

Proper 17, Year A  
Exodus 3: 1-15  
August 31, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, California

Holy Ground  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

All week long, a song has been playing in my head. Perhaps you know it. It's a simple song, a song often sung at church camps. It goes like this:

This is holy ground  
We're standing on holy ground  
For the Lord is present and where He is, is holy  
This is holy ground  
We're standing on holy ground  
For the Lord is present and where he is, is holy.

All week long, I've been wondering just what makes ground holy. I've been picturing places I know are holy ground—a rocky beach on the north shore of Lake Superior, sunset on the high desert west of Sante Fe, a redwood grove on highway 128 in the dappled morning light. I suppose we all have such pictures in our mind, pictures of places that we know beyond a shadow of a doubt are holy.

But I think if we stick to notions of the holy grounded, quite literally, in the world of nature, we miss a crucial part of holy ground. For isn't holy ground really a place where we encounter the presence of God or evidence of God's handiwork? A wise person once said, "Holy ground isn't a special piece of dirt but the place of God's presence." God's presence—that's what makes ground holy.

I think that's what Moses discovered while he was hard at work, shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. Suddenly, something catches Moses' eye. He turns and sees a bush burning but not consumed. And then he hears a voice say, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Moses hadn't moved. He was still standing in the same place. What had changed was that Moses discovered the presence of God. Moses found himself on holy ground.

What makes that ground Moses is standing on holy? It's not the rocky soil or the scrubby trees or the great view of the Mountain of God; it's God's presence there with Moses in his work.

Tomorrow is Labor Day. A holy ground kind of a day. A day when we recognize that the work we do—both paid and unpaid—and the work we witness is holy ground.

Tomorrow is Labor Day. A day created to celebrate workers and the work they do. A day set aside to honor workers wherever they may be—teachers grading papers and planning lessons; Cal-trans workers holding a sign "slow" or "stop"; firefighters scrambling down Yerba Buena Island; vineyard workers harvesting grapes; the checker at the grocery line;

the person in the toll-booth; you and I cleaning bathrooms or cooking dinner or tying shoelaces; and shepherds like Moses tending their flocks.

Let us on this Labor Sunday take time to give witness to the holy ground of work. Take a moment to quiet yourselves in the presence of God. Plant your feet firmly on the floor. Shut your eyes. Let your breath come in and out. Pay attention to your breath. Bring to mind the work you have done in the week just past and the work you have witnessed others do. Hold that work tenderly. View it with the reverence the holy demands. Honor the worker and the work. As you turn back to this moment, give thanks to God for the Holy Ground of work that is love made visible. Amen.