilderness which needed to be tamed, cultivated, and inhabited. They removed the native peoples from the land through war, deliberate infection, and subjugation to make room for what they saw as civilization. We saw this in Scotland too as the Victorian improvers in the Highlands and Islands wanted to increase agricultural efficiency and cleared the people who knew the land off it. As a consequence, we now we have vast desolate Highland regions which don’t support the abundance of life they once did. As a nomad Moses encountered God. In the wilderness Moses was in tune with nature and its demands. Tending animals he would have been more aware of nature’s awesome power than when living in the city – in the palace no less - where he’d been one step removed from the consequences of rain, wind, and poor harvests. An experience of the divine in the midst of the ordinary everyday things of life changes Moses and human history.

*The Contested Land*

The *Land of Milk and Hone*y God is portrayed as promising is already inhabited. Just as the European settlers to the Americas, New Zealand, and Australia had to deal with those who were already there, so the Jewish people had to deal with those living in the land. The writer clearly couldn’t conceive of God being a universal God – if God was seen one who loved the Canaanites, the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites then He’d not have promised it to Moses and the Jewish people. Here is an age old, and contemporary, struggle about land hiding in plain sight. Of course the passage was written long after the events they purport to show - when Israel was in conflict with other tribes and nations these stories with their divine command to take the Land would have been useful. Even now some uses these narratives as justification for more land seizures in Palestine. These stories were used by European Christians to justify taking land from native peoples all over what was called “the new world.” Conquest always had environmental consequences as well as social and political ones. The conquest of the peoples of South America led to their cities being overrun by nature again – it’s why we find amazing cities in South American jungles. Trees grew, sequestering carbon and so lowering the earth’s average temperature – the opposite of what’s happening now – a huge contributory factor to the 200 year-long Little Ice Age in the 16th to 18th Centuries. Our battles and wars change the world, damage the Earth, and have consequences we can only begin to imagine.

*The Burning Bush*

Such is the power of fire in religious story that we take comfort in such an image. Yet fire itself is rather a two edged sword. We need warmth; those nomadic peoples knew they had to keep warm and learned to make fire. Farmers knew that ash was a good fertiliser; forest fires often lead to new growth. The rising temperatures now lead to out of control forest fires. These news stories about heat and burning are in plain sight but we ignored them preferring scandals about Huw Edwards and Philip Schofield. This year the media ran over 10,000 news stories about Philip Schofield but just five on a scientific paper showing the chances of simultaneous crop losses in the world’s major growing regions have been dangerously underestimated. These crops are endangered by climate change. Our bushes are burning in plain sight but we ignore them.

*And So…*

We can find God at work in the everyday and ordinary facets of our lives hiding in plain sight.

We like to think that things aren’t connected. Sorting our rubbish isn’t connected to the war in Ukraine, or food shortages in the developing world. Every aspect of our lives is connected – often in plain sight if we but open our eyes.

Moses opened his eyes and saw a burning bush, aflame with God’s power yet not consumed. Unless we soon wake up and open our eyes to the climate emergency our bushes and trees will be consumed in the flames of our greed. The truth is there, hidden in plain sight by the press and corporations that don’t want us to see.

Moses was changed by his encounter with God. The flames of God’s fury tell us we need to change – and those who have much need to change the most. There is no plan B despite wealthy celebrities holding out ideas about the colonisation of other planets. We need to be led into freedom – from poisonous pollution, from dependency on fossil fuels which choke our planet, warm our atmosphere, and lead to our bushes burning. A freedom to see what’s in plain sight.

**Affirmation of Faith**

We believe that God created the world **and it is good.**

We believe that God created us **to live in harmony with nature.**

We believe that human selfishness and greed

are changing our climate, heating the earth,

**and endangering all living things.**

We believe as temperatures and sea levels rise

we have to change our attitudes, lifestyles, economies, and politics,

**and adapt to all that is to come.**

We believe we can live as the Creator intended,

through the sacrificial example of Jesus Christ,

in the power of the Holy Spirit,

**so that our world may not end. Amen**

**Intercessions**

O God, Eternal Majesty,

we thank you for our world,

but recognise all is not as it should be.

birds are dying of avian flu,

fish swim in polluted seas,

flowers cry out for bees and insects to pollinate them,

trees are torn down so big business can make more money.

The rains are not gentle but threatening,

the mountains shake with rage

as we turn our backs on the earth our mother.

Teach us, O God, to learn from the Earth and its earliest peoples,

that we may live in harmony with Creation and each other.

*pause*

Through our lives and by Your will, **Your Kingdom come.**

O God, Incarnate Word,

You walked our earth, know our pain, see our confusion,

and sense our confusion.

Help us to see those things You lay out in plain sight:-

the rising sea waters,

the increasing temperature,

the people on the move,

the ecological crisis reaching tipping point,

and give us the grace, strength and foolishness to act.

Forgive us when we are distracted by things that don’t matter.

Help us to call to account those who lead us,

and those who hide in the shadows of business,

that we may use our voices, money, and votes

to change before it’s too late.

*pause*

Through our lives and by Your will, **Your Kingdom come.**

O God, Eternal Flame of love,

bless those on the move this day,

fleeing war, hatred, poverty and climate change,

open our minds and our hearts to see the world as it really is;

bless those this day who seek to make peace and bring justice;

in particular we pray for the people of Ukraine

caught up in a war of aggression,

and the people of Russia, lied to and manipulated by evil men.

We pray for the people of Palestine

suffering the consequences of Empire,

and the people of Israel longing for security.

Help us to resist all that promises easy answers and cheap grace,

to see the road to Hell when it’s before us,

and turn back to You.

*pause*

Through our lives and by Your will, **Your Kingdom come.**

Eternal Trinity of Love,

we raise to You the people and places we love and worry about

*longer pause*

Through our lives and by Your will, **Your Kingdom come.**

We join all our prayers together as we pray as Jesus taught: Our Father…

**Offertory**

Moses gave. He gave of his time to tend the sheep. He gave his future to free his people. He gave of his courage in order to obey God. We too are called to give – of our time, our future and our courage in order to live as committed disciples of the Lord Jesus. We also give of our resources to support charities at home and abroad and to support the work of God through the Church. We may give through envelopes or cash, bank transfers or standing orders. We give knowing that we have to return to God something of what has been given to us and, in so doing, we embody the change our earth cries out for. Let’s pray:

Accept our gifts O God, as tokens of our praise and thanks to You.

Accept our gifts O God, as tokens of our desire to change.

Accept our gifts O God, as tokens of our love.

Accept us too O God,

that we may continue to praise, change and love. Amen.

**Holy Communion**

*written by the Rev’d Betsy Flory of the United Church of Christ, USA and printed in Worship Ways, Vol. 7 No. 3 © 2008 Local Church Ministries, Worship and Education Ministry Team, United Church of Christ.*

*Invitation to Communion*

We celebrate this holy meal because

Jesus’ ministry happened around tables:

tables where the unwelcome were invited in,

where the powerful were taught and humbled,

where the hungry were fed and

the thirsty were given something to drink.

In these meals God’s saving presence was revealed and made real,

and a new form of community was given birth.

**We come to this table to meet Jesus, made known in the breaking of the bread.**

God be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to God**.

Let us give thanks to God. **It is right to give God thanks and praise**

*Prayer of Great Thanksgiving*

God, we give thanks for your presence made known through your creation.

We are thankful that it was your word,

borne on your very breath, which commanded the first waters to yield

the disordered order of teeming, abundant life.

We are grateful for the waters of judgment

which brought a new start for your world when we sullied it with violence.

We give thanks that you parted the seas, offering us a way out of bondage.

We are glad that you have rocked in the waters of Mary’s womb

and that your feet have felt

the welcome of warm soil cupped around them.

We give thanks for our lives moulded from the same warm soil of earth

and your en-livening breath.

We know your goodness in fields

that hold seeds of grace and seeds of wheat in equal measure.

We celebrate life with grains and fruits and cold clean water,

set on the table that all may be refreshed.

And we are thankful that we are neither the first nor the last

to be invited to this feast, but are members of a great web of worshippers

who have come before and will come long after.

We give thanks that Jesus lived a human life among us;

teaching, feeding, healing, casting out evil, and calling all into your service.

He shared in our suffering and joy, and received death at our hands.

We rejoice that you raised Christ from the dead

and so ended our captivity to sin and death, freeing us for your works of love and justice.

We celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, the wind from God,

who calls us into the body of Christ where, like Mary,

we are asked to give birth to love, mercy and justice for your world.

We give thanks for the gifts of this table, the bounty of your beautiful earth,

for it is here that all are gathered, filled with good things to eat,

and sent into your world to proclaim shalom.

**Holy, holy God of love, the whole creation speaks of your glory.**

We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion

Jesus gathered with his followers to share a meal.

He took bread that was to feed them,

gave you thanks, God, and broke the bread to share it, saying,

“This is my body, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

And likewise Jesus took a cup of wine that was to quench their thirst

and gave you thanks for it. He then said,

“Take this cup and share it among you.

I will not drink of it again until the realm of God has come.

This cup that is poured out for you

is the new covenant in my blood.”

Come, Holy Spirit and bless these earth-born gifts of bread and wine.

Bless us as we receive them

that we might be made ready to feed your sheep,

to return flourishing to the land,

to heal the lame and blind and deaf,

to unstop the mouths of the mute for your praise.

Make us faithful in all things to which you have called us.

**In the strength Christ gives us, we offer ourselves to you, God.**

**We give thanks that you have called us to serve your world and your people.**

*Breaking Bread, Pouring Wine*

By this bread Christ’s body is fed.

We are gathered and sent into God’s world to proclaim shalom.

Through this cup of blessing our old covenant with death is broken.

We are filled with new life. Let us eat and drink together.

*Music for Communion*

Karl Jenkins *Adiemus*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

We thank you God because you have invited us to this table.

Here we are strengthened for the task ahead of us: the loving of the world.

Here we receive all Christ’s gifts. Strengthen our faith.

Help us love one another and your creation more.

Teach us to pray, share, sing, teach, feed, heal, call and welcome

as you have done to us. Make our lives a form of praise for your love

shown to us through Jesus Christ. Amen

**Blessing**

May the One who created this earth and all that is therein,

bless you with the will to live in harmony with all that has been made.

May the One who walked this earth, tended the poor and weak,

followed the stars of night, and was warmed by the day’s sun,

bless you with the desire to walk in His footsteps.

May the One who inspires awkward questions and disturbing answers,

unsettles us and makes us see all that is in plain sight,

give you eyes to see and minds to understand,

that you can make a difference.

And the blessing of Almighty God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, | *or* |Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Abiding Spirit

be with you and all whom you love, now and always, Amen.

|  |
| --- |
| Hymn Suggestions |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| All Creatures of Our God and King | 39 | 147 | 99 | 7 |
| All Things Bright and Beautiful |  | 137 | 100 | 231 |
| For the Beauty of the Earth | 41 | 181 | 102 | 152 |
| O Lord Our God Throughout the Earth |  | 5 | 112 |  |
| Sing for God’s Glory that colours the dawn of creation |  | 172 | 116 |  |
| When Mountains That We Thought Secure |  |  | 722 |  |
| As if you were not there |  |  | 724 |  |
| Touch the earth lightly |  | 243 | 729 |  |
| Lord Bring the Day To Pass | 87 | 238 |  |  |
| Isaiah the prophet has written of old |  | 241 |  |  |
| Praise Ye The Lord ‘tis good to raise | 50 |  | 115 |  |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | *StF – Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Other Musical Suggestions

You might want to have Joni Mitchell’s [Big Yellow Taxi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2595abcvh2M) playing before worship. Mitchell commented: *I wrote 'Big Yellow Taxi' on my first trip to Hawaii. I took a taxi to the hotel and when I woke up the next morning, I threw back the curtains and saw these beautiful green mountains in the distance. Then, I looked down and there was a parking lot as far as the eye could see, and it broke my heart […] this blight on paradise. That's when I sat down and wrote the song.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

I find music during the distribution of Communion helpful to help folk as they pray. Karl Jenkin’s [Adiemus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCsQZSB1gZg) is rather good.

Similarly you may want to consider Queen’s haunting “[Is This the World We Created?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wllXY322K7Q) as a thoughtful closing piece of music.

1. Hilburn, Robert (December 8, 1996). ["Both Sides, Later"](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-12-08/entertainment/ca-6804_1_early-songs#mod-a-body-after-second-para). [*Los Angeles Times*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Times). Los Angeles, CA. [ISSN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISSN_%28identifier%29) [0458-3035](https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0458-3035). [OCLC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OCLC_%28identifier%29) [3638237](https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/3638237) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)