



Lent reflection for March 15, 2024

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Exodus 2:1-22

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

One day after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting, and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

So Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian and sat down by a well. The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to share a meal." Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. She bore a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land."

Today's Reflection is by Geoff Kurtz

Moses "went out to his people and saw their forced labor." Who are his people? Moses has two mothers, one by birth and one by adoption. He could see himself as a Hebrew; he could also see himself as an Egyptian. (In fact, we're told here that others see him as an Egyptian.) But when he witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, it all seems suddenly clear: the Hebrew is "one of his own people." Why?

One answer would be: Moses decides. He faces a moment of decision, like in the old miners' union song, "Which side are you on?" And he makes his choice; he picks the side of the oppressed Hebrews, the people who have a covenant with God.

There have been times when it has felt to me that I have chosen a connection with God, that I've reached a moment of decision, like a decade and a half ago when I began to attend church again after years away, or in more recent times when I've taken on one or another new prayer practice, or somewhere in the years between when I decided—I mean, it felt like a decision—to reject my longstanding skepticism about the reality of God (like Puddleglum stamping out the witch's fire, if you know what I mean). And there are small daily moments of decision, too, like when I tell myself—sometimes impatiently—to make an effort to be more patient or more kind. Maybe it was like that for Moses: an existential pivot, a willful breakthrough.

Yet the moment when Moses recognizes the Hebrews as his people, pivotal though it is, isn't the beginning of his story. Did something in his early years—in his birth mother's craftiness, his adoptive mother's compassion, his sister's presence of mind—prompt him to side with the Hebrew who was being beaten? Later, on Mt Sinai, God will tell Moses that his love flows down through a thousand generations of the children of those who are faithful to him. Is Moses' decision a consequence of the faith of an ancestor he never knew? Does it follow somehow from Abraham's willingness to sacrifice, or Isaac's steadfastness, or Jacob's wrestling?

And this moment-that-looks-like-a-decision isn't the end of Moses' story, either. Could it be that Moses is summoned by the voice from the burning bush even before he reaches Midian? Is the future that God wants for us already real enough to pull us forward? Maybe that's what people mean by a "calling."

And so I wonder whether I misunderstand my own relationship with God when I see it as a series of choices I've made. How have I been prompted or called or pulled toward God, in ways I was too willful to notice? How am I being called now? What fire not yet in sight, or voice not yet in earshot, is echoing backwards into my life now, this Lent?

Day by day, I will do things that feel like decisions; hopefully some of them will lead me closer to God. Maybe I can be readier to draw close to God if I let go the assumption that I'm the one doing all the deciding.



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