

James Livingston
Third Sunday in Lent, Year C
March 7, 2010
[Exodus 3:1-15](#)
[Psalm 63:1-8](#)
[1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)
[Luke 13:1-9](#)

Almost a month ago now, I heard some of the sweetest words from my wife. She was reading from the seminary's website. "Honey. Class tomorrow is canceled due to the snow." YES! Oh, I was elated! You see, having been raised in Florida, this kind of snow was novel to me. But, alas, elation quickly turned to boredom. My week of freedom offered some amazing chances to get ahead in school; but I sat...in the cold...for days...thinking what am I doing with my life? Indecision and procrastination—each paralysis exacerbating other.

What are we doing with our lives? Lent gives us that perfect opportunity to ask the question, and to move beyond the paralysis. To hone in on it; to take action in response to it: Am I praying enough? Should I fast for a while? I think maybe I'll read a little bit of Scripture everyday this Lent and meditate on the Word. As Susan preached the other week, this reevaluation of our lives serves to disorient us so that we might reorient ourselves to God as we actively engage the question, "What am I doing with my life?"

I wonder if Moses ever asked this of himself. Moses was raised in Pharaoh's court, by Pharaoh's daughter. He saw political administration from the inside. But one day he killed an Egyptian who was mistreating one of his own countrymen. But word got out, and he fled into the wilderness. There he married, tended the sheep of his father-in-law, and lived apart from his people until the Pharaoh died. He stayed out in that wilderness for a very long time. A long time to think, to reflect, to wonder what life could have been like instead. Plenty of time to ask himself, "What am I doing with my life?"

What was Moses doing with his life out there in the wilderness, away from his people who remained enslaved? Was he ashamed for what he had done? Fearful of facing the consequences? Feeling guilty about his boring safety while his kinsmen were suffering in slavery? Whatever it was, God saw the true Moses, the one for whom God had a mission, a purpose, a plan. Moses was the man for the job, even if he didn't realize it while he was out there chasing sheep.. It took something really obvious to get Moses' attention, so God lit up a burning bush out there in the wilderness, and it got Moses' attention. Moses paid attention to the fire that did not consume the branches, attention to the command to remove his sandals while he stood on Holy ground, attention to the monumental task that was being set before him, to bring God's people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. God had a purpose for Moses, and it was not to tend the flocks of his father-in-law. If the fire of passion had gone cold in Moses, this burning bush was there to fan the flames, to rekindle a passion that was once there.

Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree that for three years produced no fruit. The owner of the vineyard comes one day to his tree hoping to see some fruit. He has been to this tree before. He knows that three years have past and not one fig. The owner is upset, but the gardener is patient. The owner says, 'Cut it down. Why should it be wasting the soil?' but the gardener says, 'Let it alone, until I dig around it, and fertilize it.'

This barren fig can do nothing for itself. It is at the mercy of the outcome of this passionate

conversation between the owner who is obviously fed up and the gardener who is willing to take the time needed to nurse this tree back to health. What is Jesus saying? As with all of his disorienting stories, many ways of hearing it are possible. One commentator suggests this: "...the fig tree reflects of the apathy and indecision widespread among those who hear Jesus' message." (Deffenbaugh, 2009)

It took a burning bush to rekindle and redirect the passion of an apparently apathetic shepherd out in the wilderness.. A bush that never stopped burning, one that directed him and gave him a purpose, a plan with no chance of success unless fueled by God Himself! Unchecked and misdirected, Moses' passion had once led him to murder, then to cut and run, and finally into an apparently apathetic wander in the wilderness chasing sheep. Moses needed help. Someone to be an advocate for him, someone to support him, to be in his corner. "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM Who I AM." To carry out this tall order, he needed something more than the fire of his own anger, followed by the chill of his apathy and indecision. He needed a passionate focus fueled by the fire of God..

God tends to the apathy of Moses, as the gardener tends to the fruitless fig tree. The gardener bargains with the owner for more time—the text from Luke says “one more year,” it can also be translated as an indeterminate length of time. More time to grow, to be healed, to be turned from apathy toward bearing fruit.

The fire of God that burned for Moses burns for us. His love for us burns with a passionate and eternal flame that never goes out, never cools off, never becomes apathetic. The LORD said to Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people... I have heard their cry... I know their sufferings..." God's covenant provides proof that He is anything but apathetic and indecisive,

God the gardener is passionate in tending to us.—digging around us, fertilizing us, nurturing us on toward fruitful growth.

I have entered into Lent with apathy. With indecision, with indifference. My good intentions have lost steam my fire has grown cold. I pray fervently to God, “God, please, let me bear fruit for you, to do your work. Have mercy on me, Lord. Have mercy.” I gain hope when I turn my head to look, pay attention and listen to the Burning Bush. It says, “I see your misery, I hear your crying, I feel your suffering. Pay attention to Me, God tells me, and together, we will bear fruit.”

Amen.