



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Lent-Year C-March 20th 2022

Readings: Exodus 3: 1-8 13-15, Psalm 102, 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6 10-12,

Luke 13: 1-9

When I was a very little boy my grandmother, with whom we lived, used to refer to a regular and ludicrously pompous family visitor as, 'The Great I Am.' I had no idea what she meant until I was recruited to my local Baptist Sunday School and spent five happy years learning the great stories of the Bible under the inspiring tutelage of Malcolm Hickford – with whom I kept in touch until his death a couple of years back. I have been forever grateful for those years because they taught me a love of God's Word and a glorious overview of salvation history which has never diminished or failed me. It would be true to say that it was what carried me through the years of university and Anglican theological college where faculty and staff were frequently in thrall to the barren unsubstantiated tripe of Biblical criticism, the gist of which is 'Why nothing in the Scripture is reliable or true' – a short cut to atheism for many.

Well, Malcolm learnt us the story and he learnt us good. It helped that he was a great footballer – opposition players bounced off his sturdy frame - and his girlfriend, later wife, was the prettiest, nicest girl on the

block. He was kind and humble and humorous and filled with love for Jesus. The ideal role model for aspiring young Christian boys.

Why am I telling you all this? Well, because when Malcolm told us the stories, we were there.....living it all. His quiet conviction and integrity left no room for doubt that we were part of this extraordinary story of salvation – we were the guys who were going to write the next chapter in the Acts of the Apostles.

We would never comprehend those theological wallahs who infested the seats of theological learning while espousing loopy theories – the disciples *imagined* the idea of Jesus living on i.e. no Resurrection. The Transfiguration was too much ‘wacky baccy’. Today’s Old Testament reading was clearly a result of Moses having too much sun, St Paul had an epileptic fit etc.

We learned to trust the record of God’s interaction with Man. We saw it being lived out. We were not surprised by or afraid of spiritual experience, the divine encounter. When we went to train for the sacred ministry, there was a division between those men who arrived with a hopeful pair of purple socks in their bottom drawer and whose priority seemed to be how to live more comfortably in Egypt and those who came to risk all on the dangerous journey to the Land of Promise.

Today’s Old Testament reading records one of the greatest turning points in the history of the world. Exiled, running for his life, the young Hebrew princeling, murderer of the cruel taskmaster, has been taken in by a foreigner and given refuge – and later a wife ! The fine days at court, as the ‘rescue job’ adopted child of Pharaoh’s daughter, are now exchanged for the weeds of a humble shepherd in the bleak terrain of the wilderness. That is the summit now of the ambitions of the once upon a time luxurious young courtier. Survival and dependence on God and upon the unexpected kindness of strangers.

Drawn to the mysterious 'Bush of Fire', Moses hears words that will change history. The sign is a metaphor of Our Lady – ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit and bringing forth the Word of God – calling Man to his part in salvation history and inviting him into the life of the divine.

The particular task for the 'Water Baby' Moses, is immense and dangerous and, realistically, unachievable. To set the enslaved people free and lead them to the Land of the Promise. Apart from the fact that to return to the court of Pharaoh is to invite the death penalty, like most people with a genuine vocation

a) Really doesn't want it

b) Is convinced that he's not up to it.

Understandably he wants a sign and a name. Who are you, Lord and how will I know? The answer is a game changer. The whole theological thinking of Man is revolutionised in this desert encounter. Out goes the tyrannical and capricious, pagan pantheon of man's creation, projections of his own worst fallen state, and in comes the one true God whose Paradise we lost. The I AM.

The origin of all that is, the pre-existent existence, the quintessential Being, the I AM, WAS, WILL BE – the Eternal who will later manifest in time in Jesus the Christ who will use that name for Himself over and over again – I AM.

Oh, and the promise, the guarantee, the sign? God says, 'When you have done it I will meet you back here, OK?' Think about it. Call requires response. Response requires faith and courage. When we have done what was asked, He will be there, waiting.

That is the nature of every true vocation, historic or little and local.

People often ask me why they haven't had a Damascus Road of a Burning Bush encounter. My answer is simple – be grateful that you are

not called to be St Paul or Moses. We are given the experiences of God that we need to fulfil each our own peculiar vocation., no more, no less. Having said that....it has been the joyful experience of my ministry as to how often people have shared their remarkable moments of divine encounter and what an encouragement those moments of engagement with the eternal reality, the I AM, are to those blessed to hear them.

Just this week an old sailor told me of the moment when, as a nineteen year old mechanic, three days into a typhoon- driven storm on the South China Sea, his ship wallowing, battered, funnels destroyed, lifeboats washed away,, his energy exhausted, his hope gone, staring death in the face, Christ appeared to him, called him and calmed the storm. The rest of his earthly voyage, he said, has been a gift and no suffering, darkness or doubt has undone that bond forged in that divine encounter in the belly of the failing engine room of the foundering tanker. There are moments, even in Lent, when Alleluia is the only response.

Never be afraid to tell the story of what God has done for Man and what God has done for you. That is both a gospel witness to the world and a great encouragement to your fellow pilgrims as they trudge the weary wilderness road to the Promised Land.