

Exodus 3:1-15 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." ⁴ So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground." ⁶ Moreover He said, "I *am* the God of your father -- the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. ⁷ ¶ And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. ⁸ "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹ "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." ¹³ ¶ Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.'

Take your sandals off. This Is Holy Ground!

Do you notice something different about me? I did something different for this special occasion. Something I thought only appropriate. I am not wearing shoes. Now I thought about asking everybody to take off their shoes today as we celebrate the

500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation and the paying off of our mortgage and the installation of our new stained glass windows, but I figured that would make some of you so self conscious of your big yellowed toenails or the stink of your feet and the rest of you so conscious of someone else's yellow toe nails or foot stink that you would be distracted the whole time. And that is not what God wants for us or what God wanted for Moses. But why was it appropriate for Moses to take off his sandals and fitting for us as well? Well taking off shoes or sandals is not part of our culture but it was part of Israel's culture and many eastern cultures. You took off your sandals as a sign of respect. And the ground that Moses stood upon was holy ground worthy of respect. And the ground that we stand upon today is holy ground worthy of respect. Now as I mentioned, taking off shoes and sandals is not part of our culture so please don't, but do realize how holy the ground we stand upon today is. It is ground that is paid off. It is ground that is the perfection of beauty. And I am talking about more than these new stained glass windows installed to imbue our worship and

building with greater beauty and having the weight of the mortgage moved. This is Holy Ground because here the Holy Saving God reveals His gracious self onto us and thus saves. That is what makes this place holy. That is what makes it worthy of our greatest respect and love.

The word holy conjures up all kinds of weird ideas in people. To the world it has a magical sense. Perhaps they think of holy water that kills fictional vampires or casts out demons. Or perhaps when I talk about this being holy ground they think, as the people of Luther's day did, that this is ground no ghost or demon can enter. I assure you that is not what makes this ground holy. First because demons can most certainly enter here. They are here distracting us from listening to God with the temptation to think of how annoyed you are with someone or the football game later or whether you left your curling iron on. They were with Moses in our text tempting him to be timid and afraid to do what God asked instead of trusting God to

provide and yet the ground Moses stood on was still holy.

What makes the ground we stand upon today holy is that here the Gracious Holy God reveals His saving self to us and thus saves.

That is what makes us, Martin Luther in his studies of the Bible which lead him to post those 95 theses, and Moses in our text, to all stand upon the same ground even though we stand centuries apart on very different corners of the earth. Here the gracious Holy God reveals His saving self to us as Isaiah and Micah prophesied. **Isaiah 2:2-3** "*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains,...Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths."* For out of Zion shall go forth the law."

Luther stood upon this holy ground for in his studies of the Bible the gracious holy God revealed His saving self to Luther. God revealed to Luther through Scripture that

God did not just demand a perfect righteousness from Luther and condemn him to hell for his failure. God provided for Luther and all men, God's own Son to provide the perfect righteousness that Luther and all men couldn't provide for themselves. Luther, in His studies of the Gospel, stood upon Holy Ground as surely as Moses, for God revealed Himself through the scripture to Luther. And so Luther posted the 95 theses attacking what was unholy - the selling of indulgences. For those who went about teaching that buying a piece of paper sold by the pope forgave sin did not reveal the gracious saving holy God but concealed Him and concealed salvation. That is unholy. And so Luther wrote and pounded on the door 95 theses including:

21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty and saved.

27. Preachers of indulgences are in error what they

say that so soon as the penny in the money-box rings , the soul from purgatory springs.

62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.

Moses too stood upon Holy Ground for there God revealed Himself to Moses and us there. That was the beauty of the words and the picture. We studied this a couple years ago remember, Moses turned aside to see this great and marvelous sight. A fire in the midst of bush but yet the bush was not consumed. God with that picture and with His Words was revealing His name forever and His memorial to all generations. God was revealing His saving gracious self and what He would do. Israel is often pictured as a bush, a dry thorny, unsightly bush. How could a fire dwell in a midst of a dry bush and not burn it up. How could a holy jealous God who burns with anger against those who turn toward other gods and misuse His name and reject His son slain from the foundation of the world for men only to have

men spurn Him. How could such a holy jealous God dwell in the midst of such a thorny people as Israel or us and not burn us to nothing? Because He is also gracious and in His Son Jesus we are not consumed but forgiven and God dwells in our midst.

Yes Moses stood upon Holy Ground for God revealed His gracious Holy saving Self to Moses there and yes we stand upon Holy Ground for God reveals Himself to us here, in the scriptures that are read, in the body and blood, His body and blood given unto death in the bread and the wine. In the water poured out in Baptism with the Gospel in connection with, God also pours out His Holy Spirit and works faith and salvation. Don't you see? We stand upon holy ground as surely as Moses and Luther. You stand on holy ground even if you are in the ugliest most run down building in the world if the Gospel is preached there for there God reveals Himself, His salvation. On the other hand, even you stood in the most beautiful cathedral in the world,

it would be unholy if it is not salvation by Jesus that is preached but salvation by works.

This past year God has blessed us in many ways. After decades, the mortgage on this land and on this building has been paid off. And we also had the stained glass windows installed. At times, when funds are tight perhaps might it seem like this ground would never be paid off, the mortgage too great and the offerings too small? And certainly to Doctor Preszler it surely seemed like her idea for stained glass windows, her labor of love would never be completed after she suffered not just one but two times lying broken on the floor. Yet here we stand today. Both with these new beautiful windows and debt free. And are they not beautiful? And is it not wonderful to look at a balance sheet and not see being in the red hundreds of thousands of dollars. If we were to sing with the tongues of angels and the heart of David who leaped before the Lord it would still not approach the levels of thanks God deserves for what He has

enabled this small group of Christ-believers in this corner of South Dakota to accomplish.

Yet despite what a wonder and blessing paying off this mortgage is not what makes this ground holy nor are these beautiful windows despite being wonderful, what make this place the perfection of beauty. Recently in the spokesman , One CLC pastor wrote about how God had graciously given their congregation a new church, an actual church, a beautiful property and building after decades of meeting in hotel rooms, back rooms, strip malls and the like. However this pastor said that those places, despite not being owned by them or the most beautiful or the most conducive to worship and nothing compared to the place God has just provided for them, were still the perfection of beauty. He wrote “The Beauty of these locations was to be seen not in their architecture , landscapes, or even location. Their beauty was to be found in the glory of God shining forth from His Word and sacraments which made them a true Eden”.

We are ever so thankful to God for allowing us to pay off the mortgage on this place and being able to have these beautiful windows, a reflection of the beauty of God, and help focus our worship on the gracious saving holy God but these are not what make this ground holy. For it is not paying of the mortgage that pays off what we owe God nor is it stained glass windows, no matter how symmetrical and alluring, that make this place the perfection of beauty.

Does God require perfection and beauty and free of debt? Yes He does. For He is holy and just. God demands perfection. He requires it but that is why the Father sent His Son and that is why the Son came to acquire for you a righteousness, a perfection, a beauty that you could not attain on your own. Jesus has attained it for you on the cross and given it to you through faith. This is His name, His Memorial to all generations. The Lord, The Lord God gracious and merciful. The greatest beauty of this ground and this building is not its architecture or landscape. It’s

beauty is found in God revealing His gracious saving self to us here in Word and sacrament. As He has revealed himself as our beautiful savior without the ugly false doctrines of men for 500 years. This places beauty is found in that here we are assured that God paid off the debt of our sin. It's beauty is found that here God dwells with us and we are not consumed by His wrath and just judgement but embraced and taken to heaven.

Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting!

C: Amen.

Pastor Aaron Ude

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