

"HOLY GROUND"

Exodus 3:1-6

October 4, 2020 Love Feast and Holy Communion

York Center Church of the Brethren

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Who is wearing shoes this morning?

I am guessing that when you worship at home you might just be wearing socks or slippers or maybe your feet are bare. And that is totally appropriate for our scripture text from Exodus.

In the third chapter of Exodus we find Moses in the middle of nowhere. Moses is an interesting character. He was the one whose mother sent him floating down the Nile River in a basket when he was an infant, to protect him. He was found and adopted by the daughter of the Pharaoh, and through the cleverness of his sister, was raised by his mother. He grew up in the royal palace in Egypt and kept his identity as a Hebrew a secret. As an adult he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave and he intervened.

Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. When the news reached the Pharaoh, he threatened to kill Moses. So, Moses fled the country. He ended up in Midian where he met a man named Jethro, married Zipporah, one of his daughters, and had a son.

Many years later Moses was taking care of his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness near Mount Horeb. It was just an ordinary day. Until it wasn't. All of the sudden Moses noticed that a bush was burning but was not being consumed by the flames. As he stepped closer to see what was happening, God called out to him from the flames. "Moses! Moses!" When Moses answered, "Here I am." God said, "Don't come any closer. Take off your shoes because you are standing on holy ground."

God told him to remove the barriers between his human flesh and God's good earth. God told him to get rid of what was protecting him. God told him to take off his shoes to show reverence. As the fugitive shepherd stood there, in his bare feet, in the presence of God, he was told that his mission was to lead God's people, the Hebrews, out of slavery in Egypt, to freedom.

Take note of where Moses is standing. He is in the wilderness far removed from the religious community and any religious trappings. There is no temple, nothing that would indicate that this place is, indeed, holy. Moses is not a prophet or a priest. He is, in fact, a murderer, hiding out in Midian. The only thing that makes this place holy, is the same thing that makes all places holy, the presence of God. If you find it hard to believe that any place you stand is holy ground, look at Moses. He is standing barefoot in the desert where

the ground is covered with sand, dirt, thorns, rocks, and sheep poop, and he is talking with God.

Before this time of pandemic, did you ever consider your home to be a sanctuary, a holy place? Did you ever think of your living room or your kitchen table as a place of worship? Now that we are going on seven months of online worship- it is becoming somewhat normal, isn't it? Sunday morning you log onto zoom or dial the phone and here we are- your church family- worshipping together.

Do you remember what it was like to worship in the sanctuary of our church building-- sitting in the pews, looking up front at the pulpit or the communion table or the piano? Do you remember holding your bulletin, picking up the hymnal, turning to the page in the pew Bible, passing the offering plate? And I would guess you were usually wearing your shoes. We knew the sanctuary was holy ground because that is where we worshipped God. But sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that **only** the sanctuary is holy ground.

In her book, *AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD: A GEOGRAPHY OF FAITH*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes, *"The last place most people look (for God) is right under their feet, in the everyday (places), activities, accidents, and encounters of their lives."* (1) She calls us to *"recognize some of the altars in this world, ordinary-looking places where human beings have met and will continue to meet up with God."* She reminds us that, *"The world is just waiting for us to notice the holiness in it."* (2)

For a great deal of the history of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament, there was no temple. Without one designated holy place, the people could see the whole world, God's creation, as holy. They could expect God to appear anywhere. And God did.

When the people were on the move, they carried with them a "tent of meeting." This is where they held their religious activities. In this way, God camped out with them for hundreds of years. They were assured of God's presence wherever they went.

In later years, King David proposed giving God a permanent address. God said, "Are you going to build me a house to live in? Are you going to confine me to one place?" David did not build the temple but his son, Solomon, did. And what a fine temple it was. Suddenly all the holy ground had clear physical boundaries protected by the solid walls of the building. And the holiest of the ground was only accessible by the holiest of the people.

Barbara Brown Taylor asks, *"Do we build God a house so we can choose (and limit) when we go to see God? Do we build God a house, so God doesn't have to stay at ours?"*

Our church building is special to us. It was built by those who came before us so that we could have a spiritual home in this place. We expect that those who come after us will also have a home here for many years to come. But what happens when we can't meet in this place, this church building, together? What happens when worship is moved out of the "holy space" and moved into our homes?

**Naming** the ground holy doesn't make it holy. The holiness is already there, always has been there. Our naming it just means that we finally noticed God's presence there. Perhaps you have always known that your home is holy ground. Maybe you are seeing it more clearly these days because it is the place where you are worshipping God.

A sense of place is so important to us as human beings. We mark many occasions in our lives by noting the place where it happened. We erect signs, altars, totems, plaques, and cairns to mark a place as special.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes, *"Earth is so thick with divine possibility that it is a wonder we can walk anywhere without cracking our shins on an altar."* (3)

If we marked every place that was special, we would hardly have any empty space left. If we took our shoes off every time we were on holy ground we would never wear shoes again.

With you, I mourn the fact that we cannot worship together in our beautiful building. But I also give thanks that this time of being apart gives each of us the opportunity to claim the holy ground upon which we stand every single day. What ground could possibly be more holy than the ground where we live, eat, sleep, raise our children, play, pray, and love?

If you acknowledge the place where you are right now as holy ground, will you see it any differently?

If you name the place where your feet are right now, as holy, do you sense God's presence in a new way?

Although we are not able to participate in Love Feast together in our fellowship hall, we are still in the presence of God; we are still together as a family of faith. And now, our family of faith stretches from coast to coast, including many who can not join us in our building every week. And we are all standing on holy ground. What an image!

Today, and every day, may we recognize and celebrate God's presence in our lives- no matter where we find ourselves. Look around you right now and give thanks that you are dwelling on holy ground. God is present!

And don't forget , this good "*Earth is so thick with divine possibility that it is a wonder we can walk anywhere without cracking our shins on an altar.*"

May it be so! Amen.

*End notes:*

- *AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD: A GEOGRAPHY OF FAITH, Barbara Brown Taylor. Harper One. 2009. P. xiv.*
- *Brown Taylor, p. xvii.*
- *Brown Taylor, p. 15.*