

Mark 12: 26-27a Exodus 1: 8-14, 3: 1-15**WHAT SHALL I SAY TO THEM?**

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to continue the saga of the stories of Genesis and Exodus. Let me bring you up to speed on the story following Jacob's dramatic encounter with God through a wrestling match. Later in life Jacob and his now considerable family are forced by a severe famine to become refugees in Egypt. They stay there for several generations and multiply. But the Egyptians use them as slave labour and oppress them mightily. They cry out to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to deliver them.

1. Enter Moses: Skipping Joseph, who has a story of his own, we now come to Moses. What do you know about the birth and upbringing of Moses?

Seek comments.

Moses goes back to his own people, the Hebrews, the descendants of Jacob, and marries. One day he is doing the lowly job of minding the sheep of his father-in-law Laban, a Midianite. While he is wandering in the wilderness near the holy mountain Horeb, (Sinai) he has a strange encounter with God. He is pulled up in his tracks by a burning bush that doesn't turn to charcoal, smoke and ash. Out of this bush the voice of God addresses him by name and his life is changed forever. This God identifies himself as the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The remarkable conversation continues as God tells Moses that he has heard the cries of his people who are slaves in Egypt, and he knows their sufferings. And, great news! God will deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The not so great news is that God has chosen Moses to be the one who will make this deliverance happen. Of course, Moses is less than keen that he is the one to do what is required. He reels off his list of excuses. Who am I to do this? Who are you? I don't even know your name, among them. You know the rest of the story I'm sure.

Now this is a fascinating story but we must now ask the question we must ask of every story in the Bible. Not, 'did this really happen?', but 'what does it mean?' What does this teach us about God's ways of dealing with humanity today? Let me spell out some of the important truths in this reading from Exodus.

❖ The first thing is it sheds light on who God is. In the mystery of that burning bush, Moses discovers God who is. It is a common misconception by people both within and outside the Christian Church that belief in God means that God should guarantee our future, bless us and keep us safe from all dreadful illnesses and accidents so we can enjoy a long and healthy old age. Many people, even today, hold versions of the view of god as the old man sitting on a golden throne in the

heavens who is all powerful, all-knowing and a terrible punisher of sin. My own experience of being told as a young lad the text, "Be sure your sin will find you out" haunted me for years. That god is nothing more than an idol: a distortion of Christian and Jewish Faiths. If we read the Scripture then we soon discover that view is not consistent with the God of Israel, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; nor the God we know in Jesus Christ, God's own definitive expression of God's nature and purpose.

In Scripture we discover that God is not some divine being who sits in splendour in some far-off Paradise, directing from afar the affairs of earth. The God of Israel and of Jesus is a God who is at work in human history and who chooses to accomplish God's purposes through the agency of ordinary men and women in human history. The God of the Bible chooses to involve himself in human affairs in God's own way.

But Moses, our brother Moses, is not too sure of this God. People generally would prefer a god who could arrange *fiats* throw thunderbolts and blast our enemies while we stand on the sidelines and applaud. Humans would prefer a god who would work miracles on request and guarantee the life we want.

❖ Secondly, Moses quickly discovers that the God of Israel is not the God who meets his expectations and fulfills his desires. God says that he will deliver his people but it is Moses who has to go and confront Pharaoh and demand in God's name to "Let my people go!" Understandably, Moses is less than thrilled with this call of God which means he must lead this fractious people to the Promised Land.

Throughout the Bible people of faith have protested that they are not the ones to accomplish what God asks of them. Many of the great prophets responded to God's call by parading their inadequacies and anxieties in order to avoid God's call to share in his mission. The prophet Jeremiah protested, "**Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth.**" (Jer 1: 6) And the response of Isaiah when he encountered the vision of God in the Temple was, "**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.**" (Isaiah 6:5) In other words I am not worthy.

Moses' litany of excuses included phrases such as: "**Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?**" (Ex 3:11) and "**they will not believe me or listen to my voice**" (Ex 4:1) and "**Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech and of tongue**" (Ex 4: 10) and in spite of all of God's reassurances, Moses tries as his final ploy, "**Oh my Lord, send I pray some other person.**" (Ex 4: 13)

❖ Third, In this passage we discover the name of God. Moses dares to ask God his name: "**If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?**" The reply Moses receives is less than helpful. The Hebrew is '*ehyeh asher ehyeh*', often translated as "**I am who I am**". There are other possibilities of translating what is called technically called "a Tetragrammaton" - "I will be what I will be"; "I will be who I am"; "I am what I will be." But in that cryptic reply is all we need to know.

God is not to be defined by a name but is only to be known in personal encounter as people journey with God through history.

In the events of the history of Israel they discovered who God is, just as we discover who God is as we seek him in the events of our lives. In our highs and lows, our successes and failures we encounter the one whom we believe is 'closer than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.'

So Moses obeys and sets out on his great adventure with God and the leadership of God's people. I like to think he muttered as he walked away from that burning bush, "God only knows where this dance is going to take us," he muttered. Maybe he turned to look back wondering. "It's up to You," he shouted. "I have no idea where we're heading – and what a chance, a dance, we're taking!" But he did turn to prepare for his first meeting with Pharaoh.

❖ Fourth, God goes with us into the future. That was the experience of Moses as he led the people of Israel through numerous trials and sufferings to God's promised land. And it has been and will be, the experience of the church too whenever it follows God's call and ventures out in faith towards an unknown future.

let us not think that the current predicament of the church is a failure, an unfortunate last chapter to the ending of the story. In terms of the work of God it is a stage on the way towards God's promised end. In the words of the Basis of Union which I still find inspirational: *...the Church is a pilgrim people always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with word and sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.* (Paragraph 3)

So let us go and meet this God who is waiting for us to move into the future where the presence of God is the only certainty.

And to God be the glory in Jesus Christ and in his church forever and ever. Amen.

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