

Not Your Ordinary Theophany
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Exodus 3:1-15
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The first two chapters of Exodus read like a Hollywood adventure movie. There are extraordinary events at every turn: a basket containing a special baby eludes the swift rapids of the Nile, only to arrive safely in the reeds; a princess plucks the child from the basket, and he is raised to become a member of Pharaoh's household; the child becomes a man, and disheartened by the treatment of the Hebrews, he kills a cruel taskmaster; the Pharaoh threatens death, but our hero escapes to Midian; and as soon as he's there, he rescues seven damsels from the shenanigans of mangy shepherds; And he meets his bride, too. And they have a little boy.

Well, actually, it was a Hollywood movie: *The Ten Commandments*. And it took them 90 minutes to tell you what I've told you in 90 seconds.

And there are more extraordinary things in store for us in Exodus (as well as *The Ten Commandments!*). There are great plagues, and the Red Sea is split in two, and God thunders like an earthquake on Mt. Sinai as the law is given to Moses, and there are battles, lots of battles. And wandering in the wilderness. Lots of it.

Exodus is an extraordinary tale.

And to me, that's what makes today's lection SO interesting. The most extraordinary, the most complicated, the most beloved figure in all of Israel's history meets the most extraordinary, the most complicated, the most beloved being in all the universe. And it's a pretty ordinary encounter.

Moses is tending sheep. He leads his herd up on a Mountain. And he notices a small brush fire.

And here's the thing. Moses lives in an arid place, so surely he's seen the occasional brush fire. But something's different about this fire. The fire doesn't consume the bush. And it captures Moses' attention. He is transfixed upon this strangely ordinary phenomenon.

And God, well God decides to show up as a small flame? What? No trumpets? No earthquake? No red carpet? No thundering voice?

And when Moses asks God's name, God simply says, "It's *I Am*. You can call me *I Am*. Or if you really want to, *I Am What I Will Be*."

Say what? I watch *Game of Thrones*. And the Lord of Light may be creepy, but at least when you look in the fire you see a vision!!!

Let this sink in. THE book of our faith. THE most important theophany of all time. THE most important leader in Israel. THE God of history. This is bigger than Jon Snow meeting Daenerys Targaryen. This is an epic encounter.

And we get this??? A shepherd, on a craggy mountain, with a flame that doesn't consume, and the least creative name for a deity I've ever heard? Somebody please call Michael Bay or Jerry Bruckheimer. We need to get this production back on track. We need explosions, lots of them, and car chases, and a musical score we can work with!!! Come on people!!!

That was my first thought. But as I pondered the text, I found comfort in this ordinary encounter. Yes, our God has the capacity to do extraordinary things. And if we open our minds to it, even supernatural things.

And yet our God is so intimate, so non-discrete, so humble, that He need not worry about his entrance, and She need not worry about the grandness of her name.

God meets us in our daily routines, when we notice the ordinary miracles in our surroundings. And when we realize God's presence, we seek affirmation of what we're witnessing, and we ask, "Who are you?" And God responds: "I am. I am that presence that will steer you through the present. I am that One who notices your predicament. I am that One who loved your ancestors. I am that One who will be revealed in the actions I help you accomplish. I am. I am. I am. I am all of it. Then. And now. And in the future. And always. I am that One!!!!"

And so here was Moses. Hiding out in Midian. Lamenting the fate of his people in Egypt. Thrust into the ordinariness of shepherding his sheep. Waiting, hoping, believing something would happen. Standing ready in life's routine. And in the stillness, a flame called out to him. And he said, "Here am I."

Elijah met God in that stillness, too. And David in a field. And Samuel lying awake at night. Zechariah in his priestly rounds, and Mary on a quiet evening. And when God called, they proclaimed, "Here am I." And in the presence of I AM, they were told about a future that would be – a future made possible by their actions, and steered through God's guiding hands.

When Moses replied, "Here Am I," *I AM* freed a people. When Samuel replied, "Here Am I," *I AM* shaped a nation. When David replied, "Here am I," *I AM* secured a future for the Monarchy. When Elijah replied, "Here am I," *I AM* revealed all that was righteous and good. Zechariah was hesitant to utter, "Here am I," but when he finally came around, *I AM* said, "Call him John." And it was so. And John was a good man. And when Mary responded, "Here am I", *I AM* became one of us. And *I AM* proclaims in each of us, what will be.

And I think to myself, "Keep your explosions and fancy stunts, Hollywood. And keep your extraordinary. I think I'll linger here in the ordinariness of chapter three. I like this place. And I like simple things. And I like names that aren't so complicated."

Sardis Baptist Church, you may think that what we do is ordinary. You may wish there was a little more excitement in your routine. But the truth is, God is revealed in ordinary spaces and places. And God is calling each of us in subtle ways. But don't take these nondescript events lightly. For it's in our everyday routines that God will be made known.

Maybe you'll see a subtle, but strangely curious flame while mowing the yard, or typing on your keyboard, or driving to work, or eating dinner with friends, or walking the halls of a familiar place. Don't discount God's presence. And don't discount God's desire to call you to new things. And don't discount your capacity to respond to such a calling.

A simple shepherd stayed alert. And an exodus was made possible.

This morning, we remember so many issues from which we long for exodus: the wake of Harvey's destruction; the lingering persistence of hunger in communities near and far; the nasty Isms that keep raising up to oppress ever-growing populations...We long for exodus. We long for relief.

But, perhaps, if we stay alert, and if we celebrate our ordinary rhythms, we too will see God's transformative fire. And we too will respond "Here am I." And we too will know the presence of I AM, and even better, the exodus of what will be.

May it be so. And may it be ordinary!

Amen.