#  The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning once said: “Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God, But only he who sees takes off his shoes; The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.”

 Our Old Testament reading this morning from Exodus is one of the foundational myths of our tradition. I want to be clear what I mean when I use the word “myth.” I’m not talking about Greek stories about nymphs and satyrs, nor am I talking about stories that tell brief moral truths, like fables. I mean by the word myth something more like our *mythos*, our most deeply basic and fundamental truths. The stories of our faith and our lives.

The overall ark of the stories that contain these truths, our canon, our bible, begins with the book of Genesis. Most of us don’t believe that the universe was created by God in six 24-hour days around 6 or 7 thousand years ago. We may even question whether Adam and Eve walked around in the Garden of Eden uncovered until the serpent tricked them into eating an apple that would enlighten them as to their naked condition. But I would suggest that most of us can see and understand the fundamental truths we carry with us that are told in these ancient stories that we have been telling for millennia. Truths such as: God created the universe, and when God saw it, God knew that it was good. God created humanity in God’s image to be in relationship with God, and at one point there may have been an idyllic moment of complete peace between us humans and our creator, but something happened. Something happened that made us discover the knowledge of evil in the world and that let us recognize our nakedness, or our brokenness, and when that happened, somehow we stopped utterly trusting God. The relationship changed.

Our Biblical history is the history of God’s attempts to reconcile with us, to bring us back, to set things straight. We as Christians believe that this reconciliation has happened or has been made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ.

These are our stories, our fundamental truths. They make us, form us. They are, in a word, incarnational. Carl Jung wrote of the “collective unconscious” which we share universally and which I believe contains the elements of these stories I’m talking about. And no story is more fundamental to our life with God than the story of Moses and the burning bush. One of the great truths we hear in this story is that God will not be pinned down to conform with what human consciousness expects of God. God will not be named. God is the great “I am,” and that has to be enough for us. God is; that is our starting place.

Another of the fundamental truths of this story is expressed in the quotation I started with by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Earth is crammed with heaven, every bush is burning, the physical world declares the wonder of God.

Moses was just minding his own business, you know, tending his father-in-law’s sheep. Perhaps straying a bit from the beaten path a bit, doing a little dreaming. And then he noticed the bush. That’s important; he noticed. He stopped plucking blackberries for a second. God didn’t speak to Moses until after God saw that Moses had looked up. Who knows how long the bush had been burning. Possibly for eternity.

But Moses did notice, and looked up, and knew that he was on sacred ground. The point is, he had always been on sacred ground. All ground is sacred, and every bush is burning.

I think it is important to be reminded of this during these times of pandemic and separation. I haven’t the words to express how much I miss being with you and especially as a worshiping community. We all miss each other terribly. This fast that has been imposed upon us feels like a desert. But we mustn’t labor under the illusion that our fast from the Eucharist is a fast from God. God is very much with us. All ground is sacred ground, and every bush is burning.

I love to speak of “thin places.” These are places where the perceived distance or “barrier” between us and God is “thin;” places where we feel we can become closer to God. For me, Shrine Mont is one, and so is the monastery of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge. Our sanctuary here at St. Thomas has become my newest thin place.

But the thing we must remember about the barrier we sense between us and the sacred is that it is perceived. It is not real. God is always as near to us as we can allow ourselves to embrace the presence. Sometimes it is very difficult. When we are separated by disease, or seemingly insurmountable differences in our political thinking or by a society rife with racial tension and unrest, it is hard to find God. When all of these things are happening all at once, well, then, God help us all.

But that’s the thing, God will help us all.

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# Browning is right of course, but I would add one thing. I think it is perfectly okay to go ahead and pluck the blackberries. God is in that as well. Just, when you do, when you reach into the bush, simply notice that it is on fire, and that it grows in sacred ground.