

**Sermon 8 March 2011**  
**Shrove Tuesday: Labyrinth Reflection**  
**Exodus 3:1–15**

I first waked the Labyrinth at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and unexpectedly, I was blown away. I don't know how long it took, but I faced the pain of the world, my own pain, and in the centre, anger and pain... and holy ground. An angel knelt beside me... I prayed. Walking out, two people met me as I left the path. We walked up to a huge font where I dipped my fingers. And the organ played...

It hasn't always been like that, walking the Labyrinth. Sometimes it's pretty ordinary. But I find it a useful tool, a walking prayer. And Nikolai and I often walk the Labyrinth at St Mark's; especially around New Year. And now — there is one here — at Holy Covenant.

We are standing on holy ground. Wherever we are, we are standing on holy ground. Wherever we are, if we look, if we are open; wherever we are, there is the possibility of encountering God. 'Take off your shoes, you are standing on holy ground'.

Moses noticed. He sensed it; he saw the power. He heard his name, Moses, and replied 'Here I am'. He has spent a long time in the wilderness as a shepherd. Lots of time for quiet and reflection after fleeing his birthplace after murdering an Egyptian (very topical, that part of the world).

Now, perhaps, he is ready to return. God takes the initiative. The God of his ancestors, of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Rachel; his birth people. The God of the Covenant, who sees his people's pain, and hears their cries. The God who plans to deliver them and give them a land flowing with milk and honey; a fertile home.

The God whose name is 'I am'.

Moses is commissioned to be God's person, to bring freedom to God's people. And God's promise is 'I will be with you'.

We are standing on holy ground.

Today, this same God, the God of Moses, and Miriam; the God of Jesus is here.

We dedicate this Labyrinth and Garden in memory of Marjorie and Paul Free, long-time parishioners of this place; faith travellers who have gone before us.

This Labyrinth is a metaphor for this journey. Our goal is the centre — God if you like; the Divine, the ground of our being. It's both an internal and external path. We, like Moses, turn aside and notice. We engage. We walk towards that Christ light. Sometimes the path twists and turns but always we move on. Sometimes we seem far away, sometimes we turn and seem to retrace our steps. But finally, we come to the centre. Here we can rest, be nourished, refreshed; be challenged, seek wisdom. Then, when we are ready, and only when we are ready, we turn and begin the journey out, back to the world. We may make this journey each day, in prayer or meditation, or several times a day, surprised by fire, the burning bush, presence and transfiguration.

We may make this journey each week in the Eucharist, to the centre, empty-handed to receive hospitality, grace, the body and blood of Christ.

Or like Moses, such clarity might be a rare thing, but once seen, never forgotten.

This little Labyrinth is just a tool, a metaphor, a physical journey, an opportunity to focus on God, on Christ, our centre; to let go and playfully, prayerfully let the journey unfold.

It is not for everyone, and often it seems pretty ordinary. That bush, on another day, may have been passed without notice. But for now and whenever you like, sit, breathe, take in the beauty of this garden.

‘Let God be God in you’ wherever you are at. You are standing on holy ground.

Others are on the journey too. You will meet them coming and going. We are in this together and God is with us.

I conclude with a story from heaven:

God and the archangel Michael were in one of the anterooms of heaven. In a continuous torrent all the prayers, oral and sung, of mankind were ascending from earth. It was a babble of sound in all tongues, and on all sides of every question; hurricane of passionate demands; winds of speech whining with wheedling words, gusts of insistent requests for special favours. Overwhelmed with it all, Michael said to God, ‘If you will allow me, Sire, I would say that you made a great mistake when you let humans learn to talk. If they were not able to talk, it would be possible then for you to know what they were really praying for’. And God said, ‘I do not listen to their words. I listen only to their lives’. God closed the window and opened the door, and all the tempest of words stopped. Instead, from the earth, came up clearly another prayer. Most of it was distressing, but a weak, wavering voice did arise also from the people’s lives to heaven: ‘Dear God, if it does not cost us too much, we sometimes would like to be just and courageous and kind. Amen.’

For the only prayer of mine that rises above the roof is the prayer of what I am. I bring my life before you, God.