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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)  
[patrickjmarrin@gmail.com](mailto:patrickjmarrin@gmail.com).

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July 16, 2019

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“The place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exod 3:6).

The Lectionary lays out some of its real treasures for us in today’s two readings. The Exodus story of Moses and the burning bush is filled with images and metaphors that describe one of the most intriguing encounters in the Bible. This first meeting between God and Moses emphasizes the mysterious power of the divine compared to human experience and understanding.

The bush is on fire but not being consumed. As Moses approaches to examine it, God tells him to take off his sandals because he is on “holy ground.” Time and space give way to timeless transcendence as God reveals his name as “I AM.” God is the God of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with whom he has a covenant. Because of this, God is going to rescue the Hebrews from Egypt.

Subsequent theophanies will repeat this sense of divine power, God coming as smoke and fire, unbearable thunder and earthquakes when Moses goes up the mountain to receive the tablets of the commandments. The people beg Moses for

relief from these terrifying displays of shock and awe.

What accentuates this revelation of God to Moses is the contrast between his encounters and the intimacy so evident in Jesus as he addresses God as his *Abba*. Jesus basks in the favor of the One he calls "Father, Lord of heaven and earth." He delights in the gracious will that has chosen to hide the divine face from the wise and the learned, but to reveal it to the childlike.

Jesus reveals the secret of this intimacy: "Everything has been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him."

Moses, the great leader under the first Covenant, the giver of the Law, the liberator of the nation, could only approach God by removing his sandals. Jesus, on the other hand, is already on holy ground, for the encounter between the divine and human is whole and complete in his very person.

Matthew records this theophany to make clear the difference between the old and the new, the first covenant and the new covenant in Jesus. In him, God is revealed not as majesty but as humility, not in might but in mercy. Only the childlike can grasp this, those who approach Jesus with eyes opened to who he really is. The wise and learned, with their thick lenses of discernment and discretion, are blind to the beauty emanating from Jesus, whose every word and gesture reveals the love of God.

The greatest obstacle to the Good News is that for many it is too good to be true. It is too simple, too obvious, that God is love, accessible to everyone, in all things and in everyone. Yet, this is the joy of the Gospel.

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