

Called to be Holy and Fully Human
Exodus 3:1-6
Feb 3, 2019

We live today in a society that is no longer a compact village where there is a settled order to life and everyone is born and dies according to God's order of things. If we were living in a medieval village five hundred years ago, perhaps even only a hundred years ago in some villages, we knew where we fitted in and who we were. Our family and occupation defined our social identity. We knew who we were. All that changed with the rise of the middle class, social mobility, the industrial revolution and the movement of families to cities. These changes mean that we no longer have the same defined identity.

The old forms of belonging disappeared; family ties are broken, the Christendom world disintegrates, and people shift continents. People lose a sense of themselves and feel unmoored, dislocated, and sometimes even lost.

Moses must have wondered who he was as he looked after sheep in the desolate wilderness far from the wealth and power he knew as a young man. (slide 1) Living for forty years in the wilderness with sheep may have been peaceful, but for a man brought up in Pharaoh's court it must also have been like living on Mars. Who did he belong to? "Who am I" may not have been a question that kept him up at night, but I'm sure as an exile, a murderer, a Hebrew cut off from his family, he must have thought about it occasionally. I wonder if he was thinking about that when the burning bush appeared

On this day he sees a bush burn but it isn't consumed. (slide 2) His curiosity gets the better of him so he climbed up the hill to see what is going on. And it is there at that moment that Moses' life changes forever. For God meets him and calls out of the bush. *Moses, Moses.* Not only do I know your name Moses, but also I know where you came from. I am the God of your ancestors: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And by the way, I have a job for you Moses. Your shepherd days are over. It's time to get back to Egypt.

God knows his name. Did you know that God knows your name? The teller at the bank may not; the person checking our groceries may not; your next-door neighbour may not; even those on our family tree and their descendents may not know our name. But God does!

I love the song, *He knows My Name*. The chorus goes like this:
(slide 3)

**I have a maker,
He formed my heart
Before even time began
My life was in his hands.
He knows my name.
He knows my every thought.**

When I left my home in Scotland it meant leaving behind a social setting where I knew my name and knew where I belonged. My friends from school; my father's family who visited from a nearby town; my work mates; my identity as son of the barber, the apprentice floor layer, Council estate dweller, teddy boy dresser: all of this clarified who I was and where I fit and who I belonged to. When I left and arrived in the big city of Toronto I was none of those things. I was unknown. I had no longer a history or identity. This is a story repeated millions of times by those who have joined in the migration from Europe and other countries to live in North America.

God knows his name. 'Moses, Moses', God calls to the shepherd out of the burning bush and Moses responds 'here I am'. I'm present for you even if I'm confused and afraid. 'Here I am', is the response God elicits when God comes close. God wants our yes and openness to the Spirit's call. I'm here Moses responds. There follows the request: *Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*

What does it mean to be holy? Oftentimes I get the sense that for us as Christians there is a feeling that we need to deny our humanity in order to fit into God's demand for holiness. I was taught very early in my Christian church experience that being fully human was a liability, and holiness is found only in denial of my humanity. And it's not only in church that holiness gets confused with false piety and denuded humanity. It has always struck me that Hollywood makes the same

mistake. Charlton Heston's Moses comes down the mountain after meeting God at the bush a changed man. His face shines; his hair has turned grey; he ignores his wife like a man obsessed. He never regains a spark of humanity for the rest of the film. Hollywood believes that holiness denudes humanity. Their philosophy is writ large over a wide range of films. (slide 4)

Irenaeus of Lyons over two thousand years ago said: *The glory of God is a human being fully alive.* (slide 5) Being human is not a liability on our sacred journey with God. It is learning to live in communion with God. It means practicing forgiveness of my and everyone's failures to live up to the divine standards. It means learning to be in tune with God and neighbour.

Being holy simply means being set apart for God and others. The ground Moses stood on was holy because Moses was set apart in that moment God called him. Jesus was fully human and fully divine, as we say in the creed. His humanity didn't prevent him from being holy. On the contrary, Jesus lived out his humanity in tune with God and neighbour and hence was holy. His holiness, his set apartness, was lived out by being intensely human. His full humanity was lived out in all he said and did.

Perhaps that is the underlying reason for his rejection in Nazareth. The villagers knew his roots in Mary and Joseph's family. He was just too human to be a Messiah. He was the carpenter's son, not the rabbi's son. Who does he think he is? So they try to kill him.

Being human as God intended us is to have both feet planted firmly in the soil just as God directed Moses. Being holy is to be more intensely human which means being connected to my roots in the earth. We are earth creatures, shaped out of the dust, but with God's image planted deep within us. Holiness isn't achieved by withdrawal from my rootedness in my humanity; it doesn't mean denying who I am as Adam's son; it doesn't mean living a kind of pious otherworldly life. It means simply living out my calling as God's child in faith. So we gladly take off our shoes for we know God's presence is indeed holy ground.

Amen

