

Don't Forget Your Staff

Scripture

Exodus 3: 1-12

Moses and the Burning Bush

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up."

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey--the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

(New International Version)

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| <p>Big Idea: God calls us to ministry. God defines it and God equips us for the mission. We need to always be aware that he will be with <i>us</i> (important word) as we head off on our God defined task(s).</p> |
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The scripture read is from Exodus 3:1-12, but the sermon is really a drama based on all of Exodus 3 through 4: 18.

*Pastor Dennis will enter the room wearing desert friendly clothing, a beard, a wig, sandals, and a staff, and he is intended to be Moses.
(The bulletin says "A Special Guest".)*

I remember my first encounter with Adonai like it was yesterday.

Thirty-five hundred years gone by, and those words should still talk to you today, like they did to me ...

I only walked over out of curiosity.

A bush was on fire, and it wasn't being consumed.

All I went for was to satisfy my curiosity.

Well, my curiosity got me introduced to Adonai – my Lord, the God of my people.

I didn't know Adonai, and I had experienced stories about him in my mother and sister's homes back in Egypt, but my time in the wilderness, here near Sinai, with my wife Zipporah and my children, tending my father-in-law's, sheep ... I had forgotten about our God. He didn't even have a name. How could a God not have a name? All the Egyptian God's had names, but not ours. Besides, he had abandoned us ... we were now slaves to the Egyptians, and our God was back in Canaan, not here, with me in the wilderness.

Or at least, that is what I thought.

But Adonai spoke to me – in fact – he called me by name, and I said “here I am” and then, he told me – “Go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

My mind said “you want me to do what?” but I was talking to God – so I pleaded unworthiness. You can't possibly want me to do this – not me, not Moses. Besides, what would Zipporah say, she had never been to Egypt, Zipporah had help home-schooling the kids here, and I was only half way through the re-model on the tent, and I had planned to watch camel races next Sunday I just KNEW the Egyptians liked to watch sailboats race up and down the Nile, so there wasn't going to be any camel racing there, so ... my mind was saying “please send someone else to do this”.

In the next verses of Exodus, after the passage you had read to you today, Adonai will answer my objections with his own view of the situation.

But let's be clear -- Adonai wasn't buying what I was selling. Adonai would say “I will be with you and bring my people back here.”

What kind of an answer was that?

Who am I and he says “I will be with you” and in order to bring the Israelites back here, I have to still ... go.

But he wouldn't actually say for me to go – just bring them back here – I wondered, is this an opening to get out of going back to Egypt??

BACK TO EGYPT!

All I had done wrong here near Sinai was to have a little curiosity, and then, I said “here I am” and then I get this task of going BACK to EGYPT – a place I had lived for half my life – and where people knew me and I had killed a man -- my mind is still screaming “send someone else” but he has already ignored me once.. so I say to Adonai, what is your name? Who do I tell them sent me?

Adonai answered but he didn't answer. He said “I am who I am”.

“I am who I am”. Now THAT told me a lot.

(pause)

My first two objections have not worked very well, so I try a third objection – how will your people know I am telling the truth?

Adonai tells me my staff will be used to show the Egyptians his power and he also gives me a hint of the turning of the Nile into blood.

I still don't want to do this, and I plead with him about my poor speaking ability ... wouldn't you think it a good idea for a person who was going to speak to a king to be able to have a solid command of speech and language and all of that?

Adonai – just doesn't deal with my problem – he ignores my objection and reminds me that he is God, the creator of everything, and he reminded me again that he will be with me, he will provide me the words, but that I need to GO.

All my objections having been tried – I just let it out – “O Lord, PLEASE send SOMEONE ELSE to do it.”

I could hear Adonai's anger.

It burned deep.

Then Adonai did a funny thing – a very funny thing. He actually allowed one of my objections to matter in the discussion ...

Adonai came back to my problem with speaking, again, Adonai ignored my problem of I just didn't want to do it, and he said “what about your brother Aaron” and he tells me that Aaron will speak for me and that he will help both of us ... but that I needed to GO ... and then he told me “don't forget your staff”.

Well, I guess that was going to be it. But I thought one last appeal to reason on this, and I will go and try and get out of this by telling my father-in-law what I needed to do.

I expected him to say:

Who's going to watch the sheep?

You're taking my daughter and grandchildren where?

Who's going to finish that tent?

Who's going to watch the camel races this Monday Night with me?

Without you here, all of those Arabs will show up and expect me to watch that horse racing ... who would want to watch horses when you can watch camels.

No – he didn't say any of that.

He just looked at me, and patted me on the shoulder and said “Go – and I wish you well.”

Go – everywhere I turn, people and talking bushes keep telling me to GO.

I don't WANT TO GO!

I am happy ... *here*.

I have a good life ... *here*.

I don't want to go to Egypt. I don't want to lead a bunch of people into the Wilderness. It is dangerous and risky and I might get hurt, and besides, it might interfere with what I have planned*here!*

Like I said ... I can remember it like it was yesterday.

(long pause)

Does any of that sound familiar?

Does any of that sound like anyone you know?

Does any of that sound like you?

Has God ever spoken to you in some way ... and you didn't feel like the timing or your skills or something was not quite right?

I told Adonai at the end my real problem – *I just didn't want to do it – send someone else*.

All I had done was going over and out of curiosity -- checking out a bush – and my life got turned upside down.

God called me by name, I said here I am, and then I get told to GO.

Has that ever happened to you? Has God ever asked you to Go and do something you didn't feel qualified to do?

Qualified, I was very qualified. My first objection was silly.

Adonai wanted someone to go back to Egypt and bring people out into the Wilderness.

I had lived half of my life where <wait for people to say in Egypt> and the other half my life in the where <wait for people to say wilderness/desert.>

I knew Egypt. I knew the Israelites. I knew the Wilderness. I knew the very spot where Adonai was telling me to bring the people.

I was very qualified to do this – the very idea of ‘who am I’ was all about me, and God ignored me in that and said “I will be with you ...”

What is it you might be being called to do and what are your objections?

Jesus would call people.

He went to the fishing boats of Galilee and called them – and they went.

He went to the tax collection booths and called them – and they went.

He went to a dusty road to Damascus and asked a person who had been a persecutor of the Church and called Paul – and Paul set aside the path he was on and answered God’s call.

Abraham and Sarah,

Samuel

David

Mary and then Joseph

Peter, James and John

Matthew

Paul

Paul’s disciples – Phoebe and

Dorcas

Since that day at that burning bush, God has been calling us to be about our part of the task of setting his people free ... and God wants us to answer that call and go speak to the Pharaohs of this world and say “let my people go!”

And you respond as I responded – who am I?

And God says – I will be with you ... and don’t forget your staff.

Oh my staff – remember?

I asked Adonai how people will know that I am from you, and he told me that my staff would be an instrument I would use in order to show them his power.

And before I left to go and plead my case one last time with my father-in-law, Adonai said “don't forget your staff”.

My staff ...

The staff I would use to show the Pharaoh's magicians the power of Adonai.

The staff I would use to turn the river into blood.

The staff I would use to produce water from the rock.

The staff I would use to produce victory over desert warriors.

The staff I would use to separate the waters at the Red Sea.

The staff didn't do any of that.

The staff was a reminder of God's might power, his ability to take the traditional bounds of power and redefine it.

I wonder if Adonai was saying to me instead of “don't forget your staff” since I was still arguing with him, was he perhaps really saying “don't forget, I will be with you.”

This will be the promise Jesus will make to the early church.

“Remember, I will be with you to the end of the age.”

God does call us.

God does call us to perform missions for which we sometimes think ourselves hopelessly under or poorly equipped.

God calls us and he expects us to leave here, and GO

I have heard some of your pastor's sermons. He has said to you ... God equips the sent and sends the equipped.

I was equipped, I just wasn't ready, my first and last objections were the best ones: who am I and send someone else.

(long pause)

There I was ... minding my own business watching my father-in-law's sheep.

There I was ... and I heard my name being called ... “Moses, Moses”.

There I was ... and I said “here, I am”

And Adonai gave me a task I didn't want to do ... and I objected ...

I said “who am I” and God said “I will be with you, now hit the road.”

I said “who are you” and God said “I am God, now hit the road.”

I said “how will your people know I come from you” and God said “Show them my power, now hit the road.”

I said “I don't have the ability I need to get the job done” and God said “I am God, now hit the road.”

I said “I just don't want to do it” and God said “I will give you help, now hit the road, and ... Moses, before you go ... don't forget your staff.”

Moses – before you hit the road -- Don't forget your staff.

Don't forget that Adonai is with you ...

Don't forget that it is through the power of Adonai that you accomplish anything and everything.

Don't forget your staff ...

What is it that God is calling you to do?

What is the task that God might be calling to you – calling your name, placing on your heart ...

You have already stepped into a holy place – God invites you to take off your sandals – recognize the holiness of the experience and say ... “Here I am”.

What are your objections to God's plan for you ... God has heard them ...

I am not worthy, I don't have the words, I just don't want to do it.

For a moment – visualize that calling you feel and hear and give it a name – call it what it is ... “I am what I am” tells you to call “It is what it is”.

And with that – let us close with this prayer repeating after me (and I will be walking out of the room to this).

Oh mighty creator, sustainer and redeemer.

You cared about a people without identity ... you cared about a people stuck in the chaos of slavery ... give us identity ... make us unstuck ... we ask for you to place on our hearts ... your call for each of us today ... we know you will be with us ... we know you will equip us ... and the most important piece of equipment ... we will have ... will be your presence ... your grace ... help us never to forget ... that we are truly equipped ... with Jesus ... as our staff ... amen.