

Really?!

From the Bible: Exodus 3 (selected verses)

The Rev. Dr. Paul Alcorn
Bedford Presbyterian Church
Bedford, NY
April 25, 2010

Have you ever heard something or seen something that seems so incongruous or so out of place that it stops you in your tracks and refocuses your attention and causes you to say, "What? Really?" If something like that has ever happened to you then maybe you can relate to this story from the Bible.

During the time when they were slaves in Egypt, the Pharaoh declared that all male children of the Israelites were to be killed when they were born. But whether out of love or defiance or some combination of the two, when Moses was born his mother placed him in a reed basket and floated him down the river past where the daughter of the Pharaoh was bathing. And rather than let the crying baby float by to his death, Pharaoh's daughter rescues the child, adopts it as her own and enlists Moses' mother, who just happened to appear at just the right moment, to be the nursemaid for her new found/new born son.

With that unlikely start to life, Moses grows up in the courts of Pharaoh far from the suffering and heartbreak of his people, but cared for by his mother who must have quietly sung him to sleep with the old, old songs and who must have whispered to him each day reminding him of who he was. Moses lived in that tension between privilege on one hand and a daily reminder of the suffering of the Israelites on the other until one day when he saw an Egyptian mercilessly beating a Hebrew slave. He rushed to the slave's defense killing the Egyptian. When what he had done became known, he ran for his life.

We next hear of Moses far from the halls of power. Somewhere out there in the wilderness. Tending the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. The wilderness which, in the Bible, is not just a place to graze sheep, but a place of challenge and decision making whether for Moses or later the wandering Israelites or much later still for Jesus. It was there, amidst that landscape of rock and sand and burning sun that out of the corner of his eye Moses sees a bush that appears to be on fire, but (as the Bible says) is not consumed.

"What?" Moses says.

"Really?"

And he turns to look and, in that moment, comes face to face with God.

Maybe you remember the rest of the story.

Unlikely and unwilling candidate that he is...

A wanted man in Egypt. Someone who gets tongue-tied when talking.

God sends Moses back to Egypt. Back to Pharaoh.

Back to free the Israelites from slavery and to lead them for a generation through the very same wilderness in which he had tended sheep. Plagues. Passover. Red Sea. 10

Commandments. Eventually leading them to the very edge of the Promised Land.

There in the wilderness Moses sees something out of the corner of his eye.

It catches him off guard and he turns to look and sees the bush.

"What?" He says.

"Really?"

A week or so ago, after getting home late one evening I was watching television.
Baseball, maybe.

When an advertisement came on for BMWs...the luxury automobile.

Now, I am not in the market to buy a BMW or any other new car so I wasn't paying much attention.
Until, that is, the last line of the commercial...carefully crafted, I am sure, by marketing experts.

Maybe even tested in front of focus groups.

"We don't just make cars." The TV voice said. "We make joy."

What?

Suddenly I was paying attention.

Really?

Car makers and cars make joy?

Now, you might want to say to me that an advertisement for a car...even a car as nice as a BMW...does not come close to a bush that appears to be on fire, but is not consumed, but I wonder.
Wasn't the purpose of the burning bush to get Moses to turn aside and to pay attention?

The BMW commercial did the same thing for me.

It made me stop and think.

Where do I find joy in my life?

That mixture of wonder and gratitude and awe and contentment.

That split second when time and eternity meet and when life and world; head and heart; dreams and reality are all in balance?

Do I find...have I ever found joy...

- In a car?
- In new clothes?
- In something I buy?

What is happening, I wonder...

What are the marketing experts telling us...

When *joy* gets pulled out the fabric of our lives and used as a tag line in a television commercial?

So, where do we find joy?

The BMW commercial didn't make me want to buy a car, but it did cause me "to turn aside" from the everyday busyness of my life and to think.

To think...

- About my life;
- About God;
- About what I believe and what is important.

And, about where and when I experience joy.

And, here is something of what I found myself thinking about...

Joy is not found in "things," but experienced in the relationships that bring meaning to our lives.

- I remember when we did the *This I Believe* series in church a couple of years ago. In his reflection, Sean Cunningham shared that he had seen God three times in his life...those moments when he held each of his three children for the first time. Joy.
- Joy brushed up against my life a month ago as I watched our son, Jason, marry Carmen Iguina.
- And, it also happened a couple of months ago when I stood with others from Bedford Presbyterian and watched two families walk into homes that we had helped them build. Joy.

I feel joy when I watch and listen to the Cherub Choir sing and see an older couple walk down the street hand-in-hand. Or, when our grown children are home and we, once again, have dinner together. Or, when high school students use a saw or pound a nail or mix cement or build a wall for the first time.

But, the sermon this morning is not so much about joy as it is about *burning bushes*.

Go back to the story about Moses for a moment.

This was not some special moment or some special place for Moses.

He was not out looking for God.

He was at work.

Doing what he did every single day.

It was so ordinary...so *everyday*...that it was probably boring.

And, that is when it happened.

What that says to me is that it is in those very same moments for you and me...

- At work...
- At school...
- Fixing dinner...
- Talking with a friend...
- Shuttling your children from one place to the next...
- Watching a baseball game on TV.

That something waits to catch your attention.

And turn you aside.

And in that very ordinary moment God waits...hoping against hope that you will be startled enough to pay attention and to stop and say "What? Really?"

And that you will use that moment to reconsider...

- What you really believe
- And what really matters
- And what values will shape how you live and how you treat others.

Just like a car commercial pushed me to think, again, about joy.

The title of a book I read years ago is absolutely right. Every Bush is a Burning Bush.

Burning bushes surround our lives each and every day.

We are just too busy or too preoccupied to notice.

Or, we think that our lives are too ordinary or the moment too ordinary...

Or something.

But let me tell you that is just not true.

Who knows where and when that *bush* might appear. It may be...

- The lyrics of a song.
- The question of a child.
- The smile of a stranger.
- The color of the flower.
- The headlines in the news.
- The questionable joke.

All wait to catch your attention.

All wait for you to say: "What? Really?"

And, all can turn you in the direction of God.