

SERMON 14 Pentecost – 30 August 2026

JESUS PEOPLE NEVER STOP GROWING –

Let's look at these themes of CURIOSITY, CALL, and COMMITMENT in our readings and in our lives today.

"If you want to become a disciple of Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him." Matthew 16.24–25.

Let's begin with the curiosity of Moses and the burning bush.

Moses' **CURIOSITY**, led him to a life-long journey following God's commandments.

To hear a **CALL** from God is to **RESPOND**, leading to a **COMMITMENT** to follow God's guidance.

STAGE 1 – THE CALL - What do the flames mean?

If we sense that God is calling us, we are on holy ground. Fire, a symbol for the Holy Spirit appears many times in the Bible: as tongues of flame over the disciple's heads at Pentecost, in the pillar of fire that led the Hebrews through the wilderness, and no doubt gave them warmth at night.

In John the Baptist's words; *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3.11)*

or in Jesus's words, *"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12.49).*

Jesus also said; *"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light." (Luke 8.16)*

I remember Father Martin Davies would tell stories of the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Syria.

This one still fascinates me: "Abba Lot who went to see Abba Joseph and said to him: 'Abba, as much as I'm able, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace, and as much as I'm able, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?' Then his elder, Abba Joseph stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him: 'If you want, you can become all flame.'" (*Abba Joseph of Panephrisis 7*)

It's a dramatic scene. Abba Lot asked his senior Abba what more he can do in following a Christian life. Abba Joseph answers with a demonstration of divine light and he tells him that if it is his desire, he will become 'all flame'. *St. Catherine of Siena once wrote; "Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."*

STAGE 2 – THE RESPONSE – how should we respond?

Have you ever been curious enough to ask why God has called you to follow Him?

I seem to ask this question every day.

We have been shown the flame in the Scriptures, now Moses, who has seen the burning bush, makes a response, and we begin to think about our own response to God's call.

Moses simply says; "Here I am."

Now it's your turn . . . If we believe God has called us here today for a deeper purpose than we can understand, will we say; "Here I am."?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning once wrote:

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes— The rest sit round it and pluck
blackberries . . . "*

While God doesn't usually catch our attention through combusting bushes, his presence is just as palpable for those who have eyes to see.

As for the rest of us, the bush may be burning, but we don't notice. God may be speaking, but we don't hear.

All we do is ignore the flames and pick the blackberries.

Would we recognise that we are on holy ground, or would we, like Moses, try to hide our faces in fear.

What may stop us . . . What excuses – do we come up with?

What do we find hard to leave behind? What do we cling to? Our fears can be endless.

Losing our processions, our privacy, our comfortable habits, family, the burdens that we came here with.

Moses said - *I can't talk, I never know the right words to say – I'm nobody special, how can I possibly do this?*

What if no one believes God spoke to me? I am too old, I'm too young, I'm too embarrassed! God.

– please don't tell me to do anything!

If that is our response, God covers it. We will be told; *"I will give you the words to say – I will be with you."*

God says – My name is "I Am who I Am", I will send someone to help you."

Who will help us? This is the wonderful mystery . . . the Holy Spirit is here for us today.

Once we acknowledge the call, we can say; **“HERE I AM”**.

God called “Moses, Moses!” and waits for our response, just as he did for Moses.

Are we today open to saying to God’s Holy Spirit; “Here am I”?

God’s call may come at any age, when we least expect it, and often when we are not looking for it. Samuel’s call was when he was very young but Moses’ call came when he was almost 80 – so that covers every age.

When we finally stop arguing with God, and say “Here am I” we learn about the **third stage - commitment**.

STAGE 3 – Making sense of the call to COMMITMENT

Psalm 105 says; *“Let those that seek the Lord be joyful in heart.*

4 Seek the Lord and his strength: O seek his face continually.

5 Call to mind what wonders he has done.”

So, finally Moses accepts God’s call and starts on the road to Egypt. Let me tell you a story about this spiritual road we travel on.

A woman called Irene was acknowledged for 40 years of service to GFS at her church. They all marvelled that she had completed so many years of service, first, through the dark days of the early death of her husband Ron, then the death of her parents, then on through the difficulties of 15 years of her daughter’s battle with MS. Through it all she served the GFS empowering girls and young women aged 5 to 25, encouraging them to develop their full potential. As she thanked those gathered, her few words made sense of those 40 years.

Only 9 courageous words – “I believe that God called me to do this.”

Irene’s sense of call made it all right for her.

The call strengthened her when she was without strength.

The call gave meaning and direction when her world was falling apart.

The call kept her going long after all the others would have given up.

Is “the ideology of our time is that we can live an ‘uncalled life’, one not referred to by any purpose beyond one’s self”

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain.” *Jn 24.12*

Peter – making sense of suffering

In the Gospel, the word “Satan,” was not to insinuate that Peter dressed in red, had horns, or sported a pointy tail. However, in this context, it means being an adversary to God’s will. Jesus had just proclaimed God’s will and

purpose for his life, and Peter's interjection went against that, so Jesus rebuked him sharply.

Harsh and out of character for Jesus, especially when addressing Peter, one of His most devout disciples. Why did Jesus say this? Jesus had begun to explain to his disciples — who now knew he was the expected Messiah — that he was going to be crucified, which is not what they were expecting to happen.

Peter was protesting because he didn't want that to be how the story ends. So, there was an inner struggle Peter had with his own Jewish understanding and the reality of what Jesus was actually doing. In short, he didn't get it.

Jesus was saying that Peter was acting like Satan would. Peter still had this denial problem when Jesus was led off to be crucified. He still didn't get it when the crucifixion was underway.

Are we, like the Velveteen Rabbit in this children's story in need of a wise person, the Skin Horse, help us be unafraid of the potential consequences?

"What is REAL?" asked the Velveteen Rabbit. ...

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand..."

...and once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

(Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, 1922, adapted download from <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html> <https://openicon.church/sermons/called-or-uncalled-that-is-the-question/>

PRAYER:

While we are still in the season of Pentecost, let us pray 'come Holy Spirit' fill us with the power, passion and purity of your presence in our lives and help us do the work you have purposed us to do, not making excuses, or running away.

Teach us, good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,

to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.
Loyola

St Ignatius of

Mandy Wheatley