

Into the Mystery - CAUGHT
Lent 1 February 21, 2010
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Luke 3:21-22

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Oh Mystery you are alive; I feel you all around.
You are the fire in my heart; you are the holy sound,
You are all of life; it is to you that I sing.
Grant that I may feel you, always in everything.

Exodus 3:1-15

³Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

²There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to

bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹²He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” ¹³But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

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I Kings 19:11-13

¹¹He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Mystery - Paul Winter

It lives in the sea or a tree as it grows.
You can hear it, if you listen, to the wind as it blows.
It's there in a river as it flows into the sea.
It's the sound in the soul of someone becoming free
And it lives in the laughter of children at play
And in the blazing sun that gives light to the day.
It moves the planets and all the stars that shine.
It's been the mover of mountains, since the beginning of time.

Oh Mystery you are alive; I feel you all around.
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You are all of life; it is to you that I sing.
Grant that I may feel you, always in everything.

And it lives in the waves as they crash upon the beach.
I have seen it in the goals that we have tried to reach.
I feel it in the light and I know it means so much.
I know it in your smile, my love, when our hearts do touch.
But when I listen deep inside, I feel best of all,
Like a moon that's glowing white and I listen to your call
And I know you will carry me, I feel like the tide
Rushing through the ocean, and my heart is open wide.

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Do you ever find yourself just going along in the same old way - just minding your own business, same routines, same attitudes, same way of looking at the world, when suddenly you find yourself caught off guard in a way that deeply disrupts or disturbs you? The world as you have defined it and neatly identified somehow looks different or you encounter something, or someone who doesn't fit into that definition. Or, maybe deep down you know that you don't have it all figured out, but you just work hard to keep it all together so that you don't have to face the uncertainty of the unknown. Living in mystery can be unsettling, and quite frankly, many people simply can't do it. But here, on this first Sunday in Lent, we set off on a journey into the Mystery that is God.

Here, we begin our journey out of the comfortable, known places of our lives and into the wilderness where we will be challenged by the unfamiliarity and the feeling of being lost or disoriented; where we will be tested to discover what our values and priorities and desires and character traits really are. In the wilderness we discover where our

faith really lies and are forced to face the demons of our soul and the obstacles of our heart and mind as we attempt to discover ourselves, like Jesus, as "God's beloved, in whom God is pleased."

Moses had run away from Egypt and his people there, and was trying to live a normal life, and yet, at the same time, surely somewhere deep inside him, he realized that he was avoiding something important. As a shepherd, he knew what he needed to do. He could create a world where he had some control and where he felt comfortable. That is, until he was out one day, part of his normal routine, and a burning bush caught his attention. Suddenly, what he thought he knew was broken open as he encountered God's presence in a way he had not before. God caught Moses off guard and called him to be a partner in freeing the oppressed Israelites in slavery in Egypt.

Well, Moses wanted to feel more certain about things, so asked God, "Who should I say sent me? By what name do we call you?" When a person encounters a mystery, one of the first responses we often have it to try to pin it down; to put it in some category or name

classification in order to take away the mystery. But God, who does not want to be put in a box or on a shelf to be taken out when it is convenient, says pretty much a non-answer, "I AM WHO I AM." In other words, "I am Mystery."

The prophet Elijah was hiding in a cave when we encounter him in the scripture from I Kings. He had come to the conclusion that the Israelites were an unfaithful, ungrateful, unworthy lot and surely thought God's wrath would come down upon them any minute. That's certainly what those wretched people deserved, after all. So there he was hiding, fearing for his own life, when the word of the Lord came to him and told him to stand on the mountain for the Lord was about to pass by. Elijah, no doubt, thought God's presence would pass in fury. But, as the story goes, a great wind, strong enough to split mountains passes by, but God is not in the wind. Then an earthquake shakes the foundations, but neither is God in the earthquake. Next a fire, and God is not in the fire. Finally, there is silence, sheer silence. And the voice of God whispers, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah got

caught, not by a great, destructive power, but by the power of silence. God, "I AM WHO I AM" remained a mystery and called Elijah to leave the comfort of the cave and return to God's people, and to trust in the Mystery.

In the story of Jesus' baptism, that mysterious voice of God spoke, claiming Jesus as a beloved child. And so, too, Jesus, like Moses and Elijah, was sent to the people to proclaim God's love, to free the people from their bondage, and to lead them into the mystery of life as God's people. In Lent, we are asked to follow Jesus and Moses into the wilderness where we, too, can encounter the great unknown, where we leave behind all the baggage and comforts that keep us from fully experiencing God's call to us, and which often keep us from rising to claim and respond as God's beloved children.

Moses got caught by a burning bush, Elijah by a Still, Small Voice. Lent is a season for journeying from the comfort of knowing and certainty that we have it figured out, into the mystery of a God who

cannot be fully known and whose mercy and grace are bigger than the measure of our minds.

Often in Lent, people of faith, in order to create a more wilderness-like experience, give up something that makes them comfortable in order to open up the possibility of seeing or hearing God in new or unexpected ways. There are many possibilities if you'd like to give it a try. You might fast one day a week during Lent. You might give up sweets, or meat. You might give up television or video games. Last year, a colleague of mine gave up Facebook for Lent. And when you give up something, you might just discover an opening in your life or mind or heart or spirit that will lead you into the Mystery that is God. This is a wilderness journey that we can take together as we gather each week and go deeper into the wilderness of the Spirit and deeper into the place where God can transform us and use us for God's saving, liberating and healing purposes. Are you ready? Let's go.

Amen.