

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Intro

After Former President George Bush died, he was being shown around heaven by an Angel.

As they went along, they encountered an old man with **long white hair**, wearing a **white robe** and **sandals**, holding a staff.

President Bush went up to the man and said, “Aren’t you **Moses**?”

The man never answered but just kept staring ahead.

Again, the former President said, “**Moses!**” in a loud voice.

But the man just kept staring ahead, never uttering a sound.

Finally, President Bush turned to the Angel who was showing him around and said, “Doesn’t this man look like **Moses** to you?”

“Well, now that you mention it, he does,” said the Angel.

“But every time I say his name,” said the President, “he just keeps staring ahead and refuses to speak. Watch.”

Again, President Bush yelled, “**Moses!**” and again the man stared ahead.

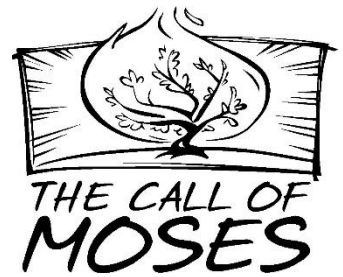
“Hmm,” said the Angel, “well, we do have a lot of men with white robes and sandals up here, let me check.”

So, the Angel went up to the man in the white robe and whispered: “You look just like Moses. Are you Moses?”

The man leaned over and whispered, “Yes, I am Moses. **But the last time I talked to a BUSH, I spent 40 years wandering in the desert, and I’m not making that mistake again.**”

## I. Moses and the Bush

A. Fortunately for us, Moses DID turn aside and talk with the bush that he saw burning but not consumed.



1. For in this conversation – so wonderfully told by Paul – two things happen that will change the way things are forever:

- Moses receives his call to lead the Children of Israel from slavery to freedom;

- and even more importantly, the nature of God is revealed.

2. Moses is tending his Father-in-Law's sheep, when he is called by God to return to Egypt and lead God's people to freedom.

3. Moses, as anyone of us would do, instantly claims that God must have the wrong person in mind – he feels totally inadequate to take on such a charge.

- Moses asks, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

4. But God promises Moses to be with him all along the way.

5. So Moses goes and takes up God's call – and as to what happens next – well, you'll just have to come to the Easter Vigil to find out.

B. In their conversation, Moses says to God, “If I am going to go in your name – ah, who should I say sent me?”

1. And God reveals God's name to Moses – God says, “I AM WHO I AM.”

2. “I am who I am” – or “I shall be what I shall be.”

3. Another way this has been interpreted is: “The One who causes to be what comes into existence.”

C. Much is revealed about the nature of God in this conversation as well.



1. God's name of "I AM WHO I AM," or "I shall be what I shall be," is to be God's name forever – "for all generations."

2. God is an ongoing God – an active God – a caring God.

3. God hears the cries of God's people and responds.

4. Our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – not the God of Greek philosophers.

5. God is not an abstract or impersonal reality, but the transcendent One who intervenes powerfully in human history.

6. God remembers the promises made to God's people, beginning with Abraham, and remains in relationship with the people of Israel, and will act to set them free.

7. And this relationship will continue – throughout the centuries – as more and more is revealed about God's divine nature – through the prophets and other acts of history.

8. Until finally, the ultimate revelation of God is made known in Jesus.

## II. Jesus and the Fig Tree

A. Jesus came that he might make God more fully known and share more about the true nature of God – and in the Parable of the Fig Tree, he does exactly that.

1. Jesus tells a story about a Fig Tree that would bear NO fruit.

2. Year after year, the owner of the fig tree came looking for fruit and found none – so he told the gardener to cut it down and rip it out.

3. The Gardener, however, took pity on the tree and begged to give it one last chance – he will dig around it and fertilize it – give it some tender loving care – and then see if that will cause it to bear fruit.



*A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it ...*

LUKE 13:6, NRSV

4. Now, the traditional way of looking at this parable is to focus on the fruitless tree as self-absorbed humanity that is unrepentant and bears no fruit, and God the wrathful owner is going to rip us out and send us to hell.

5. But when you start to assign different characters roles in a parable, it ceases to be a parable and becomes an allegory.

6. Remember, a parable has an open ended meaning and attempts to reveal to us things about the kingdom of God.

7. But what if instead of focusing all our attention on the fig tree – we instead focus on the **Gardner**?

B. Biblical commentator, Don Armentrout, offers these observations on this story:

1. “God is the ever-patient Gardner of our lives.

2. “Though we more often live for ourselves and do not produce the desired fruits of justice and love, God offers a new beginning, another year of grace.”

3. He goes on to say: “If we were judged only by the visible results of our faith, we might not have much fruit to show.

4. Yet, God continues to plant in us the seed of the Word, water us with the grace of our baptism, and provide all that we need at the table of the Lord.

5. He concludes, “God’s compassion and patience are beyond our understanding, and it is precisely this steadfast love that reveals a God who sees in us NOT the results of what we have done or become, but our potential for growth and bearing fruit.” (Synthesis – 2004)

6. You see it’s the POTENTIAL for bearing fruit that the Gardner looks for in the tree – and it’s that same POTENTIAL that God looks for in OUR lives.

7. That’s the God that Jesus has come to reveal to us – not the harsh landowner who would rip us out and be done with us – but the God of second chances who loves us and knows us, and the potential of our lives.

### III. Bearing Fruit

#### A. So how do we respond?

1. Just as Moses REORIENTED his life to God and answered God's call, Jesus calls us to **repent** – to **reorient** our lives to God and bear good fruit.

2. As the Gardener was willing to have patience with the FIG TREE and give it the time and fertilizer it needed, so too will **God the Gardner** be with us, to renew us and strengthen us.

3. For **God the Gardner** is always there – tilling the soil around our roots and providing the nutrients we need to live a fruitful life.

4. And one of those nutrients is PRAYER.

5. Prayer is our sustenance – Prayer is our life force – Prayer is our link to God – the way that God can provide for us.

6. And by PRAYER, I don't mean us constantly yammering at God with an endless list of needs, wants and desires.

7. PRAYER is also a quiet listening to God – simply being in the presence of God – enjoying God's company – and letting God fill us with God's life-giving grace – that we may bear good fruit in our lives.

B. The question for us is: are we going to be BURNING BUSHES or FIG TREES?

1. Are we going to shine forth with the brilliance of God?  
- Or just sit there sucking up all the good stuff God gives us and giving nothing in return?

2. The choice is ours.

3. When we allow God to use us and allow God's light to shine through us, we like the Burning Bush burn with God's energy, but are not consumed.

4. But when we sit in God's vineyard using up God's gifts for our own gratification and return no fruit to God – we are little better than the fig tree.

5. Jesus tells us that the way to begin yielding good fruit is repentance – repentance – refocusing our lives away from us and toward God.

### C. And that is where Lent can help.

1. Lent can be for us a time of pruning, a time of fertilizing, a time of nurturing by God the Gardener

2. There is still time – Lent is not quite half over – the Fig Tree got another chance, and so do we.

3. Let us use the rest of Lent to pull the weeds of our lives – and then be nourished with the good things that Lent has to offer.

4. That by fasting, prayer and study we may “prepare with joy for the paschal feast” – and become bearers of GOOD FRUIT – ripe with the message of God's love.

### Let Us Pray

O God as you spoke to the heart of Moses your servant through the burning bush, so speak to our hearts today. Grant that we may not become Fig Trees in your Vineyard who take all and give nothing in return. Help us to seize the opportunity to repent and be renewed, and then allow your Spirit to burn in us that we might be Burning Bushes for you and shine forth with the brilliance of your love. All this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN. (GBL)

