

Called to Share God's Vision

Exodus 3:1-15

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We're exploring God's call to us—how God calls and what God calls us to be and do. To help us with this, we'll look at stories of people in the Bible who heard and responded to God's call. Today, we're looking at God's call to Moses to share—and to help realize—God's vision for the people of Israel. That ends up being part of God's vision for the world, so it includes us.

God calls us to be people of vision. We "lean forward in hope." Abraham and Sarah model this posture as they leaned forward in following God's call, going where God led them, and looking for God's promises to be fulfilled.

Abraham's descendants continued to live in this hope. God became known as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Jacob's son, Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph was part of God's dream for his people. That dream carried Joseph through painful circumstances until he was in a position to experience the dream's fulfillment. Through those events, God was moving toward his own vision of preserving this family God had chosen and making them into a nation who would be the people of God. God would then bless the whole earth through Israel.

Moses is another example of one who sees God's vision and is caught up in it. Moses leaned forward in hope and led God's people toward the future God envisioned for them.

In Exodus we see God's vision of a people who would be holy (set apart) for God and who would worship him. God gave Moses a vision of the people's deliverance from slavery and of their coming into the land God would give them. And God called Moses to be part of fulfilling God's vision. Reluctantly, Moses agreed and became a model of faith, of fellowship with God, and of following God's lead.

The background for Moses' call is in the first two chapters of Exodus. The descendants of Jacob, the people of Israel, the Hebrews, were in Egypt because Joseph had been the king of Egypt's second-in-command. Now,

centuries later, “a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt” (Ex 1:8). The Israelites continued to multiply and the Egyptians feared them. They were afraid the Israelites would rebel and take over the land. This fear led the Egyptians to kill and oppress the Israelites. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill boys born to Hebrew mothers. The midwives refused and God blessed them. But then Pharaoh gave the order to his people to throw newborn Hebrew boys into the river.

When Moses was born, he was hidden in a basket in the river. Pharaoh’s daughter found him and raised him as her own in the palace. Later, as an adult, Moses tried to liberate the people by himself. He killed an Egyptian. Then he was rejected by his people, the Hebrews, and ran for his life. He spent forty years in the desert of Midian, hiding and tending sheep.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out. Their cry went to God. God heard their groaning, remembered his covenant, looked on them and was concerned about them (Ex 2:23-25).

Now we see God’s action on behalf of his people. God prepared Moses through forty years of education and training in Egypt and then through forty years of waiting in the wilderness. God works in “hiddenness.” Moses was just doing his work, nothing out of the ordinary, when God appeared to him. Being faithful where we are prepares us to hear God’s call. God comes to us in the ordinary times and activities of life.

Frederick Buechner describes this in a passage I’ve appreciated since I first read it years ago:

There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak—even the walk from the house to the garage that you have walked ten thousand times before, even the moments when you cannot believe there is a God who speaks at all anywhere. He speaks, I believe, and the words he speaks are incarnate in the flesh and blood of our selves and of our own footsore and sacred journeys. We cannot live our lives constantly looking back, listening back, lest we be turned into pillars of longing and regret, but to live without listening at all is to live deaf to the fullness of the music. Sometimes we avoid listening for fear of

what we may hear, sometimes for fear that we may hear nothing at all but the empty rattle of our own feet on the pavement. But ...“be not afraid ... for lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” He says he is with us on our journeys. He says he has been with us since our journeys began. Listen for him. Listen to the sweet and bitter airs of your present and your past for the sound of him.
(Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey* 77-78)

God appears to Moses and calls him to share God’s vision and to fulfill the dream and desire that burn in Moses. As always, God gives the vision and initiates the action and the mission. And, as nearly always, God involves people and seeks their commitment and cooperation.

God comes to Moses in an unusual way, but in the usual and ordinary place and circumstances of his life. Moses is out tending sheep like he’s been doing for years. He knows that mountainside and probably every bush on it. So when he sees one bush on fire but not burning up, he goes to see the strange sight.

A woman told about her aunt Margaret. Margaret lost a great deal of memory as she aged. It became more and more difficult for her to remember words until finally she had only two words left that she could say. Whenever anyone would ask her a question or engage her in conversation, she would say one of those two words. The words were, “temporarily” and “unexpectedly.” Thinking about this, the woman telling the story realized that those two words sum up what we can learn when we observe life closely. We come to realize how temporary so much of life really is. Margaret’s second word, “unexpectedly,” describes another quality of our experience. Our expectations are rarely fulfilled in life. In a moment, a phone call, a chance meeting, a doctor’s report, lives suddenly need to walk a new road. Most of life takes place unexpectedly even if we spend a huge amount of time planning and trying to be in control of the consequences. We’re never fully in control. Reality is mysterious and changing. So much of life is temporary and usually unexpected (Sheila P. Weinberg, “Healing the Heart, Healing the Planet,” *Tikkun*, Nov-Dec 2001, tikkun.org, cited in *Homiletics Online* 9/01/02).

Though God appears in ordinary circumstances, God does something extraordinary, unexpected, to get Moses' attention. What does it take for God to get our attention so he can present himself to us, so he can share his vision with us and call us to walk with him?

Once God has Moses' attention, God tells him that he has seen the Israelites' misery in Egypt, he has heard their cry and he is concerned about their suffering. God knows about his people's suffering and he cares. "So I have come down to rescue them ... and bring them up ... into a good and spacious land" (3:8).

Moses receives a vision of a God who cares about his people and comes to them. The vision includes two specific things God will do for the people: deliver them from slavery and bring them into their own land.

I can almost imagine Moses saying, "Great! Go get 'em, God! I'm glad you're going to rescue the people. Thanks for telling me."

But God says to Moses, "So now, go. I am sending *you* to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (10).

What? Now wait a minute! You said *you* were going to deliver the people. What do I have to do with it?

Moses is discovering that he can't be a spectator. God wants him to become a participant. When God's vision begins to stir in us and God's call comes to us, we can't just sit and watch. We have to get involved.

That made Moses as uncomfortable as it makes us sometimes. So now we hear several questions, objections, and excuses Moses makes to God.

First, Moses asks, "*Who am I* that I should go? I don't think I'm the right person for the job. I can't do it."

God responds, "I will be with you." God even offered a sign to show that God had sent Moses and would be with him. The sign would be that after Moses brought the people out of Egypt, they would worship God on the very mountain where Moses now stood. The sign would follow faith and obedience. The evidence of God's call comes when we obey God's call.

Now Moses asks, "*Who are you* who would be with me?" And God says, "I AM WHO I AM." This is the LORD God, the "I AM" God making himself known. He also lets Moses know that this is the same God Moses

heard about from his parents, the same God who called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of covenant, the God of faithfulness and love, the God of miracles.

Moses asks, “What if the people don’t believe me?”

God says, “Here are some signs you can perform to show my power.” God changes Moses’ staff into a snake and back into a staff. God causes Moses to have leprosy and then wipes it away. God tells him about turning water into blood.

Moses says, “I can’t speak very well.”

God replies, “I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

Finally, Moses pleads, “Send somebody else.”

The LORD’s anger burns against Moses at this. But God is also gracious and says, “All right. What about your brother Aaron? He’s a good speaker. You tell him what to say and he’ll do the public speaking.”

Moses and Aaron go back to Egypt. We know the rest of the story about the ten plagues on Egypt, the first Passover, the miracle at the Red Sea. We remember God guiding, protecting, and providing for the people in the wilderness. There was God’s covenant with Israel, giving the Law, and calling the people to worship.

Moses learns how to share responsibility (Exodus 17). There’s also an interesting passage in Numbers 11:16-30. God takes of the Spirit that is upon Moses and puts the Spirit upon seventy elders who then prophesy. The vision is meant to be shared. It’s not *my* vision, but *our* vision. There’s a scene where Moses is exposed to God’s glory that makes Moses’ face shine for a time.

Moses shared the vision of freedom with his people. God used him to bring them out of slavery. And eventually Moses led them to the edge of the land God was giving them.

All through this, Moses leaned forward in hope and helped God’s people trust God’s promises and claim God’s vision for them.

In Israel, the God of creation and covenant is renewing the call, the vocation, he had for human beings when he created them. Humans were created to bear God’s image, to represent God in the world. And to represent the world before God. Israel is called to be a kingdom of priests

for God (Ex 19:6). That is, they have the royal calling to represent God's rule in the world. And they have the calling to be priests, to represent the world to God, to worship God and give him glory. That royal and priestly calling is echoed all through the Bible. Jesus fully embodies it. He fully represents the image of God. In Christ, we receive and fulfill that call.

Robert Brookfield, an actor, was once wrongly reported to have died. He had the rare experience of reading his own obituary. It read: "Never a great actor, he was invaluable in supporting roles." That's not exactly a compliment, unless you're a Christian with a sense of call—someone who has stood before the burning bush and accepted the role God has given you (Homiletics Online 9/1/02).

God is with us. God leads us forward. Like Moses and the people of Israel, let's go with God out of bondage and into freedom, into the future God has for us, into the future God calls us to.

Are you beginning to be aware of God's call to you? How are you responding? Can we trust God to go with us, to lead us, to give us what we need to fulfill the call? Can we support and encourage each other to hear and follow the call of God?