

3 Lent 2019
Rev. Richard Hogue
St. Andrew's Episcopal, Encinitas, CA

Moses and the burning bush reminds me of our current moment in history, and that colors our gospel readings for me in a particular light. But to tell you why I have to remind you of Moses' life up until this point. He was born to a Hebrew mother in a time when the Egyptian Pharaoh was having each first born Hebrew male baby put to death. His mother, placed him in a basket in the Nile in hopes that he'd be found and could live. Moses was indeed found, by Pharaoh's own daughter, and was raised in Pharaoh's court, privileged and educated. We don't know when Moses learned of his Hebrew heritage, but beyond that fact he was always set apart by something: he was angered by the injustices he saw around him. We have three stories of this. The first is when Moses sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew worker, and Moses become rightfully enraged, but acts rashly, and killed the Egyptian. The other Hebrews all saw it but said nothing, at first. The second story is when Moses sees two Hebrew men squabbling, and he goes to reconcile them, but in his attempt to end strife, one of the men asks him, "If I don't listen to you will you kill me like you did the Egyptian?" Moses realizes he's made a huge mistake, and flees to the frontier of Midian, a traitor to the Egyptians, and untrustworthy to the Hebrews. While finding his way, he comes across seven women being abused in the wilderness by shepherds, and he defends the women. Moses confronts injustice wherever he finds it. While we cannot condone murder, we can condone defending the defenseless.

So when Moses hears the burning bush call him, he also hears from God: "I have heard the cries of my people, I have seen their oppression, and I know their suffering." God then tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him to "Let my people go." This is an insane proposition for a couple of reasons. Moses is a traitor to the imperial court, so how could he return? Pharaoh is also the most powerful person on the planet, and he's seen as something of a God among people. How would Moses' ever convince Pharaoh to listen at all? But confronting injustice has been and always will be somewhat of a lonely, and seemingly insurmountable task: the powerful have always tilted the scales, and they see no reason to do otherwise. But God still hears the cries, anger, and anguish of the suffering.

And that's why the burning bush reminds me of our own time. Whether it be shootings here or abroad, or the constant knowledge of the ecological destruction of our planet, we are experiencing an anxious and gloomy time. But God hears and sees and feels all of this, and calls leaders forth to confront the powers that be and injustice in the world. We are allowed to use our righteous anger, though we cannot strike out rashly like Moses, we are called to hold it in tension with patience. Our gospel for the day has us with Jesus, talking about horrible accidents that we've long since forgotten. "Do you think these people were worse sinners because they died so tragically? No, I tell you, we will all die tragically if we don't change the way we live!" It's not about how we die, it is entirely about how we live, Jesus tells us. He goes on to tell the parable of the fig tree. The master says: "This tree has beared no fruit, cut it down." But the gardener

says "Let's give it one more year, I'll water and fertilize it, and if it doesn't bear fruit within a year, we can cut it down." We must hold our righteous anger and wield it with patience. Just because we haven't acted yet, doesn't mean we can't or won't. What injustice of the world is angering you, and how will you listen for God's call on you to address it? That's how Moses led his people home, and how we'll find it too.