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The Day You Turned Aside to God

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli, (Adapted from revkory.wordpress.com)

SCRIPTURE – Exodus 3:1-15 (NV)

3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father;[a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

12 And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you[b] will worship God on this mountain.”

13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am.[c] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

15 God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord,[d] the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’”

“This is my name forever; the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

THE DAY YOU TURNED ASIDE TO GOD

School has started for our youth, which means the return of the daily routine. Wake up, go in and wake up your sleeping student, brush your teeth, go back in and wake up your student again, go downstairs and fix their breakfast, go back upstairs to threaten your student with walking to school if they stay in bed and miss the bus. There’s a comfortable familiarity in the routine, isn’t there?

At the beginning of our story today Moses had settled into a nice routine. This day he probably got up early, put on some coffee and fetched his copy of the Daily Gazette. He got his kids up for school and threatened to make them walk if they missed their camel ride to school. Then he kissed his wife goodbye and headed out to the sheep for a day of tending the flock. Nothing new here, just another day. At breakfast time, Moses was responsible for keeping the sheep safe. By dinner, he’d be responsible for freeing a whole nation of people from slavery.

Moses’ lack of familiarity with God may explain some of Moses’ reluctance to jump at this opportunity. A call from God isn’t necessarily like winning the divine lottery, as Moses points out when he responds, “Who am I, that I should go to the Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” Moses is saying, “Me? God, you couldn’t be suggesting that I go, could you? I mean, I’m a worker not a leader. I’m one of the behind-the-scenes people, not the frontline person.” Have you ever responded to God like that? I know I have in the past. As soon as I heard a call to serve God, the Excuse Machine would start churning: “You don’t want me! I’m not a trained spiritual professional. Still can’t find the book of Amos in the Bible without looking in the table of contents. I took a Sabbath one Sunday last month and didn’t make it to the worship service. I’ve spent a Sunday or two on the green or at the game instead of in the pew. You see? You don’t want me, God. I’m a little under-qualified.”

We’re all under-qualified to do God’s work. Moses made excuses because he felt inadequate to do this alone. Well, he was inadequate, but he wouldn’t be alone. God tells him, “Don’t worry, I’m not sending you out alone. I will be with you. I would never ask you to do something by yourself. You couldn’t do it without me, anyway. But with me, you can do anything.”

And God does something never done before: God gives a name: “I am who I am.” Later, in the Gospel of John, when Jesus uses all his “I am” sayings – “I am the bread of life, I am the way, the truth and the life” – he is drawing directly on this statement to show his divinity: “I am who I am.”

For Moses and for us, that name means both comfort and mystery. It is comforting because it reminds us of the rock-solid stability of God. God is the great “I AM.”

So after a little more hemming and hawing from Moses, he finally agrees to God’s plan and the rest is history and the most important event in the history of our faith, at least until that night in the manger with shepherds and the angels and that bright star.

Moses is doing his job, living his life, tending his sheep, when he sees the burning bush. And the Bible says, “So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.’” When the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush.

He turned aside. That’s the thing. That’s what gets the whole ball rolling. Instead of keeping his head down, or ignoring this strange sight or just plodding through is day, or going and telling someone else, he goes over and looks. And then God calls to him.

Often times the circumstances of our life and the evil that operates in the world around us keeps us from focusing on God’s presence in our lives. God is right there, in the midst of the storm, in the center of the chaos, but we are so distracted that we don’t even look. In your life, what keeps you from looking? What distracts you from seeing God’s presence around you?

We complete our routine day after day, we tend our sheep and pay our bills and do our best to be good family people and good citizens and even good churchgoers. We fight the good fight and try to keep a smile on even when it feels like there’s not much to smile about. But maybe, just maybe, God’s calling us to something greater, something peaceful, something more. Maybe there’s a burning bush in our lives, waiting for us to turn aside from our hectic pace and frantic lives, to take our noses off the grindstone and our hands off the panic button and look. And when we look, maybe, just maybe, God’s waiting to speak to us and call us to something far greater than we can ever imagine.

You woke up today, maybe had some coffee, maybe read the paper. When you woke up, maybe you were responsible for doing your job or providing for your family or taking care of your children or just making it through the day with your sanity and your hope intact. Sometimes that’s all we can do. But there’s a call out there. Maybe you haven’t heard it yet. Maybe you’ve already heard it, but don’t know how to respond. What would happen if you turned aside and said to God, “Here I am,” and you invited God to do something extraordinary in your life? Who will you be when you wake up tomorrow?

To God be the Glory!