

July 11, 2021

Fear Not! Flammable Faith & Blazing Leadership

This week we continue with our July preaching series entitled: FEAR NOT! Last week we explored the awesome reality that God is always doing a new thing In our lives, in our church, our community and the world...So be ready and open for new possibilities. Amen?

This week we're going to explore how in-spite of our fears, our perceived limitations and struggles, God still challenges us to **Fear Not**...Why this week? Because God ignites a flammable faith that blazes with power and possibility!

So let's hear about one of the heroes of the faith—Moses—And how his faith journey was ignited by God into blazing leadership. I share our 2nd Scripture reading from

Exodus 3:1-6 Moses at the Burning Bush

3 Moses 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.

2 There 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.

3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

4 When 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."

5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

6 He 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.

*This is the Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

How cool is it that—

The Bible is full of stories about God's touch & call upon people's lives.

Men and women, young and old, gentile and jew, educated and uneducated—

- Folk who allowed themselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit...
- Who followed God's call to lead...to go...to serve...AND
- Who made a difference in a world that needed direction, that needed hope, that needed God's vision.

And if you were to look throughout all of Scripture, you'd find no cookie-cutter, "One-size-fits-all" pattern for such discipleship—because no 2 leaders are alike. God's funny that way.

God uses what you have...God shapes what you and I are willing to give...God transforms it...And finally, God ignites it to blaze for the world to see. That's discipleship...that's leadership!

That's what happened to Moses as I just read. A man who's call to go & serve the Lord as leader...came from a burning bush. A man who despite his own acknowledged limitations: "Lord, I'm slow of tongue" a stutterer, "How can I speak for you?" "But Lord, people won't believe me!" a man with low self esteem...A man w/a criminal history...THIS man led God's people w/blazing leadership.

I told you earlier in response to one of the congregational questions—I love to preach about how God uses everyday, ordinary, flawed people To change the world! Because it gives me hope that despite my rough edges, despite my baggage, Despite my sinfulness...God can call upon and use me!

Moses was a man who helped light the way as he led God's people for 40 years in their wilderness journey toward the Promised Land. Forging them together...Creating community... Being God's spokesperson, God's messenger. *But it all started with a close encounter with a burning bush To spark a Holy Fire within the heart and soul of Moses. And remember, this call from God was unsettling to him. Vs 6 notes that experiencing God within some burning shrubbery Caused Moses to hide his face, "for he was afraid to look at God".

Fear comes in so many ways, doesn't it? Even from unexpected signs, nudges and calls from God. Here's this guy at his day-to-day job of tending his flock, Minding his own business—when he sees a bush out in the middle of nowhere Burning for all its worth. Intrigued, Moses says, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, And see why the bush is not burned up." God then calls to him—**only** when he turns aside and looks—sees the holy fire—THEN God calls him by name and invites him to step onto Holy ground. One holy nudge at a time...

And for the remainder of ch 3, God reveals and unpacks the Divine Name, God's own nature, power and how Moses fits into the whole plan of delivering God's people from the bondage of slavery. "Fear Not! —says the Lord our God—Why? Because I AM WHO I AM is with you... And I will ignite a flammable faith that blazes with power and possibility!

And you know what? Moses did it, one step at a time...and not without some rough patches...but it was an adventure of a lifetime...emblazoned in and through The power of God...sparked by a bush ablaze in the middle of nowhere.

You know...I wonder sometimes if I would have noticed it. I stay so consumed and absorbed in my day-to-day busyness—I wonder if I would have even seen that bush ablaze. I wonder if I am so focused on my list of things to DO...That I would not notice a burning bush until I was scorched by it. And like Moses, I am sometimes afraid to look at God, to look for God, Afraid of what God knows about me...Afraid of what God may ask of me...

So my fear causes me to think—~If I stay busy with the little things...maybe God will not notice me...Or see that I already have enough to do...thank you very much...And call on someone else to do the big things.

I'm just gonna keep my head down, and mind my own business.

- A burning bush? I didn't see it.
- A burning bush? I haven't got time.
- A burning bush? I'm sure there is a reasonable explanation.
- A burning bush? **Someone, please put it out!**

Oh church...can anyone resonate with some of my fears? Amen?

But God says...FEAR NOT...FEAR NOT! BECAUSE Flammable Faith ignites my love and grace and hope! Fear Not...I'm about to do a new thing...and I will ignite your gifts, your talents AND reveal new possibilities...

O Siblings in Christ our challenge today is to have a flammable faith that is ready to ignite and burn brightly for God.

--A faith ready to combust as we begin our ministry together here at First Church.

--A faith ready to ignite as we discern & claim God's vision together.

--A faith ready to spread to a world filled with dry tinder.

How do we do this? Well, I think three things can help us:

#1. Blazing leaders must be ready to ignite.

#2. Blazing leaders burn wherever they are.

#3. Blazing leaders burn so brightly, others turn aside and see the Holy Fire...Not Pastor Gina or Pastor Jess, not Norm or Donna...But see the Holy Fire—the Holy Spirit of God.

So First, we all must be ready to ignite with Holy Fire. This means we need to be close to the source my friends. How are we staying connected to God? There are so many ways this can happen!

Ignition comes through worship-both virtually and in-person, Sparks of Holy Fire come through prayer, through the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism, Holy sparks crackle throughout VBS...ours will launch the last week of July—And also thru Bible study & fellowship that are offered week after week—AGAIN be it in-person or via ZOOM.

Ignition with Holy Fire also comes through mission service as we do good, as we help others in need, like our youth who will ignite during their Mission Week starting July 19th with another intergenerational week of mission service in August.

*Blazing leaders stay close to the source for best combustion. Friends, is God calling you be set ablaze through any of these opportunities for service and spiritual growth as a disciple? Blazing leaders must be ready to ignite!

Second, we must burn wherever we are. Remember that as Moses approached the burning bush he was standing on “Holy Ground”. As disciples...as leaders ablaze with the Holy Spirit—**Everywhere** you and I stand is holy ground.

*Moses didn't discover the burning bush on a pilgrimage, The burning bush was found in the middle of his work day. And he was set on fire, by sheer proximity to God's Holy Fire **And** his willingness to be poked and prodded into that fire.

All the places we go and live and work and play—everywhere we go...we are called to bring blazing leadership. It's not just in church! Amen?

When people walk by your office, or join you in a ZOOM meeting...When people pass you on the road, in the store or see you on Facebook...Are you ablaze with Holy Fire of love and hope?

And finally as blazing leaders we must burn so brightly...that others will turn aside and look. John Wesley-the founding father of Methodism-said, “We must so blaze with the Holy Spirit that others will want to watch us burn.” Moses burned so brightly the Israelites followed him into the desert wilderness. Moses burned so brightly, other leaders, like Aaron and Joshua rose up to work in tandem **with** him and to complete the journey of faith he began.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, God is calling each of us to be blazing leaders, And if we do this...if we burn brightly here at First Church, If we fan the flames in our home, If we blaze at work and in all our virtual meetings, If we burn brightly at school, If we ignite our communities...Lives will be changed.

Others will watch us burn, Others will want to know about this fire that is not consumed. Others will come to believe, And others will be set ablaze with that same Holy fire and then the world will never be the same.

And it all can start with just the smallest of sparks...To reveal God's nudges, God's hopes and dreams and possibilities For your life, for my life, for our life together as the church. That's flammable faith! That's the power of blazing leadership.

FEAR NOT! As we ignite our lives for Christ everywhere we go!
May it be so! Amen and amen