

Call to Worship

Lord God, we are here to worship you, the Lord and Creator of all things.
We come...but wait, why do we come?
Is it because that's just what we do on a Sunday?
Is it because there's nothing else to do as the shops don't open yet?
Is it that we want to, but hope it won't go on too long as dinner will be waiting?
Lord God, we are here to worship you.
Open our hearts and minds that we might forget our distractions and focus on you.
We offer you our hearts and minds as we come together in praise and thanksgiving. Amen

Prayers of Approach and Confession, Forgiveness and Illumination

Lord God, on this Bank Holiday Weekend,
we look around our world and your creation is beautiful.
The sky, even when filled with clouds is different every day, and fascinating to observe.
The flowers, and trees, lakes and seas are living reminders of your creation,
changing throughout the seasons to give us a different perspective each time.
Yet, so often, we take it for granted.
We complain at the rain clouds,
we trample on the flowers,
we pollute our seas and rivers and then complain that they are dirty.
We are sorry that our actions impact on your creation.
Even small things can make a huge difference,
and we know that we need to change our attitude before we can change our actions.

Lord, we know that when we say we are sorry
and change our attitude as a result and try to live differently,
you offer your forgiveness and for that we are grateful.
Inspire us to change from inside to out
that our actions may reflect our innermost being, with you in our heart.

Thank you Lord for all that you give to us,
all that you share with us and all that we can learn from you.
May we offer all our spaces in our lives to be Holy Ground,
where we can meet with you and listen to you, and share with each other.
May your words burn like fire within us,

without consuming us, that we may be inspired and energised to go and do, rather than stay and wait for someone else.

May our lives reflect your calling, and our actions reflect your love

In Jesus' Name. Amen

Readings

Exodus 3: 1-15 | St Matthew 16: 21-28

All Age Activity

Moses and the burning bush

You will need:

- Paper and pens to draw around feet / decorate shoes (optional as you could just ask them to remove their own)
- Flame shapes out of Post-It Notes or orange/yellow/red Post-It Notes.
- Something to represent a bush – could be a green box or a bowl with a green towel

Activity

Ask the young people to draw around their feet and decorate them as shoes (or just ask them to take their shoes off).

Ask them why do we take off our shoes? (answers could include because they're muddy, or dirty, or our feet are hot).

Remind them that in some cultures, including in the UK it is a sign of respect to remove your shoes when you go into someone's house, to keep the outside away from the inside! Some mosques and temples require you to remove your shoes as you are going into a holy place – would you do that in church??

Moses was asked to remove his shoes as a sign of respect as he was standing on Holy Ground while he spoke to God.

Do we show respect to God in our worship? How can we show that Holy Ground can actually be anywhere that we are talking with God? Think of some places that you could see as being Holy, where you can talk and listen with God.

God had a message for Moses which he gave through a bush that, although it was burning, it was not used up.

What is God calling you to today? For younger ones, it could be about talking about how they can behave, or how they can help others. For older ones, it may be about how they see their future.

Using the flame outlines, ask them to write or draw what they were thinking and place it on the "bush"

Offer a prayer: *Lord God, speak to me in the everyday things, that I may know your voice. Help me to see how I can serve you and others in my daily life. Amen*

Sermon Notes

Exodus 3: 1-15 Exodus offers narratives concerning the formation of God's people – most especially under the leadership of Moses bringing the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt. The giving of the Law at Sinai is a formative experience as are the breaches of it. The events in Exodus are referred to in the following three books and as well as in other places in both Testaments. Exodus is set at some point in the mind second millennium before Christ but took form a thousand or so years later. Scholars argue if it was compiled before or after the Exile in Babylon but there's no real way of knowing. Some scholars make a link between the escape from Egypt and the later escape from Babylon thinking the former gives a frame for the latter. It is, of course, possible that those who lived in exile shaped the narrative oral history of the Exodus to contextualise it. Once it was assumed that Moses wrote the book, and the other four books of the Pentateuch but since the 19th Century that view has been roundly disputed with ideas about multiple editors each with their own slant and slight linguistic differences. Yet after 100 years of research into these various editors little can be known about them. At its heart this is a book about liberation from slavery which may have come to be written in the lead up to or aftermath of the liberation from exile. Today's passage is in the midst of a wider section looking at the call of Moses. The encounter with God via the burning but unconsumed bush has captured the imagination of both Jews and Christians with the burning bush becoming a symbol of Presbyterian Churches around the world (many of their shields decorate the ceiling of Westminster College's dining room; look up next time you are there!) God discloses something of God's own self by showing God was the deity of Moses' forebears but, unusually, Moses declines the divine commission five times! Moses queries who he is, who God is, the fact he won't be believed, that he's a poor speaker and, finally, "send someone else!" God is persistent and reminds Moses that he was commissioned by the Almighty, the one who is I Am, who offers signs to help the people believe, who has power over speech, and even offers Moses' brother Aaron to help him. God is firm yet helpful. It's an interesting passage to explore call and response from. The passage ends not with agreement, it must be said, but with Moses giving up arguing! The call narrative takes the form of other calls in Scripture – most obviously in the midst of everyday life. Moses wasn't doing anything particularly religious but getting on tending his father-in-law's sheep. God has decided to do something about Israel's pain but what God has decided to do involves human agency – Moses. And as unwilling and unskilled as Moses seems to be, or at least believes himself to be, the point of the story seems to be not who Moses was but the God who was with him. These seem to be rich themes to explore in preaching if considering call from the ordinary to the extraordinary, the disregarding reluctance and skill in favour of trust and obedience.

St Matthew 16: 21-28 This is the first of three predictions Jesus makes of his Passion in Matthew's Gospel. It also gives insight into Peter's character as he wavers between steadfast believe in Jesus (think of last week's confession of faith in Jesus by Peter) to a failure to accept the consequences of Jesus' vocation. The hostility that Jesus has encountered thus far will be amplified in Jerusalem – the seat of power. Yet Jesus foretells his resurrection as vindication for his life and message. This must have sounded fanciful

to Peter and the others. There's a play on rock/stumbling-block here. The one who was to be the rock is now a stumbling stone as Peter stopped thinking with divine insight but with fearful human responses. He cannot accept the message of the Cross – who can blame him? It would have been scandalous to accept that God could work through the shame and torture of the Cross. The idea of carrying one's cross is also scandalous. To us now it's an accepted metaphor for discipleship, sometimes an object of humour. Yet to first Century Jews it meant carrying one's cross to the place of execution where one would be nailed to it – often the fate of revolutionaries against Roman rule. Jesus wasn't just proclaiming liberation, he was being very clear about the likely consequences – albeit with a promise of eternal reward in the new age to come. Peter is not that unlike many of us now who are happy with glory but extremely disturbed by suffering and death. Any proclamation of Christ has to include the proclamation of Him crucified. Easter Sunday is only approached through the shame of Good Friday.

Weaving these threads

We have two stories about discipleship. Moses can't escape God's call despite some very good excuses, Peter can't accept that discipleship leads always to the Cross. You might want to preach about vocation and calling – using some of the excuses and responses in Exodus, you might want to temper this with the path to Calvary that always beckons to those who follow. That path may not be literal (thankfully) but following Christ's narrow way always involves sacrifice as the Covenant Service introduction puts it: *Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.*

Sermon notes by
Andy Braunston

Prayers of Intercession

We offer our prayers for our World: **World; Our Nation; Regional; Local; Direct**

World

Lord, our world is broken.

So often we think we know best for your creation;
for how to treat others in our world.

And yet around our world, nature is damaged

and there are many who are starving, or oppressed, or at war, or in fear of war.

Use us to see the bigger picture that it is not about “me”, but about all.

Our Nation

Lord we offer our prayers for our country.

Trying to do the best for the people living here and those coming in to live here.

We pray that we may be a welcoming nation, not the “you can only come in if... and not near me” mentality. You welcomed friend and stranger – may we do the same.

Regional

Lord, we all live in different areas, rural, urban, city centre. We ask that you use us to be a light to those around us, bringing your love to those in need and bringing hope to those in despair. May we speak up for those with no voice, and support those in power to make decisions for the benefit of all.

Local

Our streets used to be filled with the chatter of neighbours over garden fences and in streets. Now they are silent, or visions of mobile phone conversations and closed doors. We pray for those who are isolated as the world has moved on to technology, not talking. May we speak to those around us, so they feel valued and part of the community in which we live.

Direct

Lord, you know our hearts and the issues that lie there.

We offer to you in a moment of quiet, those names and situations that are closest to us.....

Speak to us Lord to show how we can support those we love,
and offer comfort to those in need.

Help us to listen to others, not just to “fix” things.

Lord we offer our prayers for ourselves too.

We need your love and compassion and strength to face our daily lives.

Fill us with your Spirit that we may be that love and compassion and strength to others.

We offer these, and all our prayers in the precious name of Jesus. Amen

Offertory

May the offerings that we bring,
our money, our talents, our skills, ourselves,
in whatever form they are offered,
be given in love, be given in hope, be given in prayer.
May we offer ourselves too in your service. Amen.

Blessing

As we go out into the world, to serve, to share and to be disciples,
we know that we go out together, with a common purpose.

Let us go out and be light and hope and support in all that we do. Amen

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
O Thou who camest from above	433	625	564	525
Immortal Invisible God Only Wise	67	132	55	327
Go Down Moses	643			
Moses I know You're the Man	547		473	
Come Ye Faithful Raise the Strain	236			
The God of Abraham Praise	121	162	91	
All Creatures of Our God and King	39	147	99	7
Be still for the presence of the Lord		189	20	50
Here I am Lord		251	663	857
Jesus calls us o'er the tumult	355	509	250	359
Will you come and follow me	558	533	673	
Before the Throne of God Above		466		975
Take My Life and Let It Be	371	502	566	624
Take Up Your Cross The Saviour Said		402		935

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

Ruth suggests playing Gloria Gaynor's cover of "[I am what I am](#)" and Pentatonix' version of "[Mary did you know](#)" at different points in worship.