

Exodus 3: 1 – 15; Matthew 16: 21 – end

My grandparents were Cornish farmers and lived near Bodmin Moor, which they described as a place best avoided at night time, because strange lights flickering on and off would sometimes be seen dancing across the landscape – “Piskies” they said (naming the source) ... “naughty little things that’ll lead you into the bog if you weren’t careful!”

Both strong chapel goers, I don’t think they *really* believed this – but it was true that wandering on boggy moorland in the dark was a bad idea ... but were there really eerie bluish lights up there? For us children it was just a tale ... but ... when I moved up to Cheshire some years ago, I heard similar tales about the marshland along the remote parts of the River Dee ... flickering lights ... best ignored to keep you out of trouble and safe at home ... particularly noted I might say around the area of Shocklach ... h’mm ...

The geographer in me thought about it ... scary lights ... will o’ the wisps, imps ... fairies ...piskies ... or glow worms, which used to be found round these parts (occasionally still do) ... or possibly methane gas seeping out from decayed plants in the moss and igniting (though who knows how?) ... lightning, grass heat ... I have to say I’ve never seen those flickering lights ... I have seen glow worms ... if I saw them what would I do? ... turn away, run away, follow ... I don’t know ... what would you do?

Well, in today’s readings, we have a story of an unexpected light – a bright and burning light that was not ignored by the person who saw it ... I suppose a fire in sheep country needed investigating ... it was of course **The Burning Bush**.

We’ve heard some very sad tales this summer of bushes, grasses, woodlands, even people’s homes suddenly catching fire due to the dry heat – carelessness, climate change ... but definitely fires which were real enough to destroy things including the bushes in which they begin ...

The burning bush was too large and bright to be a will o’ the wisp ... it was a signal, a beacon, but although there was a fire, it did not seem to damage the bush at all ... and who went to look at it?

Moses ... rescued from the bulrushes in the River Nile by Pharaoh’s daughter, raised in the palace ... a good life ... but he knew he was not Egyptian ... he knew he was a Hebrew (Jewish) ... and he began to see how badly his own people were treated ... they were becoming slaves ... labouring in the heat of the desert and beaten by slave-masters. One day Moses went to prevent such a beating and in his anger he killed the slave-master ... and buried the body in the sand ... but one of his own Hebrew people told Pharaoh’s officers what had happened – Moses had to run away ... he went away into the hills and became a shepherd for many years. Shepherds guarded sheep from predators (wolves, lions etc.), from thieves and certainly from fire ... so of course Moses went to see what was on fire.

It wasn’t imagined, it wasn’t a will o’ the wisp, but it was a sign ... actually it was a call sign – to Moses – come here and in that fiery bush Moses found God ... heard God’s voice and recognised he was in a holy place – removed his sandals and began to talk to God ... or to listen (a bit). In the end God not only tells Moses of his plan to use Moses, to rescue the Hebrews (God’s people) and he overcomes most of Moses’ objections to the plan (mainly objections around Moses saying “I can’t do it”).

In an astounding moment God gives Moses the supreme revelation of God’s name – put simply his name is “**I am**” ... the present tense of the verb ‘to be’ ... if the name **I am** is spoken in past, present or future, it is still the same identity ... God living and present through ‘all eternity’. That’s a big thing (although it didn’t stop Moses continuing to make conditions about becoming a rescuer of the enslaved people ... a super-hero with a lot of attitude.

What we learn however is:

1. God had a plan for Moses – Moses would never be alone in his tasks.

PLAN ...Does God have a plan for each of us? We are never alone even in difficult times and places.

PTO

2. Moses heard God's name because he listened to the voice and began to understand.

LISTEN ... Can we listen too? Not just with our ears, but with our hearts and minds – listen with understanding.

3. God came to Moses in a burning bush – got Moses' attention and assured him that despite everything he was the chosen man to lead God's people ... and lead them he did.

FAITHFUL COMPANIONSHIP ... Do we have a burning bush equivalent?

Jesus is our burning bush – a brightly burning light that never goes out, however hard things get, however long we turn away, however much we fail to listen – that burning bush, our holy sanctuary, is always there for us to find. Whatever we're asked to do in God's name, however frightened we are, the burning light of Christ will always guide us.

4. In the end, God convinced Moses that it was by God's power, not Moses' ability, that the world would begin to be set right.

We have a responsibility too, to continue to set the world to rights trusting in God's loving power and not our own ability.

**Don't follow the flickering lights into the marshland where your life will be bogged down,
but across the pastures to the burning bush whose light will send you on the right path.**