

Standing on Holy Ground

June 11, 2006

(Trinity Sunday - Year B)

Exodus 3: 1-6

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Last summer, the women's team from Northwestern University won the national championship in lacrosse.

As a result, these young women were invited to the White House to meet President Bush for the traditional congratulatory visit.

To memorialize the occasion, the girls had their team photograph taken with George Bush.

However, when the picture of the Northwestern women's lacrosse team was published in the news magazines, the picture caused a huge stir across America.

You see, most of the girls wore summer skirts and tops, but some of the girls wore flip flop sandals.

Now, flip flop sandals have become quite popular in recent years.

But, many Americans thought that it was improper to wear flip flops to the White House to meet the leader of the Free World.

In the reading from the Book of Exodus, Moses is tending sheep at the mountain of God, also called Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai.

The angel of the Lord appears to him in a flame of fire out of a bush, but the bush is not burned up.

God calls to Moses out of the burning bush,

"Moses, Moses!"

And Moses replies:

"Here I am."

Then God says:

"Come no closer!

Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

From the biblical account in Exodus, we do not know if Moses' sandals were flip flops or Birkenstocks.

But, Moses was told to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground.

Of course, it is debatable whether visiting the White House means that you are standing on holy ground.

But, when you are standing on the mountain of God,
When God has spoken to you out of a burning bush,
Then, you know to take off your sandals because you *are* standing on holy ground.

You will sometimes hear folks say that the Episcopal Church is a liturgical and sacramental church.

When we say that the Episcopal Church is a sacramental church,
What we are saying is that we Episcopalians believe that things and places matter.

In the Episcopal Church, size might not matter so much,
But, Mt. Sinai and the White House and burning bushes and flip flops
DO matter.

Bread and wine and water and money DO matter.

For, there *are* such things as holy time and holy ground.

The Episcopal Church is a sacramental church because times and places
and things point us to God,

Times and places point us to the mystery of the holy and undivided
Trinity.

And, in awe and wonder, we take off our sandals because we know,
deep in our gut, that we are standing on holy ground.

Each of us, I bet, have places which, in our individual lives, are holy
ground for us.

For me, one of those places is Camp Allen.

Camp Allen is the Episcopal camp and conference center for the Diocese
of Texas, located near Navasota.

Several significant events have happened in my life there:

On the patio at Camp Allen, I met my wife, Susan, nearly 20 years ago.

At the lake at Camp Allen, I had a burning bush moment, where I believe that God called me to the priesthood.

In the conference center at Camp Allen, I was approved to go to seminary.

When I go to Camp Allen now,
When I see the patio, the lake, the conference center,
I am reminded of the times when I have had a significant encounter,
I recognize that I am standing on holy ground,
And, in my mind, I take off my sandals and give thanks to God.
I give thanks to God that, for God, times and places DO matter and are made holy.

Times and places are made holy because of whom we meet there and what has happened there.

For the flip flop wearing women's lacrosse team from Northwestern University, they met the President of the United States and celebrated a national championship.

Thus, for them, the White House is holy ground.

For Moses, he met God and was called to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt.

Thus, for Moses, the base of Mt. Sinai where the bush burned is holy ground.

For me, I met my wife Susan on the patio at Camp Allen, which started a life long relationship.

Thus, for me, Camp Allen is holy ground.

Each of us have holy times and holy places in our lives.

At what times in your life have you experienced a holy time?

Maybe it is the day your child was born.

Or when you began sobriety.

Or when you felt God's presence while taking care of someone who was dying.

And, where is holy ground for you?
Maybe it is a cherished house.
Or the beach.
Or maybe it is St. Alban's.

I invite you to think about the times and places that have been made holy
for you.

Then, give thanks and honor those times and places by taking off your
sandals and realizing that you have stood on holy ground at the
base of the mountain of God.

We celebrate the Holy Eucharist here at St. Alban's each and every
Sunday.

The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word, "eucharista" which
means, "thanksgiving."

Thus, each week at St. Alban's, we celebrate "The Holy Thanksgiving."
And, in the Eucharistic Prayer, which we call the Great Thanksgiving,
we pray:

It is a good and right and a joyful thing, that we should *at all times and
all places* give thanks to you, Father Almighty.

We give thanks to God each and every Sunday.

In all times and in all places,

We give thanks that God has been present in the holy times and holy
places of our lives.

We give thanks to God that we are standing on holy ground.

It is my hope that whether you are a long-time member of St. Alban's,
Or if you have been at St. Alban's for a short while,
Or if this is your first time to ever worship here,
That you will meet God in *this time* and in *this place*.

But, I also hope that you will look for the presence of God in times and
places outside of this hour on Sunday morning, outside of this
inspiring building.

I hope that you will look for God's presence in the people who can't pay
their light bill,

In homes and office buildings and camps and schools,
In our families, friends and neighbors, and those who are alone.

For, we are a sacramental church.

We believe that the one and undivided Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Meets us in burning bushes,

Meets us in bread and wine,

Meets us in the sick, the friendless and the needy.

At this celebration of the Holy Eucharist, this Holy Thanksgiving,
Give thanks to God for the holy times and holy places that *you* have
experienced.

And, give thanks to God that on Sunday, June 11, at St. Alban's
Episcopal Church,

God will meet you once again.

So, take off your flip flops.

For we are standing on holy ground.

AMEN.

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