Canticle of Burning\*

*Exodus 3: 1-15*

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” 4When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.   
7Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” 11But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 12God said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” 13But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” God said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” 15God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,  
and this my title for all generations.  
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Seven bullets in the back.   
For breaking up a fight.   
Maybe the wrong place at the wrong time,   
but now he’s fighting for his life.

His kids—who aren’t much younger than my three—  
wide-eyed from the back seat watched the scene.   
The pop, pop, pop of the machine   
which keeps robbing them of their dreams.

The man’s sister said it well,   
“I have not cried, but I’m mad as hell.   
For this is not the first time   
this tragedy has transpired.

These acts of brutality   
have plagued my people and family,   
for a long, long time, in a society   
which leaves us oh so tired.

So, I don’t need your pity or your apology.   
It is change that we truly need.   
To burn down the system   
where none of us can breathe.

**My heart shall sing of the day you bring  
Let the fires of your justice burn  
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near  
and the world is about to turn  
----------------------------------------**

Now turn to the story.   
About the revealing of God’s glory.   
On a little mountain called Horeb   
which means “to glow.”

Moses fleeing for his life,

got a new job and found a wife

in a far-away place

where no one would ever know.

You see, Moses was once   
a prince of Pharaoh’s estate,

until one day he sealed his fate,

by killing an officer of the state.

And now he wanders all alone,   
making peace with his new home,   
until a fiery bush speaks

and challenges everything he’s ever known.

The bush calls out: “Moses, Moses.”

Oh Moses, it is me,   
the God of your ancestry.

I have heard the cries of my people   
for far too long.

So buckle in and hold on tight,

you will have my presence, strength and might   
to lead my people out of plight   
toward a new solution.

Take off your shoes and take a stand,   
for on this holy, sacred land,   
I’m calling you to be the hand   
of my revolution.

But Moses says, “Whoa, hold on, how can this be?   
You’re just a shrub talking to me.   
Either it is you or it is me   
that is crazy.   
Let’s say I agree to your command,   
I go back to the pyramids and the sand,   
and tell your people here I stand sent   
from a voice who spoke to me.   
  
I mean, I appreciate the push,   
but no offense, you’re just a bush…  
and by the way, who should I tell them it is   
who sent me?!”

God says: Oh Moses, Moses tell them this:

their God has heard their stricken cries.

I’m sick of the brutality and lies.

And a bright light is shining in the darkness.

I am the Spirit who sets all free,

and I will be who I will be;

and I AM bigger than anything

you can imagine.

Like water forms to any mold.

I am the wind you cannot hold.

I am a fire which burns bold

against all oppression.

So Moses, Moses the time has past,

to let my people go at last.

Now help me turn this world in a fast

new direction.

**My heart shall sing of the day you bring  
Let the fires of your justice burn  
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near  
and the world is about to turn**

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Now let’s recap:   
Verse one. A man shot in the back whose greatest crime was being Black. A son, a brother, a father, a human being.

Verse two: Moses in a foreign land, called out by the Great I AM, to lead the people in a rebellion unlike one we’ve ever seen.

But here we are at verse three.   
It has to do with you and me.   
And in all sincerity,   
here is my question:   
  
how can we go on even one more day,   
pretending there’s another way   
than the price we’ll have to pay   
for our conviction?

This is so much bigger than our view,

this is about co-creating something new,

as the people of God who have been   
called and inspired.

There will be sorrow,   
there may be loss,   
but we’ll bear the weight   
and carry the cross,   
we’ll be afraid, broken down   
and oh so tired.

But as history will attest,   
our children will say we did our best,   
and we will have given our all against   
this fierce oppressor.

With faith we’ll march,   
our feet will pound,   
the streets of holy, sacred ground,   
where fresh hope can be found   
through our resilience.

And by God’s grace we’ll have no choice,   
but to exercise this voice,   
until we’re all burning in the light   
of love’s persistence.

God has heard their stricken cries.   
Despises brutality and lies.   
And a bright light is shining in the darkness.

It is the Spirit who sets all free,   
and she will be who she will be;   
and I AM is bigger than anything we can imagine.

Like water forms to any mold.   
Like the wind we cannot hold.   
A great fire which burns bold   
against all oppression.

So Trinity, the time has past,   
to let God’s people go at last.

And help turn this world in a fast   
new direction.

**My heart shall sing of the day you bring  
Let the fires of your justice burn  
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near  
and the world is about to turn**

\*The refrain for this sermon song was based on the hymn “The Canticle of Turning.”