

I want to say a few words for those of you who are left about the Old Testament reading that we heard earlier about Moses. And I think I was drawn to this passage because it's about names. Moses asked God, "what shall I say when the people ask who sent me? What is his name?" And I'm sure that Valerie and Joel have had to answer that question many times, when you go out with a new baby. I remember people, after saying goo-ing a bit, they'll say, "And what's her name?" Because we all want to know what somebody's name is.

And I've heard that psychologists say that the name you give a child shapes something of their identity as they grow up. And I think Laura and I might've known that subconsciously when we decided that we wanted to name our son Boaz, a great biblical name. The giggling behind me shows just that we met with that reaction. And we thought, "Well, it's a good strong name." Then we thought, "Well, what happens if he turns out to be a rather delicate flower, and he's lumbered with this name Boaz?" So, in the end, I wish we hadn't told anybody because we didn't call him Boaz, we called him Jacob, which turned out to be the most common name the year he was born. So, in his rugby team, there were six Jacobs. So, he ended up being called Chubby for his whole time at school, and nobody ever called him Jacob anyway. But I digress.

It was that interest in names that drew me to this Old Testament passage. And I want to just pick out three things that God does in this great story of Moses and that burning bush.

The first thing is that God remembers. The passage begins, "God heard the groaning of the people, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And this theme of God remembering runs throughout the whole Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. We read things like this in the Psalms. "God has remembered his love and his faithfulness for the house of Israel. Give thanks to the one who remembered us in our low estate."

And then in the gospel story, there's a great reference. Do you remember when Jesus was crucified and there were two criminals on either side? One of them abused Jesus, but the other one said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into

your kingdom." And what a great hope is expressed in that statement, that God remembers us. And I want to share that hope that when I take my final breath, I'll put my soul in the hands of the God who remembers me.

God said this in the prophet Isaiah, "Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, but, says God, I will not forget you."

And God's remembrance of us, his people, is contrasted in scripture with the forgetfulness of the people. The psalmist says, "Praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits." The prophets were sent to jog the people's memory. If you read what they're preaching, they weren't trying to persuade people of the existence of God, they weren't coming up with clever arguments to help people believe. They were there to jog people's memory, to make them remember the God who remembers them.

And I think forgetfulness is still a modern sin. Do you know that I read a recent survey that said that 89% of Americans believe in God? Are 89% of Americans in church this morning? No. Why? It's not that they've stopped believing in God, it's that they've forgotten. They've forgotten how important it is to worship the God who made us. The funny thing is that we all suddenly remember God outside the operating theater or the exam room, but we need a prompt like that to remember.

And if we look at the Old Testament, the prophets who came after Moses were calling the people to remember him, not to forget. And when we're young, it's strange, God seems so present to us. It's as we grow older that we can forget the God who made us.

So let's be grateful that God does not forget us, and see here that God remembered his people, and it says, took notice of them. So, God remembers his people and God acted. And he acted in this story in a very unusual, in fact, not unique way. He appeared to Moses in a bush that was blazing but not burning. Nothing like this happens anywhere else in the Bible.

So why does God do it here? Well, we don't know. We could only speculate. It seems to be that that's what it took to attract Moses' attention. Moses is out

in the field. It says he's gone beyond the wilderness. He's watching his sheep. He's not expecting to have an encounter with God. And remember, he's kind of in a semi-exile. He's not a religious leader. He's far from the action. So, God had to do something dramatic to attract his attention. And it worked.

And I think the story prompts me to ask, what's the equivalent of the burning bush in our life? When have been the times that God has tried to attract our attention, and we fail to notice that God still reaches out to us in many and various ways, but do we take notice?

Somebody told me recently who's only been coming to church for a few months that often when they're in church, they feel that God speaks to them, and they hear something that they perceive to be from God. And they told me how helpful it was. And I thought, "Well, I'm so pleased that you're paying attention," because it would be easy to say, "Well, what's that nonsense? Where's that coming from?" But this person recognizes that as a message from God and takes it seriously. We need to be mindful that God continues to try to attract our attention. So, let's pay attention, take notice of where God is speaking to us, where God's active in our lives.

So, God remembers, God acts, albeit in a rather odd way in this story, and God reveals. At the heart of this story is the revelation of the divine name. God says to Moses, "You're the one I've chosen to lead the people out of slavery. So go and tell Pharaoh to let my people go." God seemed to think this was all very straightforward, whereas Moses saw the potential pitfalls. Putting Pharaoh to one side for the moment, Moses thought, "Well, why will the people of Israel listen to me? I'm out in the boondocks looking after sheep. What are they going to make of me if I just turn up and say, 'Right guys, God's told me that we're going to be led out of slavery.'" Why would they take him seriously? He thought they might think he was a crank.

So, Moses wanted to be able to say that he was on a bona fide divine mission. So, he asks of God, "Who are you? Who shall I say sent me?" And the voice comes back with this rather enigmatic revelation, "I am who I am". Say to the people "I AM sent you to them." And what Moses learned isn't just the name

for God, but he also learned that the God so named is a God who was with him. When Moses says to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" God says, "I will be with you." And that's what makes the difference. He wasn't thinking that he was having to go to Pharaoh on his own. God was with him.

So, what Moses learned is that God wasn't choosing him because he had all the skills and gifts, that he could sweet talk Pharaoh into letting the people go. God was choosing him because God thought that they'd work well together, that God was going to be with him. So "Who am I?" Moses asks. "You're a companion of mine," says God. "I'm going to go with you to achieve this task."

I once heard a story of a young boy in Africa who was going through a rite of initiation. He was transitioning into adulthood. And in order to become an adult, he had to spend a night out in the jungle on his own. So his father and the other men in the village led him to a clearing, and they all withdrew, and he was left there. Well, of course, he barely got any sleep. He was terrified. He spent the whole night hearing terrible noises. In the morning, when light came, he was relieved. And he looked, and he saw behind a tree there was his father with a gun. And he ran to him and said, "Well, if I'd known you'd been there all night, I wouldn't have been so scared."

That's a lesson we all need to learn, that God is with us. We might not always see God. We might not always have a sense of his presence. But the God who calls us, the God who reveals himself to us, is a God who is with us and accompanies us. The promise of God is a promise for all of us. "I will be with you," said God. And of course, life can be scary, and our God might be out of view, but he can still be close by.

And our hope today for Olivia is based on that. We don't know how her life will pan out. We know there'll be ups and downs. But through it all, God will be with her. God remembers, God acts, God reveals, and God is with us. Thanks be to God. Amen.