

### 3 September 2017 Sermon Notes

Exodus 3.1-15

Mat 16:21-28

Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'

Adapted from David Lose

Don't be fooled, this passage isn't about a timid exile's reverent first meeting with the God of his ancestors. Rather, this story is about a no-holds-barred encounter between a wily, even conniving outlaw and a God who's more than up to the challenge of transforming him into an instrument of salvation.

The drama of this scene peaks when Moses asks what seems an innocuous question. Up to this point, it's been pretty much your standard encounter with a deity:

spectacle (burning bush),

booming address ("Moses, Moses..."),

appropriate show of humility (shedding the sandals ),

followed by a huge promise ("I will deliver my people from bondage"),

self-deprecating hesitation ("I can't do this"),

and divine reassurance ("I will be with you").

And then it comes. "Suppose I go to the Israelites and tell them all this great news and they're a tad skeptical, you know, to the point of asking just who this God is who sent me. What shall I tell them?"

Such an innocent, understandable, even reasonable question, don't you think? Except that it's not. It's a total power play; subtle, even sly, to be sure, but a power play none the less. Everything at this point hinges on names and, particularly, the power of names to reveal the character of a person. Remember Jacob, the heel -- *literally* -- who received his name because he was grabbing his brother's heel as they came out of the womb and never stopped grabbing for all that he could the rest of his life, until he wrestled this same God to a draw and was given the new, life-transforming name of Israel.

That's what's going on here. Moses isn't asking for a calling card, he's trying to get the name out of this divine being because to know its name is to have a certain power over it.

Which is what makes God's answer so perfect: "I AM WHO I AM!"

I love God's answer because through it God is saying, in a sense, "Don't box me in, Moses!" Significantly, the divine name, Yahweh, has a future cast to it as well, rendering it even more elusively, *"I will be who I will be."*

Which means, I think, that what God is actually saying is that you can't really know who God is unless you're willing to sign on for God's mission in the world, willing to get involved. Which is what Moses ultimately does, going to Egypt, confronting Pharaoh, leading his people out of Egypt, taking them through the parted waters and into the wilderness. And there, on the other side of things, Moses doesn't need to ask for God's name anymore, as he learned it first hand, through his own experience, and so is ready to sing of what he has discovered.

(When reading, keep in mind that every time it reads "LORD," it really means "I AM WHO I AM.")

'The LORD is my strength and my might,  
and has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise God, my father's God, and I will  
exalt God..

The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is God's name. (Ex. 15:1-3).

Moses has learned who God is, you see, only by following God on the path God set for him and thereby learning first hand the nature, purpose, and truth of this God.

And the thing is, this doesn't stop -- or even begin -- with Moses. It was true of his ancestors --

Abraham taking off for a new land in his old age;

Jacob fleeing God in every which way only to be called by God to sire a nation.

And it will be true of his descendants, as well, from Old Testament prophet and priest to New Testament disciple and missionary.

To tell you the truth, I suspect that this is the way it always is, even today. To know God, you have to go with God. Faith is a full contact, participation sport. You just can't sit back and expect to really know God, you have to get up off the couch and get in the game, take a risk, try something marvellous, reach for something you thought unachievable, step out onto the winding road the end of which you can't see from your doorstep.

What are some of your big questions about God?

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Second,  
where do you believe God is calling you?

It doesn't have to be spectacular, when done in faith, there is no small gesture.

Most of us don't see ourselves as the stuff of which faith-heroes are made. But that's probably because we haven't been reading our Bibles very carefully. After all, few of the characters God employs -- including Moses -- are the stuff of heroes. And yet God uses these frail, fallible, and oh so ordinary people, over and over again, to do extraordinary things.. remember last week.. Peter, shiprah Puah, Moses mother..

So it's important, I think, that we ask this second question,  
where do you believe God is calling you?  
because God is, indeed, working through us in small ways and large for the health of the world.

God continues beckoning us forward into a future that we cannot yet see but which God is fashioning both for us and through us.<sup>1</sup>

When Moses was called by God, he didn't believe that he was worthy to take on the mission that God had assigned him. He said, 'Who am I to go' and God replied 'I will be with you'. We too may

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<sup>1</sup> David Lose in <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1600>

feel unworthy or ill equipped to take up the challenges before us. But like Moses, we too can achieve great things through the power of God. For just as God promised to be with Moses, Christ has promised to be with us until the very end. Each and every one of us has a role to play in God's mission, here and now. We just need to say "yes" to God.<sup>2</sup>

Today, I want to thank you for your faithful ministry, for God has called each one of you to a unique role in God's church and future, and I am grateful for your fidelity in responding to it.

God said, 'I am with you, Trust me'  
Susanna

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<sup>2</sup> [http://resources.holycovenant.org.au/docs/sermons/2014/Sermon\\_2014-08-31.pdf](http://resources.holycovenant.org.au/docs/sermons/2014/Sermon_2014-08-31.pdf)