

Moses' Call: a Pattern for Us?
Exodus 3:1-12
February 10, 2019

In the opening chapters of Philip Yancey's book, **Reaching for the Invisible God**, he shares many of the letters he has received from Christians struggling with their faith. Just like those who wrote these letters, we too find the walk of faith a battle. The world of the bible, so full of miracles and wonders, seems so far from our ordinary life experience. Our world often seems flat, grey, and predictable, and with little evidence of God peeking through.

Yancey turns to Frederick Buechner who sought to solidify this relationship one day with a hoped for miracle. He felt, Buechner says, that this particular day was just right for God to come close and reveal himself. He lay down in the grass full of great expectation that this time God would speak clearly to him. He just had that inexplicable feeling that something extraordinary was about to happen. But nothing did. Instead, all Buechner heard was the sound of the wind in the trees and the clack, clack of two apple branches scraping against each other. (slide 1)

Buechner, like most of us, wanted to have that direct experience of God. He, like us probably, wondered why God couldn't speak more clearly. Is it perhaps only for the inhabitants trapped in the pages of the bible that God breaks through the time/space/material universe? Is it only for them that miracles happen, doubts are erased and a voice is heard? Or must we be satisfied with only the clack, clack of the apple branches? Feel that way sometimes?

The story of Moses may shed some light on this dilemma. From his birth God seems intimately involved in Moses' life from the very beginning. Moses survives Pharaoh's decree of death to all Hebrew children, for Pharaoh's daughter rescues baby Moses from the river. The basket that his mother set him in mysteriously floats down river into the reeds where Pharaoh's daughter just happens to bathe. She adopts him as her son and that gifts Moses all the privileges Pharaoh's court provides: wealth, education, position, and power. As a young man, however, one day when he is out in the Hebrew's territory he witnesses an Egyptian beating one of his tribe. In anger

Moses kills the overseer and buries him in the sand. The next day he discovers that his crime has been seen so he fears Pharaoh's wrath and flees for his life. This takes him far from the splendor of Pharaoh's court to a small, insignificant area in the wilderness of the Sinai called Midian. (slide 2)

As a result, for forty of his most creative years, Moses is an alien from civilization. No God has spoken to him, nor is there any evidence that his connection to Abraham's family has brought him blessing. So far he has experienced only misfortune and silence. On the surface one might conclude that things could not have gone more wrong for Moses. For the next forty years of his life Moses is reduced to being a humble shepherd far from the splendor of Egypt. One would assume that Moses has given up and settled for the quiet life far from trouble. But God apparently had other plans.

In one of the most arresting encounters between God and a human being recorded in Scripture we learn of God's call to Moses. We need to notice a number of things about this encounter.

First, it's interesting to note that God doesn't move toward Moses until he turns toward God. Moses sees this strange sight of a bush burning but not being burnt up. So Moses decides to go out of his way to see what this is about. It is at that precise moment in our story that God chooses to respond. This tells me that God respects our freedom. Surely openness to mystery and miracle is part of what being a Christian involves. Any notion that we have arrived when we get our catechism memorized, or we have ticked all the right boxes, does not square the faith experience of the saints in the bible.

Second, God calls to Moses by name out of the bush. "Moses, Moses," echoes down to where Moses is walking. This is a truth we ought never tire of hearing. God knows our name.

There is a wonderful passage of the Bible that celebrates this theme. In Isaiah we read these words: *he who created you...he who formed you...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you... Do not fear, for I am with you (43:1ff) (slide 3)*

The New Testament is also full of such language. Paul says...*remember that you were at that time without Christ...having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:12ff) (slide 4)*

Just as Moses stood in a long line of God's people, we too have been made children of Abraham by virtue of the gift of faith in Christ. We may not always feel like children of God; we not always act like the beloved of God; but we are God's children through faith in Christ.

There is nothing in Moses' experience that earns him God's favour. The same is true for us! We didn't achieve our salvation because we were worthy, or better than others, or because we were naturally predisposed to be religious. Nor indeed does salvation come to our door because we behave in life as respectable citizens. No, like Moses, we are the grateful recipients of God's grace or unmerited favour. It may not have been through the fires of a burning bush that we were captivated and called. It may even have taken a long and difficult struggle for us to find this gracious God, or should I say, for this God to find us. But remember that it is God who holds on to us, and not the reverse.

The **third** thing I notice from this encounter is God's profile. Moses hears the wonderful news that this God he meets in these strange circumstances, is the God of his ancestors: Abraham's family. In the bible God is not merely the God of individuals in isolation, but of a people. The promise was that through Abraham the whole world would be blessed. For in the flow of time a Saviour will emerge from this family, Jesus of Nazareth. Moses is an important link in that majestic story. The burning bush encounter is not merely for Moses' benefit. It is part of God's plan to redeem Israel from Egypt. Moses encounter with Yahweh is the mere preface to the Exodus. God has been preparing Moses for a task that will change the Hebrew family forever.

This is the **fourth** thing I can't help noticing in this story of God's call to Moses. God is going to use all of Moses' experience and education. Yes, even Moses' anger and passion for his tribe that caused him to murder the Egyptian overseer is included. Moreover,

God will also use the long years of solitude that Moses has experienced in Midian. All of this has shaped him into the man he is.

Think for a moment about your life and your faith story. How has God been preparing us for our call to be servants and kingdom builders? Moses' life experience ought to remind us that there are no experiences in our lives, both good and bad, both challenging and rewarding, that God doesn't use.

What kind of a God are we dealing with here? It is a God who notices injustice and is willing to do something about it. God tells Moses that he has seen the hardship of his people in Egypt and he has heard their cry. This reminds us of God's closeness to our planet's discord and violence. God is not absent or indifferent. It may seem that way, but in surprising and hidden ways God's will is slowly being done on earth, even as we pray our Lord's Prayer. But God needs Moses to bring it about, just as God needs each one of us to build God's kingdom on earth.

We are not likely to run into burning bushes. But amid the ordinary, grey worlds we inhabit, where all we hear sometimes is the clack, clack of the apple tree branches, God continues to call us by name. It may be that miracle will surprise us. But above all it will be this marvelous notion that God has come to us, called us by name, commissioned us personally, that keeps our relationship fresh and alive. If that relationship depends solely on us perhaps we have reason to be anxious. But knowing that it is God who names us and holds us in God's heart is a refreshing reminder.

Amen