

August 30, Ordinary 22A (Exodus 3:1–15)

For anger to fuel hope, it needs to be a fire that burns but doesn't consume.

by [Melissa Earley](#) in the [August 2026](#) issue
Published on August 24, 2026

I fell in love with a strawberry. I don't know how else to describe it. I was at a retreat in the Colorado Rockies with six other women. We were sitting in camp chairs that wobbled on uneven ground, wearing hats to protect our eyes from the sun, and we could hear a tributary of the Arkansas River in the background. Writer and former CENTURY editor Amy Frykholm was leading this portion of the retreat, and she gave us each a strawberry and invited us to behold it. She read from her book *Journey to the Wild Heart*, "Beholding is the practice of being in the presence of something or someone and contemplating it, allowing your own reality to be penetrated by the reality of this other."

At first, I felt a little silly. It was just a strawberry. I've seen thousands of strawberries. I knew what a strawberry was. But as I took time to consider it, to look at it, to experience it, allowing its reality to penetrate my own, I noticed so much. It was surprisingly hairy. The leaves were fuzzy, and each seed had a miniature whisker. Each seed was nestled in a tiny divot, and the seeds were in tidy rows, as if carefully placed by an elf with tweezers. I smelled the strawberry. I tenderly licked the strawberry. But I couldn't bring myself to actually take a bite. When the exercise was over, I kept her for a day, then the next morning I released her into the river.

I don't think of myself as a woo-woo person, but something happens when we turn and notice, really notice. We discover we are on holy ground.

Moses catches a glimpse of something that surprises him. As he is counting sheep or counting days until this stint is over, something flickers in the corner of his eye and he turns to look at it. He overcomes the resistance we all carry to exercising true attention. Frykholm writes,

What in the world is there to be afraid of? It's just an orange [or in my case a strawberry]. It's just time. And yet we are afraid, and the reason is simple: to enter into relation, a part of us that is very fierce and very in control and very sure of everything has to step aside and soften. This encounter involves a tiny act of kenosis—self-surrendering love—and the ego isn't inclined in this way.

If it's scary to contemplate a strawberry, how much more terrifying is it to contemplate the suffering of another person?

God contemplated the people's suffering first. "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt," says God. God has beheld God's people and let their suffering pierce God's own self. God invites Moses to do the same.

To be fair, Moses has seen the suffering. Moses recently saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and he responded by killing the Egyptian. When he learned that there were witnesses, he fled.

Anger is an appropriate response to injustice. In fact, anger is a necessary condition for change. Ernesto Cortes is a community organizer who helped neighborhood groups address affordable housing, unemployment, and health care issues in Houston, El Paso, Fort Worth, East Los Angeles, Gary, and East Chicago. He looked for anger in community leaders—for a particular kind of anger. “I’m talking about the ability to get angry and act at an appropriate time and place,” Cortes said. “Anger has to be related to the classical virtue of prudence. It has to be controlled and connected to a concern for someone else.”

In murdering the Egyptian, Moses displayed anger that burns hot. Anger disconnected from prudence consumes either the one who is angry or the object of their anger. Anger needs to be a fire that burns but doesn’t consume. This kind of anger is the fuel of hope.

I’ve noticed that in churches there tend to be activists and contemplatives. The activists engage in social issues. They pass petitions and organize rallies. The contemplatives go to Bible studies and silent retreats. In this story, contemplation and action merge into one person and one encounter with the Divine.

God speaks to Moses from the burning bush not just to get his attention, but to equip him. The burning bush awakens in Moses a curiosity that leads to an encounter with the living God. He hasn’t displayed that before. The call to action is preceded by a call to contemplation. To pause and behold. It is the first of many mystical experiences that will guide and sustain Moses in his work.