

August 30, 2020

God's Call

O Lord take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hands and work through them; take our wills and bend them to your own. Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

I love this story of Moses and the burning bush. Those of us who attended Sunday School as children have most certainly heard this story and anyone who has seen Charlton Heston play Moses in the movie The 10 Commandments has seen the dramatic scene where Moses sees the burning bush in the distance, goes to investigate and encounters the living God. There is so much in this story that you could preach at least four different sermons but for your sake I have decided to only preach one today!

This scene at the burning bush is bracketed by Moses' life circumstance. He has escaped the fury of the Egyptian pharaoh, his adoptive grandfather, after he murders an Egyptian overseer who was abusing a Hebrew. Moses runs for his life to Midian, a tiny tribal community in the southern desert on the east side of the Dead Sea. There the story goes he sat down by a well and encountered the seven daughters of the priest of Midian. They had come to draw water for their father's flock when some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses steps in and protects the girls and waters the flock. He marries one of the daughters and it is while tending the sheep of his father in law Jethro that Moses sees the burning

bush. When he goes to investigate a voice calls out to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses” and his response to the call? “Here I am.” With these words Moses indicates his readiness to submit and obey.

During the ensuing conversation Moses discovers that this God isn't just any God. This God is the familiar God of the Hebrews' ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He must have been filled with joy when the Lord told him “I have observed the misery of my people, I have heard their cry. I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them.” God knows Israel's present circumstance and is prepared to counter it decisively. Finally God had heard the prayers of the Hebrew people and was going to come to their rescue.

This God of the burning bush cared about Israel, and about justice, and about protecting those who couldn't protect themselves. This is the same God we know today and the same God who still cares about justice and about protecting those who cannot protect themselves.

Moses was so relieved to hear that God had heard the cry of the Hebrews and was going to deliver them from mighty Pharaoh when all of a sudden God says one phrase that changes everything; “come I will send you”. With that utterance it's made clear that the intention of God has now become a human responsibility, a human obligation. We learn that Moses, not God will meet with Pharaoh, it is

Moses, not God who will bring out the people of Israel and it is Moses who will act in God's place to save God's people. Everything now depends on him.

He has been asked to do a remarkably dangerous deed. He has been asked to return to Egypt where his life is at risk and where he must challenge the power of the status quo. His chances of success in Egypt are modest and his chances for survival are no better. It's no wonder that in the narrative that follows Moses voices serious doubts and resistance to the summons. Moses' "here I am" suddenly turns to "who am I?" Who am I to confront Pharaoh? I am nothing more than a shepherd. I am not by any means important nor do I have any authority. Why would Pharaoh would listen to me? Oh please Lord, please send someone else." God's response? "I will be with you." Moses must go but he will not be alone.

Moses seeing that that excuse isn't going to work tries another. This mission is going to be dangerous for himself and the Israelites. Before agreeing to attempt it he wants to know specifically who is sending him. He knows that he is dealing with the God of his ancestors but he knows that the people of Israel will require a personal name. God's response "I am who I am." This God is named as the power to create. The one who causes to be. This God is the one who will be present in faithful ways to make possible what is not otherwise possible. From this interaction Moses is reminded that God's promises were the same then as they

were in Genesis. God's name is filled with promise and with the capacity to work a new thing.

Moses is now sure of the God who is calling him but he has a third objection. Later in the story, which for the sake of time I didn't read, he explains to God that he fears that his own people will not believe that he has been called by God to perform such a task. God assures him that as he acts with courage he will have resources he does not yet know he has. To prove this to him God has him change his staff into a snake and then back to a staff. He has him put his hand in his cloak. When he removes it, it is leprous. When he put it back in his cloak it is restored. Surely when the Israelites see these miracles, they will believe Moses has been called by God.

Excuse # three didn't work either so Moses tries this one on for size.

"Oh my Lord, "I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." But the Lord tells him that he gives speech to mortals. Go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say." But Moses says again "Oh my Lord, please send someone else." Now you can imagine that after all of these excuses God is getting a little put out. To counter this latest objection God tells Moses that his silver-tongued brother Aaron can speak for him. He tells him to take his staff in hand and get on with it.

Well, you know the rest of the story. Moses goes to Pharaoh but has a hard time convincing him to let the Israelites go. Eventually through a series of plagues Pharaoh repents and frees the people of God.

This whole story I believe invites each of us to reflect upon the power of call in our lives. I doubt if any one of us has encountered a burning bush or seen the Holy One. We may imagine that no one knows our name until we announce it, and no one requires anything of us except that for which we volunteer. But like Moses, our lives are not autonomous. There is One who knows and calls us by name even while we imagine we are unknown and unsummoned.

Each of us listening today has at some time in our life been called by God and my guess is that sometimes we are a little like Moses. We are quick to offer reasons, alibis and excuses as to why we cannot obey the call. Now, am I saying you should say yes to everything you are asked to do? No. Not all calls are from God. Do you remember the song from the musical Oklahoma, I'm just a girl who can't say no? That was me. If anyone would ask me to do something I would say sure, I can help with that. After years of saying yes to nearly every request, I learned that for my own sanity I had to sometimes say no. I came to understand that just because someone asked me do something, I didn't have to accommodate the request. I needed to step back, reflect, pray and decide if the ask was really something God wanted of me or if it was something a committee chair or someone else wanted of

me. Sometimes there are valid reasons for saying no. That being said...sometimes the call **is** from God. Sometimes God needs you.

Maybe God is calling you to teach Sunday School. Is your response “Oh God, please get someone else. I don’t have the knowledge and I don’t want to commit the time”.

Maybe God is calling you to serve on a church committee. Is your response “Oh God, please get someone else. I don’t know anything about the workings of the church and that would take one or two evenings a month.”

Maybe God is calling you to be in ministry with the least among us. Is your response “Oh God, please get someone else. I would be uncomfortable around someone who is different than me.”

Maybe God is calling you to speak out about an injustice you see. Is your response “Oh God, please get someone else. What would people think of me if I challenge the status quo?”

The United Methodist Church’s mission statement states that our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This week’s text reminds us that the affairs of nations and humans are in fact elements of the large drama where divine resolve and human vocation work together for

transformation. It was God's will that the Hebrews be freed but it was up to Moses to do the job. We are called by God to transform this world. We may feel we are not up to the task but God will be with us.

God's call to service is regularly met with reluctance and a lack of enthusiasm. Yes. We are a little like Moses— less than eager to speak the truth, more than eager to leave the task to someone else. But sometimes, the task is ours and ours alone and only we must be the agents of God to transform this world He loves.

When Moses encountered the burning bush and was addressed by God his initial response was "here I am." Granted, he questioned his ability but in the end with God's help he was able to fulfill his calling. When **God** says "come, I will send you to a Sunday School room, a church committee, a homeless camp under a bridge, a meal site for the poor, a mission in rural Kentucky, or into the streets to protest for justice how will you respond? Will you say "please Lord, get someone else" or will you say "here I am Lord, use me"?