

August 8, 2017

He looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.
Exodus 3:2

Dear Mennonite Church Saskatchewan,

How long had the bush grown there in the desert? How many seasons had it seen? Tradition claims that this bush is a blackberry bush. How many seasons of fruit were lost into the rocks and dust before that moment when it lit up with the glory of the living God?

Moses looks up the mountain and sees this curious sight: the bush blazing, yet not burnt. He scrambles, picking his way among the rocks. A voice calls him, commands him. “Remove your sandals, for this place is holy ground.” In the bramble, Moses finds the presence of God. Moses finds his future.

Scripture is full of people waiting, often in thorny, tangled places. Abram and Sarai, the barren nomads. Andrew and Simon, the fishermen with empty nets. Moses, herding sheep in his desert of exile. Mary Magdalene, weeping before the garden tomb. But God, without warning, alights in their lives.

For each and every, the flame and glory of God’s presence also lights up the future. God appoints Moses his prophet, he names Abram father of blessing for the nations, he turns Simon into Peter the apostle. God’s presence brings God’s future. That, after all, is the future promised in Revelation 21:

Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind.
He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them. (3)

Our future is with God; God-with-us is our future. Immanuel marks the way forward. On Pentecost God’s Spirit alighted on an upper room prayer meeting. Suddenly Jesus’ friends light up with the presence of God, blazing like flames but unconsumed. In the midst of their aching night, their wasted sadness, they light up like a city on a hill, like a bush up on the mountain. In that moment, they find a future: speaking about the mighty works of God (Acts 2:11).

Sisters and brothers, we gather to pray for God’s future—“Lord, what are you calling us to live into?” The future comes unexpected, like flames to a blackberry bush that somehow keep it whole. Here is God’s presence.

And this God-with-us sends us out in strange directions. Moses is sent to carry liberation for slaves and compassion for the brokenhearted (see Exodus 3:7). Sarai becomes Sarah, the mother of God’s promise. Peter the liar becomes Peter the witness-martyr.

I do not know where God will lead us. But I do know that, long or short though the time be, God will come to us. And in God we will find our future.

Yours in Christ,

Josh Wallace