

**Exodus 3:1-12**  
**The Challenges of 2022**

*Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."*

*4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.*

*7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 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—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

*11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

*12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."*

New challenges? What new challenges will 2022 bring? Maybe we don't want new challenges; maybe we want a quiet life where everything is settled, calm and peaceful; things are predictable and straightforward. We've had too many new challenges in the last 2 years and we simply want a year in which everything goes according to plan! I can well understand that plea for a quiet life; I would echo it, in some ways. But I also know that life's not like that, most of the time; I suspect there will be new challenges for us in 2022, questions that we've not been asked before, experiences that are new to us; there will be challenges for us as individuals, as church, as a community, world-wide challenges, and we will need to face up to these challenges in the best way that we can. We would hope to face up to these challenges with faith in our hearts, would we not?

Moses was 80. The time for new challenges in his life was surely past. He had had his grand life in Egypt, as the prince in Pharaoh's palace and that had gone sour. Now he was content, married with family, living out his days as a shepherd for his father-in-law. God had forgotten him and left him alone for the last 40 years since he had messed everything up. At least, that was how he saw it! Until one day when he was out with the sheep and he saw a bush on fire – there was nothing surprising about the fire; that happened all the time in the desert, with the heat, but when he looked closely, the bush was on fire, but not burning, not turning black.

He went over to have a closer look and God spoke to him. It was an encounter that was to change his life all over again.

God spoke with Moses. The first part of that conversation would have been a comfort and reassurance to Moses – God is going to save His people, just as He promised before. The people are slaves in Egypt, suffering in appalling ways; they have been praying for years to be set free and God, now, once more, promises that He will rescue them, save them, set them free and give them a new place to stay, a land full of good things, *“flowing with milk and honey”*. So far, so good; but Moses is miles away from Egypt! The second part of the conversation is much more troubling for Moses: *“You are to go to lead them on this new journey!” “I am sending you...” (3:10)* Wow! Did Moses see that coming? A new challenge at his age? He would be delighted that God was going to rescue His people from slavery, but he obviously was not delighted about the leadership call.

He raised 5 objections: *“I’m not the person you need; I’m not fit!” “I don’t know things that I would need to know; what is Your name?” “They won’t believe me!” “I can’t speak in public!” “Send someone else!”* What? Me? To say he was reluctant would be to put it mildly. He looked at himself and said, *“I can’t so I won’t!” “Who am I, that I should (do this)?... “What is God’s name?... “What if they don’t believe me?... “I can’t speak!”... “send someone else!”* By the end, you sense God’s frustration. God is calling Moses because in His eyes, Moses is the ideal candidate for the job, but all that Moses sees is his inadequacies. *“I can’t so I won’t.”* Things happen that make us walk this road too. This seems to be our standard post-Covid reaction; we’ve got out of the habit of volunteering; we’ve lost our confidence; we’ve got used to sitting back; so we say *“I can’t; I won’t.”* Our circumstances just make us feel quite weak and helpless; we make mistakes that leave us thinking that faith is just a struggle; we say *“I can’t so I won’t”* and we don’t!

God answers all of Moses’ objections. He’s given the information that he needs – *“I am who I am” (3:14)* is God’s name; he’s given a staff by which to do some miracles to help people believe; he’s given his brother, Aaron to go with him and to speak. But most of all and first of all, God makes Moses a promise: *“I will be with you.” (3:12)* God will go with Moses everywhere he goes; God will help him and guide him; God will give him the words to say; God will help him in the choices that he makes; God will provide to Moses everything that he needs. *“I will be with you.”* That’s designed to change Moses’ whole way of thinking: *“I can’t, so I won’t”* becomes *“I can’t, but God can, therefore I will.”* This is an act of faith: Moses believes God’s promise; he trusts God’s promise and he depend on God’s help, albeit reluctantly. The rest, as they say, is history, as Moses leads the people out of Egypt and on to the border of the Promised Land.

*“I will be with you.”* That is the constant and consistent promise that God makes all the way through the Bible; He makes it to Moses; He makes it again and again to individuals and to the community as a whole; even in the darkest days, God is there with His people. Jesus makes the same promise to His friends at the end of the gospels, a promise He kept when the Spirit came. That same promise is for us, and it is by the same Spirit that Jesus is with us always and

everywhere. God's constant and consistent promise to be with us brings comfort and reassurance, gives us courage, and inspires faith in our hearts. "I can't but God can, therefore I will." That is an act of faith for us, even if we make it reluctantly. "I can't but God can, therefore I will." When we get to that point, we can rise to meet the challenges faith and life presents.

One of the hardest things about standing at the start of 2022 is the sense of uncertainty that we all feel about the future. We all have hopes and aspirations that 2022 will be better than 2021, but we can't be sure that it will. We hope that life will be better, that people will be kinder to each other, that Covid will either go away or at least be much more manageable, and that we will be able to live freer, more relaxed lives. As Church, we are facing some of that uncertainty for the future; we hope that some of that uncertainty will become clearer, if not yet more settled in 2022, as we try to rebuild the life of the congregation in ways that seem fit for the future. That uncertainty continues to produce in us feelings of discontent and inadequacy – "I can't..." but what comes next?

There is a choice. "I can't..." – when we keep looking at ourselves and our inadequacy then what comes next is "I can't, so I won't". That's one option. The other option starts in the same place: "I can't..." but when we look at God's promise – "*I will be with you*" – that promise inspires us to trust God. "I can't, but God can, therefore I will." Can we say that? Can we get to that place? We still see our own inadequacies and weaknesses; we are still aware of the mistakes we've made and the mess that we've made of things; but now we also see something else – we see God's grace, God's constant and consistent grace, loving and supporting us, comforting and reassuring us, guiding us and giving us courage. So we would rise to meet the challenges in that spirit, trusting God, walking in the Lord's ways, serving Him with heart and soul. The challenges are still there; the uncertainties are still there, but we trust God; Jesus promises to be with us; His Spirit lives in us. "I can't but God can, therefore I will."