

Youth Sunday, Adult 7:45 meditation, St. David's Episcopal Church (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Today is Youth Sunday, so the real sermon will take place at the next service, where Regan, Jake and Liam will offer meditations. This year, the talks focus on "holy ground," because of today's reading.

Last week, we began a series of readings from the book of Exodus. Last week, Moses was a baby in Egypt drawn out of the Nile river, and today, he's a shepherd in the wilderness outside Midian who encounters a burning bush. Clearly, we skipped a bit. We skipped Moses murdering an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. Moses fled after that, to the land of Midian, where he got married and became a shepherd. The Pharaoh died and was replaced by a new Pharaoh. The Israelite slaves continued to be oppressed, and groaned to God, who heard them.

Then we come to today's reading, to Moses seeing the burning bush, that was burning yet not consumed. When God saw that Moses had turned aside to see this great sight, God called out to Moses.

You'll notice Moses is repeated by God: "Moses, Moses!" We heard this sort of repetition in Genesis, with the near-sacrifice of Isaac, which we heard at the beginning of July. God started that with, "Abraham, Abraham!"

Moses responds, *hinene*. Here I am. Just like Abraham did.

But then we get something different than what we read in Genesis. God tells Moses to remove his shoes, because he is standing on holy ground.

This is the first time in the Bible that we get an idea of sacred space. In Genesis, there was only sacred time, the Sabbath. Now we have actual holy ground, although the idea is different than some religions, that certain places are inherently holy. This spot is holy because God is there.¹

What is holy ground for you?

I invited the three youth who are speaking to talk about that. Where do they find holy ground? I loved their responses, and will post their talks so you can read them or listen to them yourselves; but let me summarize.

They all struggled a bit with the idea of place as holy. Regan expresses the struggle, then talks about music as holy ground. Music plays a vital role in her spirituality, as well as personal healing. Now, you all attend the music-free service, so at first glance, that analogy might not seem to work for you. On the other hand, we have dancers in this group, so of course you appreciate music. We have a classically trained pianist. It has amused me in the past that there are so many music lovers at the early service. But music lovers understand the importance of silence, so I can understand why this service appeals.

¹ Sarna, Nahum. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991, p. 15.

Jake is a new member: he and his family joined the church just one month ago. Isn't it wonderful that he already feels comfortable enough to offer a talk? Jake explains that holy ground is a place where God is present, and he names some, such as our diocesan camp, Chanco; but he's also felt God present in his bedroom, so isn't that a holy place, he asks? Then he describes as holy an experience. His grandparents celebrated their anniversary, and his father collected voice mail messages from their friends wishing them a happy anniversary, and put them all in one mp3 file to play for them on the special day. Isn't that holy, asks Jake? I think most of us would answer, absolutely!

Another thing Jake did that you all will appreciate, being the quiet service: when Sue, Kay and I met with the youth to plan the service, I asked the kids, "Would you like anything special this year?" Now at this point, Jake had been a member for maybe a week and a half. He said, "I'd like to have some quiet instrumental music play at some point during the service while we observe a period of silent prayer."

Finally, Liam comes to us with a talk for the second time. Liam brought his family here more than five years ago now, and he talked about that in his first talk. Liam is a couple years older now, and the first blush of faith has faded, and he's been challenged in his spiritual journey. He names our diocesan camp Chanco as a holy place, but then goes further and says that the people who walk the holy ground with you are just as important as the holy ground itself.

I love that all of these kids thought deeply about the assignment to explore holy ground, and all embraced as well as pushed back against the metaphor in deep ways. An important part of faith development is challenging, stretching, and questioning, and these young people are doing it. We should all feel good about that.

Youth Sunday is critically important to our church family. We all play a part in the formation of these young people. I'm glad I can share with you a piece of what they talked about. I hope that you will contemplate their stories, and ask yourself what holy ground is to you.

I also hope you will ponder how, as Liam said, we can all walk this holy ground together, adults and children, together, as disciples. We have so much to learn from each other.