

Sign of the times?

It seems somehow appropriate that in the week when the governments Covid19 lockdown enables, from yesterday, Garden Centres to re-open providing they adhere to the social distancing requirements, that today's Old Testament reading is from Exodus 3 and tells of Moses's encounter with God through the Burning Bush on Mount Horeb.

Having escaped from Egypt where he was in all sorts of trouble, Moses had found a new life and had settled down with a new family, a wife, and was tending flocks on the mountainside for his father-in-law who was the local Priest. Couldn't get much better even if he was no longer Egyptian Royal family. Life had been full of unwanted, unplanned changes and yet things seemed to have worked out even if many of the luxuries he'd lived with all his life were no longer available. Then he goes up the mountain, sees the burning bush and his curiosity (well who wouldn't be curious?) led him to a life-changing encounter he could never have imagined. Imagine, he turns a corner and there on display is the power of God! Wow.

It's fair to say that any of us who go to a garden centre or park or the like this week with expectation of a pleasant interlude, denied for the last 8 weeks, certainly won't expect to see a burning bush, but we will be surrounded by God and all his works in the plants, trees, shrubs, seeds, flowers and other living things we would expect to see. But I wonder if we have ever thought of a Garden Centre as somewhere we meet God?

We're surrounded by him and his works all the time, but have we ever thought of our gardens? Parks? Countryside? Towns? villages? and cities? as places God is really present?

It's too easy to think of places of worship or sites of religious significance as the obvious places we might expect to be in His presence – personally I have that sense whenever I go to St Peters on the Wall at Bradwell, which has a timeless quietness about it – but this is limiting our thinking and use of our senses.

In a way, just like Moses, we've been rudely disconnected from the life we had up till the beginning of this year. Like him, we had no clear picture what life would be like when we could stop and take stock of the new situation we find ourselves in. Like him, many things we've taken for granted now have to be re-assessed. Things that were important before may not be so much or even relevant now. People we knew before may have changed out of all recognition,

or, worse still, not have survived these changing times. One thing we do also have in common with Moses in his encounter with God, is that He still knows us all better than we know ourselves. He knows our hopes and dreams, our fears, our health, our illness and he cares for us just as he did for the Israelites in Moses day. We know this, not just because we've read the Old Testament, but because Jesus, His son, brought us the Good News and the New Covenant. Today's New Testament reading in Mark 12 refers back to Moses's encounter with the burning bush and Jesus reiterates to the scribes who were questioning him about how resurrection works given the Jewish law, that God said to Moses that He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob – we are all their descendants and thus he is a God of the living.

So whatever changes are coming along, we should be glad that we are in God's care and should appreciate his surrounding us with his love – whether it's in our home, garden, the local area, or a garden centre where his bounty is on display for us to admire, and perhaps to buy and take home that we can give back some loving care to his creation.

We live in the New Covenant and that is a two-way contract that as we remain faithful to Him, his power and love will be with us and around us. We only need to see it whether it is in a burning bush.