



**A Sermon for The Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
Sept 3, 2023**



*Moses and the Burning Bush, by James Tissot*

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**New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

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September 3, 2023  
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The Rev. Barbara Bond  
Exodus 3:1-15

Turning aside

This past Friday, as I began writing this sermon, I noticed that it was the feast day of David Pendleton Oakerhater, one of my favorite and somewhat unlikely saints. The coincidence of this morning's text on Moses, and the life of David, caught my attention.

David Oakerhater was a 19<sup>th</sup> century Cheyene warrior who had many serious encounters with United States army forces on the plains of Oklahoma. He was a brave leader for his people, but he met defeat in one battle and was taken prisoner by the army and sent to prison in Florida. There David had one of those inspired encounters – an army captain saw that the young Indian warrior was bright and interested in learning. David learned about Christianity. Once released from imprisonment, David went on with his Christian education, sponsored by a Mrs. Pendleton of Cincinnati, Ohio, and, taking her name as his own middle name, David Pendleton Oakerhater, he was ultimately ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church. David returned to his tribe in Oklahoma with a whole new perspective, telling his people that he had learned about a new chief, Jesus Christ, who would lead them to new life. David's chance encounter with that army captain changed his life, and also the lives of many of his own people.

So what happened to Moses? Last week we heard how he ended up in the Egyptian court, raised there as a Prince of Egypt, not realizing his own heritage as a Jew. His sympathies for the enslaved Jews in Egypt led to his killing an Egyptian, and he fled into the desert to avoid prosecution. There he started a new life, marrying the lovely Zipporah, daughter of the priest of Midian, Jethro. He was content with his new life, spent mostly keeping flocks of sheep for Jethro. Then one day, everything changed.

Now Moses thought his life had already changed, so he was not expecting this encounter that would change not only his life but the lives of all Jews

forever. God saw some potential in Moses and called him to greater purpose.

You know the story. Moses saw a burning bush – a bush that burned but was not consumed. He turned aside to contemplate it, and thus began a crucial conversation with God. Moses was totally astonished. God called him to greater things than leading a flock of sheep – Moses was to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. In this remarkable conversation, Moses' response was: Who? Me?

Moses did not feel up to the task, which involved going back to the Egyptian court and asking for the release of his fellow Jews. God's message to Pharaoh, through Moses, would be, "Let my people go!" Moses asked God, "Who, me?" And God said, "Yes, you. And I, God, will be with you, telling you what to say and do." So, Moses went. We know the rest of the story: Moses did ultimately convince Pharaoh to let the people go, after many trials and demonstrations of God's might, including plagues, famines, insect infestations, rivers of blood – you name it, ten different signs that God wanted the people liberated. The biggest sign was the last one, when God sent the Angel of Death over the houses of the Egyptians, killing the first-born of every household, including Pharaoh's son, but preserving the Jews. This event is celebrated as Passover – the Angel of Death *passing over* all the homes of the Jews and not killing the Jewish first-born. We will look at this momentous event in more detail next week.

So let's back up to the burning bush encounter. Moses saw the burning bush, and turned aside to see what was going on. "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." God had Moses' attention.

Have you had any events that changed your life? Maybe not a burning bush, but something, that you realized later, was God trying to get your attention? I think David Pendleton Oakerhater had one of those, while he was in prison, and he followed it to new life for himself and for his people. I had one of those when I was 43, clueless, minding my own business working as a medical secretary in Houston, not sure what I was supposed to do with the rest of my life, until God told me. Oh my – then followed eight years of following God's bidding, to seminary, to the wilds of Idaho (well, at least to Boise....) and to ordination in 1996. I'm still astonished by

that turning aside and listening to God and following God's call, that ultimately led me to New Life, to here, and to you.

I know some of you have had some pretty astonishing encounters with God, and many such moments have led you to turn aside from where you thought you were going, and to find new life and purpose in something you had never dreamed of. God works God's purposes out and leads us to do God's work in the world.

Right here in this parish, this coming together of community has been a blessing for the people you serve. New Life Church has had some rocky moments in the past, just as David Oakerhater and Moses' lives did, but you have persevered, because you know that God has a larger purpose for you and for this community. Your inspired leadership to help others – through donating school supplies, food to FISH, adopting families for Christmas, events like the recent Hoedown for adults with disabilities – you find the needs all around you, and you respond with love and purpose, to make the world a better place, and to act out your love of God and each other. I think perhaps you have had an encounter with a burning bush, which has given you a burning desire to change the world.

Amen!