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Pentecost 5-Exodus 3 and 4

Last week we heard the story of Moses being called by God from the burning bush...called to this mission of setting the Israelites free from their bondage in Egypt. And I spoke about how we, too, are called by God from fire and into fire...called to jump in to all those places of need in the world. Because God doesn't work alone.

Today, we hear the continuing development of Moses' call and his response. But instead of hearing about Moses wholeheartedly jumping into the fire with God, we get a very different kind of response. What we hear from Moses is basically, "I'm sorry God. But you've got the wrong guy. And let me tell you all of the reasons why I'm not the one that you want to send on this mission."

Now before we judge Moses too harshly for his skepticism, let's remind ourselves what he's been asked to do...return to the land where there was once a death threat on his head, inform the Israelites that God has called him, this guy that's been MIA for years, to lead them out of their bondage, confront pharaoh, and demand the freedom of all the Israelite slaves who play a big part in making the pharaoh immensely wealthy and his kingdom stable.

Would you jump into the fire with God if asked to take on a mission like that? One that must have seemed absolutely hopeless and doomed to failure.

Understandably, Moses lays out all his objections to God's call. Who is he to do this mission? Why would the Israelites believe him and believe that the God of their ancestors has been revealed to Moses and has called him to be their liberator? And even when God gives Moses the signs that were promised, the signs of the serpent and the diseased hand and turning water from the Nile into blood...Moses reminds God, who surely must know, that he doesn't speak eloquently. He's slow of speech and tongue. Can't God find someone else?

But as it turns out, God cannot. It is Moses that God has called and believes has just the right skills for this mission.

We should take note, that while God sounds a little frustrated with Moses and his objections and grows angry when Moses whines that someone else should be sent, God continues to hear and answer Moses. He takes the feelings of Moses into consideration. In fact, God acknowledges Moses' questions and resistance and responds in a way to answer those and adjust the plans so that Moses can be successful.

God is clearly the one in charge in this exchange. And yet, God's approach to Moses is grounded in relationship and isn't authoritarian in nature. (Brueggemann)

I want to focus this morning on one of Moses's objections in particular—his speech impediment. He begs God to send someone else because he doesn't think that he will be able to speak clearly and eloquently all that God has asked him to say. He worries that because of his slow speech, the Israelites and Pharaoh will not listen to him.

We know about speech impediments, particularly stuttering in our family, and so I can understand Moses' terror of being expected to speak boldly in front of a crowd of people.

But what is fascinating about God's response to this fear of Moses is that...while God has just shown Moses these signs, what we might call magic, that he will be able to perform—like turning the staff into a serpent—there is no magic that God will use to take away Moses' speech impediment. God does not choose to *correct* Moses' speech difficulties, but instead to work in and through them. First, there is a promise to be with the mouth of Moses and when that isn't enough, God calls Aaron to be Moses' partner so that they may speak together.

This exchange between Moses and God shows us that God works with us when we are called and doesn't expect perfection. God calls us because of our inherent gifts, like Moses' gift for leadership, and then will work through and with our human frailties and those things we may believe to be our limitations so that we may answer God's call.

So is there a call that God is making in your life? Perhaps a call to a ministry or a vocation or a neglected relationship or some opportunity to use your gifts? And if so, have you, like Moses, found a whole list of reasons why you can't be the one God is calling? If so, pay attention to what happens between God and Moses.

What I love about the relationship between them is, first of all, that it is relational. Moses is not an object to be manipulated by God. We see in Moses's story, that if we are open to hearing God's call, God will respond to our objections and fears. There may not always be a direct path. God has a willingness to be flexible so that we may be successful, but we also have to finally be willing to say, yes, to the call...to jump into the fire with God.

This is what Christian discipleship is all about. We hear again and again in the Gospels that the path that leads to God is not the easy one. We are told of the narrow gate and the impossibility of a camel going through the eye of a needle. When the rich man asks Jesus what he must do to follow, he is told to sell all his possessions. Even in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we heard this morning, we can see that while the priest and the Levite took the easy way when they passed right by the man who had been beaten and robbed, the Samaritan followed the compassion of Christ and helped the man—but at great expense and bother to himself.

If we look closely at the story of Moses, we find the foundation for this challenging discipleship we're called to as Christians. When Moses asks God who he should say

has sent him, God answers, “I am.” In hebrew, the word for “I am” is a form of the verb “to be.” The theologian, Martin Buber, translates it, “I shall be present.”

God wanted Moses and Israel to hear the name of God and know that they could count on God’s presence to accompany them as protector and guide. God would not call Moses and then abandon him.

And neither will God call us and then abandon us. Ours is a God who is present and in relationship with us—that is the foundation of our discipleship. And it is that knowledge and faith that allows us to answer when God calls. So may we all open our ears and our hearts to where God may be calling us. And may we find comfort and assurance in our God who will work with us and support us in those calls, despite our objections and fears. Amen.