Moses and the Burning Bush
Exodus 3:1-12

The Story

1. With God's Help

2. Taking a Closer Look

3. You are Standing on Holy Ground

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Moses and the Burning Bush

Moses was taking care of his father-in-law’s sheep, taking them to places with lots of grass and fresh water. He took them up a mountain called Horeb, the mountain of God. While he was there, he saw the strangest thing – a bush was on fire but it was not getting burned up! It just kept blazing with the flames!

Moses said to himself, “I have to take a closer look and see why this bush isn’t being burned up”. When the Lord saw that Moses had come closer to the bush, he called to him, “Moses, Moses!” Moses answered, “Here I am!” Then the Lord said, “Don’t come any closer. Take off your sandals because you are standing on holy ground”. Moses did as he was told, amazed at what was happening.

The Lord continued, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Once Moses realized who he was talking to, he hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Then God said to him, “I have seen how miserable my people, the Israelites, are in Egypt. I have heard them cry and I know that they are suffering. I have come to save them from slavery in Egypt and take them to a new and beautiful land where they can be safe and happy and where they will not be oppressed. I will send you to Pharoah, the king of Egypt, and you will bring my people out of his country.”

But Moses said, “But I am nobody special. Why would Pharoah listen to me? How am I supposed to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” God answered him, “I will be with you and when you and the Israelites have come out of Egypt you will worship me on this mountain.”

(Exodus 3:1-12)
With God's Help  
(Moses and the Burning Bush Lesson 1)

This first lesson on Moses and the burning bush is, in my opinion, the most important lesson of the unit. If you are only going to do one of them – make it this one. It addresses the role of people as God’s agents for achieving justice, scaled to the social world of children. Depending on your context, you may need to adjust the parameters of that social world.

I would greatly appreciate feedback on this lesson plan. The activity it offers is a really fun theatre game that I have used in a range of settings but I’m curious as to what you think. Does it feel too complicated/difficult/intimidating for you, your teachers, or your students? Do you think you can make it work with younger students (say, 6-8 year olds)? Would you be prepared to give it a try or do you need an alternative activity for this lesson? Please let me know by visiting www.storiesontheway.wordpress.com.

Before the Lesson

• Familiarize yourself with the rules of the activity.

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

Today’s story comes from the Hebrew Bible (or the Old Testament, if you prefer). This is the holy book of Jewish religion and it is the bible that Jesus (who was a Jew) would have known, too. It tells us about God’s relationship with the people of Israel (called Israelites) – stories that happened long, long ago, before even Jesus’ birth. These are still important stories for us because they tell us lots of important things about God and the way God wants people to live.

In this story, we will hear about a man named Moses. Does anyone know about Moses? He was an Israelite who was raised by an Egyptian princess during a time when most Israelites in Egypt were slaves. Who can tell me what a slave is? (a person who doesn’t get paid for working; a person who is owned by another person) When Moses grew up, he ran away from Egypt. Eventually, he got married and he stayed in his wife’s country and worked for her father. He did not want to go back to Egypt.

Our story begins while Moses is at work.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

What did God tell Moses to do?
Why did God want Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?
How did Moses feel about that?
Have you ever had a time when you knew the right thing to do but you didn’t want to because it was too scary or too hard or too embarrassing?

If necessary, offer examples like confessing to doing something wrong or walking away from a fight or standing up for someone who was being teased.

If you didn’t do what you knew you should, how did you feel?
If you did do it, how did you feel?

What did God tell Moses after Moses told him how he felt?
What do you think Moses will do? (after the kids make their guesses, tell them that Moses did go back to Egypt and bring the Israelites out but that it took a very long time and was a very difficult and dangerous job, even with God’s help)

**Introduce the Activity**

Today we are going to practice doing difficult things with God’s help. To start, I need two volunteers to come to the front.

Bring the two students up.

I am going to give you a situation and I want you to act it out. After a little while, I will call “Help!” Freeze right where you are. Then someone else will replace one of you and show us how God might help us to deal with the situation. Okay?

(If you only have two students you can simple have one of the actors switch their behaviour after you call Help. If you have a lot of students who are too young to manage the acting, they can simply provide directions as to how the actors should change their behaviour. If necessary, you can be an actor – be sure to ham it up!)

**Play the Game**

Sample Situations:

- two kids fighting over a toy
- a parent asking a kid if he/she broke the window (the kid did it)
- two people making fun of someone (perhaps you, the teacher, or perhaps someone who is only imaginary)
- one person trying to start a fight with the other
- a person ignoring someone who is asking for help
- a person seeing someone throw a food wrapper on the sidewalk

Note: there may be more than one set of responses to these situations (e.g. simply throwing away the food wrapper for the litterbug and politely confronting the litterbug could both be good alternatives to ignoring it or screaming at the litterbug). Feel free to provide the group with multiple rounds with the same situations, if they would like or you think it would be useful.

**Regrouping**

Give everyone a round of applause. Then ask everyone to think about something they will try
to do next week that might be difficult to do. They can share their ideas or not, as they choose.

**Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for helping Moses bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Thank you for caring about how people are treated and how we live our lives. Help us remember that you are with us and that you will help us do what is right. Amen.
Taking a Closer Look  
(Moses and the Burning Bush Lesson 2)

The second lesson on Moses and the burning bush asks us to take a closer look for the places and times where God might be speaking to us. The activity is a nice and easy arts and crafts activity – no more improv games for a while.

Things to know about this lesson:

• It will work better if you are prepared to share a fairly personal story of your own spirituality – when and where has God spoken to you?

Materials

• green construction paper
• red, orange, and yellow tissue paper
• scissors
• glue

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

If this is your first lesson (or your students’ first lesson) on Moses and the Burning Bush, see With God’s Help for an introduction to the character and situation of Moses.

If everyone present has heard that introduction, you may want to ask a few questions and refresh everyone’s memory before you jump into the story.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

What was the strange thing that Moses saw on the mountain?  
What did Moses do when he saw it? (went to take a closer look)  
What did Moses NOT do? (run away, ignore it, call the fire department, try to put it out)  
What happened when Moses went closer to the bush? (God spoke to him)  
Now, I don’t think that this story is telling us that we should not report fires to the fire department in case God wants to talk to us. But I do think it is a reminder that God can speak to us from strange places so we need to pay attention to what is around us. Just think, if Moses had not taken a closer look at that bush, he might never have helped the Israelites get out of slavery.  
I have never (unless you have) heard God speak to me quite in the way that the story

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describes but I have heard God speaking in my heart. Sometimes I can hear God when I am with my family or when I sing a hymn in church. Sometimes I hear God when I sit quietly in the sunshine. Sometimes I hear God when I am running. But I only hear God when I leave my own thoughts and activities on the side for a moment and take a closer look to see what wonderful thing God has to show me. Then, when God sees that I have come closer, God speaks.

Use your own personal story along with, or instead of, the paragraph above. Then you can invite the students to share as well.

Can you think of a time or place when you could hear God? Would you like to tell us about it?

**Introduce the Activity**

Today we are going to make burning bushes to take home. I hope that, whenever you see your bush, you will remember to take a closer look and hear God speaking to you.

**Making a Burning Bush**

Give each student a piece of green construction paper and some red, orange, and yellow tissue paper. Invite them to cut the green paper into a rough bush-shape and then to tear or cut flames out of the tissue paper. Glue the flames onto the bush. Twisting or bunching the tops of the “flames” will allow them to stand slightly above the bush. The more tissue paper, the flamier the fire.

**Regrouping**

Give everyone another opportunity to share a story about paying attention to God. After the stories, or right away if there are none, remind everyone to take time for taking a closer look.

**Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for speaking to Moses out of a burning bush. Help us to take a closer look at the things around us so that we can hear you when you speak to us. Amen.
You are Standing on Holy Ground
(Moses and the Burning Bush Lesson 3)

This lesson invites students to consider the ways we recognize the holy in the context of our church services. Most of our communities do not ask that people take their shoes off but we might bow to the altar before sitting or wear “church” clothes or make the sign of the cross. The lesson can also be used to address the norms of your congregation with regards to behaviour or dress. This can be useful if there is dissatisfaction with those norms or with children not meeting (reasonable) expectations.

Please do not think I am taking a position on how kids should dress or how silent they need to be. Sharing any space with any number of other people is always a negotiation and church is no different. I believe that children should be a part of that negotiation which means they need to know why people want decorum at the Communion rail and clean shirts in the pews. If only there was a way to teach this lesson in reverse...

Things to know about this lesson:

• Finger paint is wonderful! The washable kind will not stain clothes or floors (but do wipe it up quickly) or skin and it is really fun to use.
• The finger paint is optional. If it is too messy for you or you don’t want to buy any, there is a perfectly fine alternative provided in the lesson plan.

Materials

• mural paper (kraft paper or white paper)
• pencils, crayons, markers
• (optional) finger paints, one shallow pan/colour, large bowls of water, towels

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

If this is your first lesson (or your students’ first lesson) on Moses and the Burning Bush, see With God’s Help for an introduction to the character and situation of Moses.

If everyone present has heard that introduction, you may want to ask a few questions and refresh everyone’s memory before you move onto the following discussion:

What does the word “holy” mean? (sacred, special, dedicated to God)
Can you think of any holy places? (make sure church is at least mentioned)
How do we behave in holy places? (respectful, thoughtful, we think about God)
Moses found himself in a holy place without even knowing it. Let’s listen to the story.
Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

What was the first thing God told Moses to do? (take off his shoes)
Why did God tell Moses to take off his shoes? (because he was on holy ground)
What kinds of special things are done or used or worn at church? By everyone? By the priest/servers/choir members/etc.?
Which of these things do you really like? Why?
Are there any you don’t like? Why don’t you like them?
Are there other things you would like to do or wear when you are in a holy place like church?
We do things or wear things like that because it’s easy to get distracted. We stop thinking about God and start thinking about what’s for lunch and how much fun we had yesterday and the fight we’re having with our brother or sister and how cold it’s getting. We do things like (use their examples) to help us stay focused and remind us that this is not just regular time but a holy time in a holy place.

Introduce the Activity

Today we are going to make a sign for the church. Everyone needs to take off their shoes and socks!

Holy Ground Foot Prints

Lay out a long piece of paper. Write (or have older students write) “You are Standing on Holy Ground” in large letters. Invite everyone to decorate the sign with footprints, using one the following options.

Option A: Use fingerpaint! Pour the paint into a shallow pan, big enough for one foot. Step in the paint, step on the paper, and step into a bowl of water to clean off the paint. It’s not as messy as it sounds, I promise!

Option B: Everyone traces someone else’s foot. The feet can then be coloured in, either by the print-owner or the foot-tracer.

Regrouping

Ask everyone to put their shoes and socks back on.

Post the sign at the entrance to the church or the Sunday school meeting space and gather around it for your closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the gift of the church. May it always be a holy place where we are reminded of you. Amen.