

Exodus 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?" ¹²He 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." He 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.

¹⁶Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.'

The story begins with a **theophany** – an appearance of the divine; and an **epiphany** – a recognition of God's presence. We meet Moses tending sheep - he has fled the comfort and security of his home in Egypt. He has escaped the fury of the Egyptian pharaoh, his adoptive grandfather, after the murder of the Egyptian overseer who was abusing an Israelite. Moses runs for his life to take up residence with a Midianite clan in the wilderness. He meets his wife and soon finds work in the shepherding business tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. On his way to work one day, Moses notices a strangely burning bush that is not consumed. Curiosity gets the best of him. Scripture explicitly says that "he turned aside." This curiosity leads to theophany. A voice comes from the bush announcing that Moses is standing on holy ground and must give proper respect to the Holy/Sacred by taking off his shoes.

If you noticed something like a burning bush out of the corner or your eye, you'd turn aside, you'd get off the path of where you were headed, wouldn't you? Of course you would. Except, so often, we have this tendency to walk on by, not notice, not get involved. We're busy. We'll come back later. Rational thought also keeps us from turning aside: we don't believe in visions. We have reasons to keep on walking, don't we?

But Moses, Moses turned aside. He got off the path. And when God saw that he turned aside, God called to him. If Moses hadn't turned aside, would God have spoken? Surely God could have found

another way to get his attention if Moses had not stopped. Yet, God did not speak until Moses turned aside. One could wonder if his turning aside actually brought forth God's speech. We would have to ask, what kind of inefficient God is this, waiting for human beings to notice, to turn aside, instead of just acting. But, this inefficiency is born of relationship. The nature of God who longed not only to be, but to be with.

Could it be that if we turned aside more often, God would speak more often? How hard it is to turn aside, to find time each day to come into the presence of God. To take off our shoes believing the place where we stand is holy ground. But what if we turn aside and God doesn't call to us? Worse yet, what if God does call to us? What will God expect of us? What if we don't know if it's God or our own imagination speaking?

Moses got caught up in these self-doubts- A burning bush? A voice in the bush? Am I crazy? But, Moses stays put, and the voice gives him a lesson in theology. The voice announces that it has heard the cries of the Israelite people. Things are still not good for the people of God in Egypt. Moses may have escaped after killing one of their taskmasters, but God's people were still trapped in slavery and suffering. They cried out to God, and "*their cry for help rose up to God*" (2:23).

God has been touched by their pain, God will respond. But, God chooses not to do it alone. God needs human companions to accomplish the task.

Moses protests. He is aware of his limitations; he knows his history; he is a wanted man. He has an identity problem. Was he a Hebrew? Was he an Egyptian? Marrying into a family of Midianites. Hard to know who he was or where he belonged. He is also anxious and concerned about his abilities. God overlooks his protests. "Don't worry. You belong to me. I'm going with you all the way." God is faithful and will be with Moses as he attempts the impossible. God does not reveal *how* God will deliver the Israelites and empower Moses. God simply says, "I will be with you."

This simply wasn't enough for Moses. He keeps arguing with the Almighty. Moses wants to insure that the Israelites will accept his leadership and authority. "*If the people ask me who sent me, what am I going to tell them?*" *The Lord said, "Tell them I AM sent me to you."*

It is a mysterious name. In Hebrew letters and Greek vowels, the name has been translated as Yahweh in some Bibles, Jehovah in others. But this name is never spoken aloud by Jewish people. It is too holy to be spoken aloud. God continues: "*Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is my name for all generations.*" God is not only beyond all words; God's name is attached to human names: *The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*" The God of Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, the God, of Mary Magdalene and Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King, Jr.. The God of Cathy. Where will you add your name? It is similar to calling ourselves children of God. By this name God will be known forever. Mystery. Majesty. Transcendent. Immortal, invisible, Inefficient, Relational--the Holy God waiting for you and me to notice, to turn aside.

The conversation goes back and forth for a few chapters in Exodus. "*What if they won't believe me if I tell them you sent me?*" *"Well, then, I'll give you some signs you can show to them."*

Moses continues to protest, "*You have forgotten something, God. You have forgotten that I am a very poor public speaker. I'm slow of speech.*"

"Moses, you have forgotten that I am the one who gives speech in the first place?"

Moses presses on. "*O Lord, please just send someone else.*"

Astonishingly, God relents, "*All right. your brother Aaron will do your speaking for you. Now pick up your staff. The people are suffering. They're waiting for you. You are the one I have chosen.*"

Finally, Moses stops talking and starts moving. Finally, he pushes through the wall of self-doubt and inadequacy and fear.

But now we have to ask the question: Was Moses' life easy and restful after God got a hold of him? Not so much. That was the day his real troubles began. Pharaoh's army tried to kill him. The people that he liberated complained for 40 years; and when they finally arrived at the Promised Land, God decided that Joshua should take the Israelites over to the other side. Moses died before reaching the Promised Land.

There is a quote that says, "*Every cry, every suffering falls, not on deaf ears, but on the heart of God. If God is hidden, God is hidden within the suffering*". There are still cries of suffering in the world. God still needs companions to hear God's name and do God's bidding. We will protest, we will come up with all kinds of excuses, we will pass on by, we will struggle with our identity, we will come up against the wall of our own limitations and self-doubt and inadequacy, not wanting to get involved.

From the book of Roman's Eugene Peterson's translation in *The Message* offers this path to the challenge Paul lays out: "*Love from the center of who you are...discover beauty in everyone.*" Those words lead us to be generous and hospitable, forgiving and peaceful, humble and kind.

At some point in our lives, just maybe....the scripture from Exodus and from Romans continues as it calls to us.

When God saw that we had turned aside to see, God called to us... It's enough to cause you to take off your shoes. The life you're living - it is the only one you've got. The bush is burning. It burns for you

Lord, we have gathered here today to hear your word for us. We marvel at the witness of Moses who received your call to liberate your enslaved people. Be with us this day, guiding our spirits and opening our hearts to hear your forgiveness and call to us. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.