

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021**  
**Exodus 3:1-12**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word

Holy Spirit, come among us and soften our hearts to the word of God.

Holy Spirit, come among us and reveal to us the heart of God and be a balm to our heart if we need that today.

Holy Spirit, come among us with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

If a friend or colleague or neighbor was to ask you why they should bother about church what would your answer be? Could you give an answer? What would your answer convey to them and do you think it might resonate with them in any way at all?

Most likely your answer will be dependent upon your experience of church so if you think church is boring your answer's probably going to be a pretty dull or you might struggle and start her to try and say something because there's something in there that says you have to have a good answer and you're just waffle something of course on the other hand if church has been beneficial to you may have something positive to say but again I wonder would it resonate with today's culture one analysis of today's culture suggests that people across the age ranges yearn for belonging and they yearn for purpose the yearn for belonging and for purpose so I wonder have you experienced either of those when you've shared in church

I know I have I have I've experienced a depth of belonging that is so very rare in our culture today at one time I was part of a small group of young adults when i was in my 20s at a church in Edinburgh and some of them jill and i are still in contact with now they know the depths of who we are they have journeyed with us through some of the darkest times in life they have encouraged us they have spurred us on and picked us up we've hung out we've had meals together in each other's homes we've had a cuppa at the latest time of night you can imagine we were family and it really was and as a gift so that even though we are in different countries now we still make the effort to book a holiday once a year and go see them and be with them and keep in contact across the year that's the experience of church that I've had so that when church is at its best there is true belonging and it really functions like the best of families but the same writer goes on to say that today's generation not only wants to belong they want purpose indeed they yearn to be part of a community that lives and works for a purpose higher than mere survival its own survival a purpose higher than its own survival yet sadly too often how often does that feature in the church sure we're a place you can belong but we are very focused on our own survival particularly when things seem threatening and many a church lacks a sense of belonging to something greater and maybe that's because we end up making church about us about me about I sadly too few of us have a sense of belonging to something greater something that is worth living for even something that is worth dying for either literally or metaphorically so by now you know that we're working through this new teaching series on our purpose and values and today's value is the value of family we're a family of all sorts of people journeying in community towards wholeness our passage has much to say about this value but before we dig into it it's helpful i think to recall some of the story of Moses he was an Israelite part of the

Israelite nation that grew up in Egypt and became slaves to the Egyptians and his life was a threat because of the command given by pharaoh to suppress the growth of the Israelite nation but his mother saved him and he actually ended up living in pharaoh's household we might say as a prince of Egypt but then as a young man he intervened in an altercation when he helped uh try to help a Jewish slave that was being mistreated and that led to him fleeing Egypt fleeing into the wilderness into Midian and living there as a shepherd for 40 years and that's where we find him in today's passage Moses is out tending his flock on the far side of the wilderness and that's where God meets him God catches his eye with a burning bush a bush that is con not being consumed by the fire and so Moses thinks to himself well that's pretty strange I'm going to go see this yet before he can even take a step God intervenes and says Moses, Moses do not come any closer take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground Moses meets with God this holy God that we were thinking about last week and again we see God keeping that distance because of his holiness so Moses has this personal and life-changing meeting with God which was our value last week if you recall but there's something we need to see in this passage something else as Moses encounters God he receives a calling a calling into something greater something greater than merely personal faith or personal benefit and let's pause and think about that for a moment because as i said already we often make church we often make faith or following Jesus about ourselves how does it benefit me does it meet my needs does it take enough of my boxes what am I getting out of this do I really have the time for this

yet Moses story shows us that when we meet with God he calls us into something bigger something that has both belonging and purpose God goes on to say I'm the God of your father the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt God in meeting with Moses is calling Moses into this people again into this family the family of God and so we should be quite familiar with us by now because I've said it so often in the last couple of weeks God has a heart to have a people of his own and he's going to relate to them now we see as a family with him being the perfect father to them and but in the very next people he reaffirms this he says in the next chapter even he says when you return to Egypt say to pharaoh this is what the lord says Israel is my firstborn son and i told you let my son go so that he may worship me the firstborn son his pride and joy his heir and so God has his heart for our people but he has his heart for our family he will treat them as his children and he calls Moses out of the wilderness out of estrangement out of distance and back into this place of belonging when we meet with God when we meet with God it is meant to lead us to something more than just a personal faith yes God wants you to know forgiveness and he wants you to know peace and he wants you to know hope and he wants you to know life but as we've seen biblical faith is meant to be more than merely me mine and I we're called into something greater we're called into belonging to something greater and that carries over into the new testament we read there see what great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are it's what we are does it is it core to your identity i hope i remember talking to hope about this the idea that we talked about this morning it's a hard concept for a five-year-old to get our head around this idea that as deep as your family roots go you still have a family that goes deeper and for all eternity and Paul carries that on he

says you're no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household members of his family with God as your father we're called into something greater we're called to belong to something greater to something that can never be lost never be taken away from us even after death

have we allowed this to grip us have we allowed it to shape our mind and our heart to shape our living the sense of belonging to the family of God to something greater because when we do church is no longer an event that we turn up to once a week and it's no longer just a club or a loose group of people it's your brother and sister someone you love and it really does become family in church we becomes the best it can be God was calling Moses back into this family he's called us into this family and do we allow God's word to shape our thinking in this way because it sounds a simple lesson something you tell kids till they grow sold enough that they've heard it so many times but do we live it out do we live it out do we see one another as our sisters and brothers in Christ so our family value says we're a family of all sorts of people but it doesn't stop there and it didn't stop there for Moses either God goes on to say i have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt I've heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering so i have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land a land flowing with milk and honey God has his people his family and he now tells Moses he's going to take his children on a journey a journey out of darkness oppression and strife and to a place that is full of joy and life and goodness so when God speaks here of a good and spacious land a land flowing with milk and honey he's simply using the language of the time he's using the language of a shepherd and he does so that he might paint a picture and help his people understand a concept that we're familiar with I'm sure but it's still hard to get our heads around it's spoken of in many ways throughout scripture often referred to as peace or in the Hebrew shalom maybe our best contemporary word would be wholeness, wholeness and shalom has this idea of a wholeness that's both individual but collective it's meant to ripple out across society in the wider world it includes wholeness both physically so that there's no more suffering or death it's meant to affect us emotionally and intellectually no more brokenness in those areas of life it's meant to be part of our spiritual wholeness as well and speaking of shalom across the scriptures this is what God speaks of wholeness and its greatest extent that you can imagine that's the peace that's the wholeness that God wishes to give to his people is this is the wholeness he calls them into that would affect every area of life every area of brokenness and so when Jesus says i've come that they may have life and have it to the full he's not limiting this to forgiveness

his death on the cross was not just so that you can get forgiven that's the tip of the iceberg God's intent through Jesus is yes for you to be forgiven because you need that we're all a bunch of sinners as we thought about last week but that forgiveness is simply an entrance point into something greater a greater destiny a greater future God intends for his people to know this shalom his peace his perfection his wholeness and so that's why our family value says we're a family of all sorts of people journeying in community towards wholeness as a family we're on a journey and we do it in community because we need one another but we're journeying towards somewhere we're not journeying

aimlessly we're journeying towards life in all its fullness as part of the kingdom of God into that new heaven and new earth that will one day come

now at this point I can imagine that there's either two objections or struggles with this first of all you might think this sounds kind of selfish again Scott this me mine and i thing maybe it's too earthly minded maybe it's sinful maybe I feel I'm a bad person that i want this but then also remember please all I've done is quote scripture so God wants this for you more than you want it God wants this for you more than you want it he is a good God he came to save that you might have life, life in all its fullness life and all its wholeness but i suspect the other struggle that will come to mind as i say this is a struggle that every one of us faces from time to time and we are facing it even again today with the news that I've had to share because you hear this chat about a God a God who yearns for a people of his own a family of his own that he came to die that they might have life in all his fullness and yet this world is still so broken and it's just getting worse isn't it you know jill and i were in for our 20-week scan the other week and when the doctor found out i was a minister lead came off is about all i can say because suddenly we faced with all these questions about these very issues it's where he went to second time we saw him so maybe as i share God's heart his heart to bring us on a journey to wholeness you struggle with that because maybe in your life or in the life of someone you love all you see is brokenness and the more you see of it the more brokenness comes about because then it ends up breaking your heart and maybe even ends up breaking your faith

and friends there's no silver bullet to that there's no answer that fully resolves the pain

in some ways i believe there shouldn't be because when we try to have an answer the answer it probably just minimizes the dark and difficult realities we face

yet know this God is not unaware nor is he unaffected in the verses i quoted earlier God said i am concerned about their suffering now to you and me concerned probably sounds pretty cold distant about as caring as a politician pick the one you'd most want to fill in the gap there but that's a fault of our English because the Hebrew word that's translated here concerned it involves the idea of knowing of knowing with certainty of knowing with intimate knowledge even knowing with experience so we could even paraphrase God as saying I have experienced their suffering i have experienced their suffering just as a parent may experience a genuine degree of suffering as they see their child struggling so too does God yet God sees all suffering so the hardship that you and I know in our lives and what we feel as we watch a loved one struggle these are multiplied a billion-fold time a billion-fold for God who has experienced the suffering of every life of every moment of brokenness in this world at least from the beginning of time but as an eternal God maybe he's always experienced it

and a day and a year can seem a long time in our lives what's eternity like carrying all that suffering

God is not unaffected friends and now of the overflow of his love for you and me in this broken world he desires for all of us to belong to his family and then journey towards his peace his new kingdom the new heaven and earth that we might know life in all its fullness

there's much more that can be said on this the tensions of the now and the not yet the tensions of waiting but this is God's heart for us he calls us into family and he calls us on a journey to wholeness but he also does something quite strange with Moses he says to Moses so now go I'm sending you to pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt God has this people his family and his plans and purposes for them and yet for some unfathomable reason God wants to involve Moses this guy who messed up he messed up so bad he had to flee when he was younger and yet God still wants him to be involved i think he does it so as to rewrite Moses story so that the the future that Moses has is different from what he has had because God is calling him into something bigger into family towards wholeness into a new story by being involved and Moses responds not only this one time in verses 11 and 12 if you go on and read he responds four more times to God saying God who am I mean come on God you might be God you may have all wisdom but this just seems crazy why be no way but God says i will be with you and he later provides Aaron and others to journey with him towards these purposes so brothers and sisters God has called you into his family he has called you towards wholeness and he is calling you to be involved that the future story of this place the future story of an individual's life the future story of our community might be different you're part of a bigger story you know I'm I'm journeying with someone who came to faith about a year or so ago and it's a real privilege to journey with this individual and I'm getting to know this individual story and there are hard parts to the story but i believe that God has got better in front of her than what she's known that there will be joy again there will be peace and purpose because God is calling us all into that and he's calling us to be involved but maybe as you hear that you're thinking uh that sounds a bit scary i couldn't do that i can't do what you do Scott I can't do what Jean or Ann did today well maybe you've got a different role to play you will have I'm sure and you need to know that God will be with you as well his grace and power will be with you to further what you might do in your life to help us be a place of family to help us be involved in the purposes of God there will be others of us however who need to drop the excuses just like Moses had to because God calls us all to be involved for the sake of others for the sake of his purposes for the sake of his family because if this family value is to be realized more fully we need everyone brothers and sisters we need everyone to play their part and if we do then maybe maybe when someone says to you why should i bother about church your answer certainly won't be dull and you might still stumble and stutter a little but what you say won't be from a place of trying to come up with the best answer possible you'll just speak from experience and that might be captivating to them because you'll be speaking of something greater I've been called into something greater i've been called into the family of God where you belong and into a purpose that is about more than mere survival it's about inviting encouraging and enable people of all ages to encounter and follow Jesus Christ such that their lives change for the better and they too journey with us as a family as a community towards that wholeness and peace

which he promises and which we will experience one day when His kingdom comes in all its fullness and we share in that new heaven and new earth

I pray it may be so, Amen