



Burning Bush, Burning Planet

(Part 1)

Brian Grogan SJ, well-known to our readers, gives an impassioned plea for commitment to the protection of our Common Home.

The Burning

We can no longer refer to our ecological situation as merely climate change or global warming. These phrases are too bland: global heating or planetary burning more accurately describes the current crisis of Planet Earth. In reflecting on this, the story of Moses and the burning bush comes to my mind.

The symbol of fire has always intrigued the human imagination. Browning's lines are well known: 'Earth's crammed with heaven /and every common bush afire with God'. Hopkins writes: 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out like shining from shook foil'. Jesus speaks of his passionate desire to cast fire upon the earth (Luke 12:49), and Teilhard de Chardin understands Christ himself to be the fire which is cast upon the earth with the power to penetrate all things.

The dramatic account of the burning bush (Exodus ch 3) originated some 3,000 years ago: it is the beginning of the Judaeo-Christian salvation story.



We now urgently need a new salvation story for Planet Earth if we are to fulfil, as an essential part of our faith, our duty towards nature and its Creator (*Laudato 'Si* 64). The story of the burning bush may serve us well.

'Here I am'

Moses is a shepherd, a nobody, powerless, on the run, a man located firmly at the bottom of the social heap. With no financial resources, no record for holiness or scholarship, he is just fine for divine purposes because if anything remarkable happens around him, no-one will ascribe it to him but to God. I can identify easily with him!



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God knows him as a curious man who likes to dabble in whatever goes on, as when he intervened in a brawl and murdered an Egyptian. So God judges that he will be intrigued to find that a bush is burning but not consumed. Blazing bushes are not uncommon in the heat of the semi-desert, but for a bush to remain burning rather than smouldering out is, to say the least, unusual. Moses is hooked and goes to investigate. Perhaps I can identify with Moses and pause to recall what first made me aware of the perilous state of our planet, and what changes that moment made in my life.

Twice God calls Moses by name:

‘Moses! Moses!’ There is an urgency here to which Moses responds promptly: ‘Here I am.’ A little further on, God reveals to him the divine name: ‘I am who I am.’ This exchange sets up a personal relationship between the Divine One and our down-at-heel shepherd that will last a lifetime. To mark Moses’ cards, God mentions his own previous engagements with Moses’ ancestors. Next, Moses is told to forego the safety of his sandals because he is standing on holy ground: semi-desert it may be, yet it is holy because it is God’s. By now the poor man is completely out of his depth, but riveted by the realisation that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knows him and is actually speaking with him.

Can I sense that I am urgently called by name to play my part in the saving of the planet? Perhaps I doubt that God sees me as suited to such a divine purpose. And have I anything worthwhile to offer God for the struggle? But perhaps I do want to be involved, because I love nature and I want to serve God in whatever way I can. Working alone to protect Mother Earth seems futile, whereas I’m chuffed by the idea of being invited into partnership with God: it gives me hope and energy.

Like Moses I can humbly whisper, ‘Here I am’. Moses was afraid, and I too am afraid when I think of what I may have to let go of in order to fulfil God’s expectations of me. Can I risk walking barefoot on what will surely be thorny ground? ❤️

(To be continued)