

In scripture, we see God call people to follow him in myriad different ways. Today, our OT lesson is one of the great stories from scripture: the Call of Moses. God's call to Moses, and Moses' response, have much to tell us about God's call to us. It's worth spending some time with. So let's take a look this morning at our lesson from Exodus.

You may remember the story of Moses. Moses was a Jewish slave born in Egypt. His mother put him in a basket so that he would escape Pharaoh's death sentence. Pharaoh's daughter found him, and raised him as her own.

But one day, Moses saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews. Moses killed the Egyptian. Then Moses had to flee Egypt. Again, he had to escape Pharaoh's death sentence.

But he found a home in the Sinai Peninsula, in the desert, in the wilderness. He found a wife, had children, and settled down to live the rest of his life as a shepherd. But God had other plans.

And so, in ch3, in our Old Testament lesson for today, we see that Moses is tending his father-in-law's sheep at Mt. Horeb, or Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God.

There, he sees a strange sight. A bush burning. And though it is on fire, it is not consumed. What kind of strange fire is this? A fire that is self-sufficient. A fire that burns without needing outside fuel.

And out of that fire, God calls to Moses.

God identifies himself with the old traditional formula: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

And then the good news. God says, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians."

Oh my goodness. Think about this for a minute. Remember, Moses is on the run from an oppressive police state. And his people are still back in Egypt. They have been enslaved. And they have been suffering.

And now God says, 'I have seen it. I have heard it. I know they're suffering. And I'm going to do something about it.' "I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians."

What must Moses be thinking? 'Oh yeah. Oh yeah. You go God. Do it. Clean house. Set things straight. God is going to act. The time of freedom and deliverance is here!'

And then God says to Moses, "So come, I will send you."

'Uh... Excuse me? What?'

"So come (Moses), I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

God says 'I'm going to act. And I'm going to act by sending you, Moses.' Whoa.

Moses wants God to act. But God wants to act through Moses. Not quite what Moses was expecting. And so, Moses objects. In fact, the rest of chapters 3 and 4 is Moses' objections to doing God's work. Moses tries 5 different arguments to get out of being sent back to Egypt.

I'll mention the first two, which are part of our lesson for today.

First, Moses says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

'I'm nothing. I'm a fugitive on the lam. I'm in exile. Who am I?'

And God's answer basically is, 'It's not about who you are.' God says, "I will be with you." In other words God is saying, 'Your job is to bring your people back here to this mountain to worship me—let me take care of the rest.' It's not about who Moses is. It's about who God is.

But, Moses says, 'If I go back to Egypt and say, "Your God has sent me to you," they're going to say, "Which God?" "What is his name?" What shall I say to them?'

God says, "I AM WHO I AM."

'You want my name? Okay: "I AM WHO I AM."' Or we could translate it, "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." Or "I WILL BE WHO I AM."

Now, to 21st-century Western ears, this sounds like something of a cop-out. Sounds like God is being evasive. I AM WHO I AM sounds suspiciously like, "It depends on what the meaning of 'is' is."

But to ancient Middle Eastern ears, there are some nuances we miss. To them, there are a couple of added dimensions.

First, I AM WHO I AM can be heard philosophically as "I AM THE ONE WHO IS;" "I AM THE GROUND OF ALL BEING."

Or it could even be a little bit accusatory, "I AM WHOEVER I CHOOSE TO BE." Or, "I WILL BE WHOEVER I BLOODY WELL WANT TO BE." 'So who are you to be asking me who I AM?'

But there's another strong possibility. To ancient Middle Eastern ears, I AM WHO I AM could very well be taken to mean, "I AM THE ONE WHO IS WITH YOU. I AM THE ONE WHO WILL BE WITH YOU." After all, God told Moses that he is the God who was with

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. So now it's quite likely that he's saying, "And I will be the God who will be with you."

In other words, 'I'm sending you back to Egypt in my name. And my name is my promise. As you go back to do my work, I will be with you. Because that's who I AM.'

Both of Moses first 2 objections are countered in similar ways. In answer to both, God promises to be who God is. And God promises to be with Moses, as he's doing God's work.

In scripture, that's a consistent pattern. God has work to do in the world. And he calls flawed and fallible human beings to do his work. God has the power. God has all the power in the universe. But he's often very selective about how he uses it.

Most often, he uses it to empower human being to carry out his work. He wants us to buy into his vision. Then he wants us to do his work.

Over and over God calls us to be his hands in the world.

Over and over, God says, 'I have come down. I'm going to get to work. So come, I will send you. And I send you with the promise that I AM here. And I will equip you to do my work.'

That was Jesus' command. "Go into all the world. Baptize. Teach. And remember I am with you always."¹

God has put us here for a reason. Job #1: We are called to worship him. Job #2 We are called to do his work in the world.

1. Love the Lord your God. 2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

God has all the power. And yet he uses it to empower us to be his agents, his troops on the ground.

That means, you have been appointed, you have been anointed to carry on God's work in the world. With your treasure, with your talent, and with your time, God calls you to minister to the world in his name.

You might say, "God, why don't you do something about the troubles in the world?"

God's reply is, "Come, I will send you."

"God, why is there injustice? Why are hatred and violence all around us? God, why are there children who go to bed hungry in the richest and most powerful nation in the history of the world? Why is there war and strife? God, fix it. God, do something."

¹ From Mt 28:19-20

God's reply is, "I will do something about it. Come, I will send you."

You might have objections. "I'm not ordained. What can I possibly do?"

"The problems of the world are too overwhelming. What difference can one person make?"

Objections are not new. Moses had five objections at the burning bush. And yet God used him powerfully to bring his people into freedom. God's call is still there. "Come, I will send you."

But there's a warning. God rarely calls people to stay within their comfort zone. God calls them to stretch, to push the envelope, to grow. God's call involves stepping out and taking risks.

As the old saying goes, "God loves you just the way you are. But God doesn't want you to stay just the way you are, because God loves you."

God wants us to grow and learn and change into the people he has created us to be. So following God entails a huge risk.

But there's also a promise. God promises to be present with those he has called. And God promises to empower those he calls. He promises to give his people sufficient gifts and resources to do his work.

This week, test that promise. This week, listen for God's call.

It may come from an unexpected place. After all, Moses heard a voice from a burning bush. So listen. If you're sensing a still small voice calling you to do something, or if you are hearing something from an unexpected direction, maybe you should pay attention.

And if you think God is asking you to do something, try it. Take a risk, step out of your comfort zone. Give it a try.

Love someone. Serve someone. Help someone. Stretch beyond yourself. Do one thing, not matter how small, to help someone else. Find one way, this week, to carry God's love from this altar rail out to those you meet on the other side of those doors.

It's easy to make objections. But God calls you to faithful actions.

Listen. And act.

And as you do, God, the great I AM WHOM I WILL BE, will be with you.