

11 June 2021

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Exodus 3:1-12

Mountains. There are so many beautiful mountains here in Scotland. And the 1st word that comes to mind if I think of a mountain, is “majestic”.

When we stand at the foot of a mountain, we feel so small. And when we are at the top of a mountain, we feel as if we can conquer the world!

In the Kids’ Kirk clip you’ve seen me and my boys climb Black Hill. It was exhausting and exhilarating at the same time! The views from the top were breath-taking... I can only imagine what it must be like to climb Ben Nevis!

When we reached the summit and sat down for a breather, I could completely understand why people in Biblical times built their altars on mountains. Because although we know very well that God is with us on the mountain-tops AND in the valleys, you feel a little closer to God when you’ve left the world behind (so to speak) and feel as if you can almost touch the clouds.

All through the Bible we see examples of people climbing a mountain to meet God, climbing a mountain to pray.

The story we read together today is no exception.

Moses was just minding his own business, tending to his father-in-law's sheep, when he came to the mountain of God, where all of a sudden, out of the blue, God appeared to him in a burning bush.

Now although this might sound very strange to us today, that's the way in which God often spoke to his people in Old Testament times, before he sent Jesus to come represent him on earth.

Moses must have gotten the fright of his life! Straight away he takes his shoes off and covers his face, because he knew he was on holy ground...

And then there, on the mountain-top, God tells Moses that he wants to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt.

I can only imagine what went through Moses' head when he heard this: "Wow! That's amazing news! But why are you telling *me* this?"

And then it came: God wanted to use Moses to do this. At this point I'm sure Moses wanted to grab his shoes and start running down that mountain as fast as he could!

He had one excuse after the other. Why on earth would God want HIM to do this?

He grew up in the Egyptian palace as an adopted prince. He knew exactly how powerful the Pharaoh was, and that no-one dared to mess with him. On top of that, he was a fugitive, because he killed an Egyptian man. He would probably not even make it over the border before he

would be caught, thrown into prison and sentenced to death. AND he wasn't good with speaking, which would be the very first requirement for someone who wanted to convince a Pharaoh to let his slaves go free...

So his answer to God was: "Thanks, but no thanks. I'm not your guy. I will never in a million years be able to pull this off."

This is the same Moses who 5 minutes ago took his shoes off and covered his face because he realised he was in the presence of God! How could he so quickly forget who he was dealing with?

How could he not realise that the God who could speak to him through a fire that didn't burn out the bush, won't ever choose the wrong person for a task? That God would give him what he needed to get the job done?

So Moses' mountain-top experience was quite a scary one... But he would have many more. To make a long story short – he eventually did what God asked him to do, and as God promised, he led his people out of Egypt straight to that same mountain. Where God met with Moses again and gave him the Ten Commandments. And there would be many more mountain-top experiences in Moses' life, each time reminding him that no matter what was going on around him or in his life, God is always in control.

All through our lives we have mountain-top experiences too.

Life can sometimes be very similar to climbing an actual mountain.

Some days are easy, some days are hard.

And none of this is the same for everybody. When we climbed Black Hill, I found the steep bits the hardest, but my boys ran up no bother. Because I was the only grown-up there, I suppose, I got a little worried when we ventured up to the summit and it was difficult to find the footpath. I was scared we would get lost or get hurt on the uneven terrain. But because I was there, my boys weren't worried about anything.

In life we also sometimes get worried or scared, but if we just remember that we are never alone, we will be able to stay focused and reach our destination.

We can make this hill climbing experience easier on each other, if we remember to always look out for others and help them if needed. Like we took turns carrying the backpack... The journey is easier if you don't have to carry all your baggage by yourself.

If the journey gets hard, we need to be sensible about it. We need to rest when we get tired – and what better place to get spiritual nourishment than on a Sunday in church?

I think our mountain was extra steep this past year and a half... But if we just keep on walking, we WILL get to the top.

Please remember – the steeper the climb, the more amazing the view...

The climb is always worth it, and just like God was with Moses, he will be with us every step of the way too.

We might sometimes feel ill-equipped for the task that lies ahead of us, but we should never forget WHO our travel companion is... The God who can MOVE MOUNTAINS, will give us the strength and the ability to face whatever lies ahead of us.

He will be with us when we are in the valleys, in the twists and turns. He will be with us when we think we've reached the top, just to realise that we actually still have lots of climbing to do. He will be with us when we are tired, and he will be with us when we feel strong.

However hard the climb may be, when you get to the top, you will know that it was worth it.

And let's make sure to listen to God with every step we take. He spoke to Moses through a burning bush. How does he speak to you?

Does he whisper to you in the night? Does he teach you through the words in the Bible? Does he roar to you through the thunder? Does he smile at you through the wild flowers? Does he pat you on the back through the hands of a friend?

Make sure to listen, because very often when we are just minding our own business, we can suddenly find ourselves on holy ground.

And whether God asks you to simply support the person walking next to you, or to lead all his people to the top of the mountain, don't even

bother saying no – just put one foot in front of the other and go where God leads you, because with his help, you will be able to not only conquer your own mountains of worry, sadness, stress, and frustration, you will be able to conquer the world!

Amen