

Last Sunday, we caught a re-broadcast of a Vinyl Café episode from a few years ago. As a storyteller, Stuart McLean was a person I looked up to. Stuart McLean took his crew to visit Gander, Nfld. He began the story by saying he went there to visit the airport. He portrayed that visit like it was a dream from boyhood days. Stuart reminded his radio listeners that the airport came in the 1930s, the town came much later. There was a time when Gander International Airport was the largest airport in the world. Bigger than La Guardia, Idlewild...bigger than Gatwick and Heathrow and arguably more important than any of them. At the time of the broadcast, Stuart commented that it still is an alternate landing site for the space shuttle.

In 1937 it was the middle of nowhere. But a few years later, the airport was precisely in the right place. It was right at the 'sweet' spot for transcontinental flight from New York to London. They carved runways from the woods. Then WWII came along and they lengthened those runways. Without the airport the allies would win, but because of the airport, the war was shorter. 20,000 Canadian and American built fighters and heavy bomber aircraft were ferried across the Atlantic. At the beginning of the war they shipped the aircraft over by sea and lost 80% to German U-boats. Why not fly them over? They didn't have the range. Then the engineers took up the challenge to see how they could fly -with increased fuel capacity. No one would have thought that the bush pilots, crop dusters the barn stormers could fly all the way across the Atlantic-by dead reckoning, but they did. By the end of the war, 100s of aircraft a day were flying out of Gander. After the war transcontinental flight was hitting its stride. Virtually every plane going across the Atlantic stopped in Gander. In the latter 1950s, 150 airplanes were stopping in Gander for refuelling every day of the year.

Stuart McLean, his writers and crew had the ability to high-light the big and small accomplishments of Canadians. Of course, he did get around to telling the story of the generosity of 21st century residents of Gander in the great relief effort of September 11, 2001. Stuart had the ability to high-light our foibles and help us to laugh at our own behaviour through the stories of Dave and Morley. Our Scripture reading this morning reminds us that we need to be watchful of what God is 'high-lighting' for us.

We may be recalling our Church school memories of Moses or have dim recollections of the Charlton Heston's Hollywood version of Moses. Moses on the shores of the Red Sea comes along further in the story. At the earlier stage of the story after Moses is drawn out of the Nile river he begins to be raised in the household of the Pharaoh. That is where we left the story last week.

Now Moses was actually nursed by his own mother. So, presumably she passed on some knowledge in that early stage that he was actually part of the Hebrew nation, not an Egyptian. As the story goes, Moses grew up and saw that his blood brothers were put to hard labour. He witnessed an Egyptian overseer hitting one of his relatives! Moses looked around and didn't see anyone so he struck the Egyptian so hard that he killed him and then buried the evidence in the sand. Somehow word got out and Moses crime began to be talked about.

Moses feared the reaction of the Pharaoh and fled to the land of Midian where he was shielded by Jethro, the priest. Moses was given one of the priest's daughters as a wife and he became a shepherd. His journey led him to the west end of the wilderness. Often our journey does not go exactly as we expected it or hoped it to. We get side-lined for a time.

This story is really not about a timid exile living life under the radar, or at least that is not the way things continue to be. Rather, it is a no-holds-barred encounter between a shifty outlaw and a God who's more than up to the challenge of transforming him into an instrument of salvation.

Moses is walking in the desert and he has a profound religious experience. There's a bush, a kind of wild shrub growing off in the distance, but as he walks closer to the shrub he begins to see that it's on fire. Yet this burning bush is not consumed. It burns but does not burn up. It continues to burn and blister, throwing off sparks and flames of fire and heat.

Bright intense light. A bush blazing away and not burning up. Moses interpreted this as a divine encounter. God calls out of the bush-Moses! Moses! Moses shows humility by taking off his shoes. "You are standing on holy ground." God has heard the suffering of the people. God has heard the cry of the people to be brought away from their predicament with the

slave masters. God has seen the cruelty the people are living through. God is going to act to help them. God 'High-lights' the anxious plight of the people of Israel. God calls on Moses to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. Moses is modest or scared. "But why me?" God offers assurance that Moses can do this and God will be there right through the process.

Then Moses shiftiness and scheming continues, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and tell them all this great news and they are just a bit skeptical, you know, to the point of asking just who this God is who sent me. What shall I tell them?" Now, we could think that is an innocent, understandable, even reasonable question. But, I've always found this whole conversation rather strange, until I came across this understanding-In Hebrew thinking there was power in the 'name'. The power of names revealed the character of the person. Remember Jacob, the heel-literally 'the heel' who received his name because he was grabbing his brother's heel as they came out of the womb and never stopped grabbing for all that he could the rest of his life, until he wrestled this same God in the night, ended up with an injury to the hip joint and was given the new, life-transformed name of 'Israel'.

So, Moses is not asking for a business card from God that he can pass on to those interested. No, he is trying to get a name out of God because in Hebrew thinking, to know the name is to have a certain amount of power over the object or person. This is what makes God's answer so perfect: "I AM WHO I AM!" This is not the kind of answer Moses hoped for.

One author has said, God is saying, in a sense, "Don't box me in, Moses!" This Hebrew God, Yahweh even put a future perspective 'out there', "I will be who I will be." Which means, I think, that God was actually saying, that you can't really know who God is unless you're willing to sign on for God's mission in the world. This is what Moses ultimately does, going to Egypt, confronting Pharaoh, leading his people out of Egypt, taking them through the parted waters and into the wilderness. And there, on the other side of things, Moses doesn't need to ask for God's name anymore, as he learned it first hand, through his own experience, and so is ready to sing of what he has discovered.

Some of you may remember these words to the Song of Moses, "I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior, the Lord is his name. " (Exodus 15:1-3)

You see, Moses learned who God is, only by following God on the path God set for him, learning first hand, the nature, purpose, and truth of this God. It was the case with his ancestors, Abraham taking off on a new land in his old age; Jacob fleeing God in many directions, only to be called by God to be father to a nation. And it was true of his descendants, from Old Testament prophet and priest to New Testament disciple and missionary. I suspect that this is the way it always is, even today. To know God, you have to go with God. Faith is a full contact, participation sport. You can't just sit back and expect to really know God, you have to get up off the couch and get in the game, take a risk, try something marvelous, reach for something you thought unachievable, step onto the winding road the end of which you can't see from your doorstep.

What is going on out there in the world that is capturing your attention in a way you never saw it before? Moses was out there wandering and the 'burning bush' caught his attention. What are the burning bushes in your daily wandering? What is God 'High-lighting' in these days? What is turning your attention to one side or the other?

Anxiety over covid-parents not feeling safe enough to use the school buses and bus drivers saying they cannot control 72 children and drive safely, the lack of supports for students with disabilities in this pandemic time. Basketball players brought together to play in the NBA's Florida bubble-valuing the use of this occasion to high-light 'Black Lives Matter.' Being faced this week with the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin- another black man maimed by multiple shots from police. The 'Raptors' players, like Fred Van Vleet frustrated that their actions upholding 'Black Lives Matter' has not stopped the loss of life. He is feeling despair, "I have family. I have cousins. I have people who have history with the police, or have been convicted of felonies, etc. and I want them to be treated fairly. But most people want me to just shut up and dribble." Women's basketball has joined in, along with the NHL. Finally so many have joined in doing what NFL player Colin Kaepernick began 4 years before, during the national anthem of a 2016 preseason game, 'taking a knee' to take a stand against police brutality and racial injustice.

I have come to know this church in Caledon that sits on Old Church Road, but it is not a church stuck in the past. It is a church which is rooted in today's realities. It is a place where people come for solace, support, and strengthening. It is a place where its members are engaged in today's challenges-affordable housing and support for seniors, the strengthening of community in a changing environment, the challenge to world powers which our faith calls us to. A place where people go with God's leading and hence learn more about God.

This is a place where they even value off-tune voices and do their best to help those voices find 'a place in the choir' (title of a popular choral piece) which includes everyone.

They even grow sunflowers as symbol of their work together. Flowers that always point to the source of our energy and inspiration. Those flowers do not focus inward, instead they face outward, toward the challenges of the world.

Let us be watching for the 'burning bushes' on our journey, for the places where injustice and despair reign. Lead us God to respond with faith, hope, love, and all the wisdom you have given us. Amen.