

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle C

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15; 1Cor 10:1-6,10-12; Luke 13:1-9

As I reread the material I had shared with you three years ago in a Bible Bullet, the reading about Moses and the burning bush suddenly transported my thoughts back to the Brain and Learning Conference that Theresa and I attended last week. One of the presenters, John Jonides from the University of Michigan, spoke about research on the effect of nature on intelligence. In an article, he wrote:

Imagine a therapy that had no known side effects, was readily available, and could improve your cognitive functioning at no cost. Such a therapy has been known to philosophers, writers, and laypeople alike: interacting with nature. Many have suspected that nature can promote improved cognitive functioning and overall well-being, and these effects have recently been documented.

While our presenter did not cite the experience of Moses at the burning bush, the story could provide fuel to the findings of research. There is a very good chance that if this bush had appeared to Moses while he was in Egypt living like a prince he never would have noticed, or at least would not have cared about the welfare of a worthless bush. Living in the palace in Egypt could be likened to an “urban” situation. In contrast, the wilderness had prepared him—yes, even cognitively—to be open to new learning.

The tedium of each day watching Jethro’s sheep made Moses ripe for a distraction. It was not unusual that a bush might burst into flame in the Sinai Desert. In the heat of summer when dried bushes caught the isolated rays of the sun magnified through the quartz crystals lying on the ground, bushes did at times burst into flames. Such an event happens even today.

The difference was that this bush was not being consumed. Moses was peaceful enough, cognitively alert enough, to notice that. Forty years before in Egypt Moses would never have given the bush a second look. But his days were now spent noticing the details of nature while the sheep grazed. His senses were awake to the small changes in his surroundings. His curiosity peaked just enough to put Moses in the right place at the right time. That moment, standing barefoot in the sand, Moses was about to begin an adventure that changed the lives of a tribal people forever.

Why should he be barefoot to be in the presence of the Lord? The impact of that moment would direct the rest of his life. He must not miss the experience of even the smallest grain of sand beneath his feet.

Is this not similar to Elijah when he ran into the wilderness from the anger of Jezebel? He finally recognized the voice of God in a tiny, whispering sound. Recall the story of Hagar who had been left in the wilderness with her young son, Ishmael. She accepted certain death from thirst until she opened her crying eyes to the landscape around them. Suddenly she saw a well that she had not noticed before.

How often do we read in the Gospels that Jesus left his friends to spend quiet time on a mountaintop? Being fully human, he found nature cognitively and spiritually restorative. In those quiet times, the voice of his Father could reach him.

We need restoration too. Finding it is our Lenten challenge. Where will you hear that tiny whispering sound? What well has been sent to you to quench your spiritual thirst? Believe and look.