

Exodus 3 and 4 – Defining Moments - (Ex 3. 1-14)

Intro

I may have mentioned it a few times before!, but I'm a lover of Sport and increasingly in a sport like Rugby, when you watch it on TV, you hear the commentators and experts talk about the best teams, and what they say is that at the crucial moments in a match, winning teams make the right decisions at the right time. TCUP. They keep their cool, make good decisions, execute their skills under the highest pressure points. However talented you are, however, fit you are, however driven and passionate you are, when it comes to it, often it's about managing the pressure situations well that makes all the difference. It's what Bath Rugby didn't do last Sunday.

Managing key moments and recognising them in your life are absolutely essential if life is to go well. In our work, relationships, hobbies, church we need to understand what season we're in, so that you know when to act and when to wait. Biblically its about knowing God's timing (Kairos)

At the wedding service – we say I do

When a friend or family member is down, you when to pick them up, rather than kick them

When a God-given opportunity to step out is in front of you, you don't step back

Passage

We left the narrative last week, with God taking centre stage. Before God had been in the background. At end of Exodus 2 God “heard” the cries of the Israelites; God “remembered” his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God “looked” at the Israelites; and God “understood.” God is clearly now taking centre stage and in our reading today God is getting Moses’ attention, in a dramatic encounter and calling him to be God’s leader to deliver the Israelites from bondage and slavery.

Exodus 3, and 4 are really all the same narrative. Remember, *Moses life is at a dead end, he's a failed, forgotten, old man, in a dead-end part of the world. He's out as a shepherd in the desert, and he sees a bush that's burning but is not consumed, and he says, "This is weird. I'll investigate this sight."* He comes over and God speaks to him out of the bush. God says, *"Moses, Moses, take off your sandals. This is holy ground."* God reveals himself to Moses and gives him His name. he says, *"I want you to go to Pharaoh in Egypt to lead my people of Israel out of bondage."* And Moses says *are you crazy?*

As we read these chapters we're reminded that God uses repentant, humbled, weak men and women, who have come to the end of themselves and are ready to trust and depend on God. These chapters teach us about God and ourselves . We discover that we can encounter God personally, but that in encountering God, He gives us an entirely new agenda for our lives. We become people in mission *In these defining moments, Let me show you how **Moses is called in** and then he's immediately **sent out**.*

1. How God calls Moses in

Exodus 3 begins with these words: *¹Now 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. (Ex 3:1)* On this particular ordinary day, like any other day, when Moses was tending Jethro's flock near Mount Horeb, Moses saw something incredibly unusual—a bush that was on fire but not being consumed, Bushes when they're burnt are usually consumed. — So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see

this strange sight'— and when he gets there, we're told, "God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' **God calls Moses' name.**

²There 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. ³So 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 (Ex 3. 2-5)

In the Old Testament, the "Lord's messenger/Angel of the Lord" appears at some points to be a separate being while at other points this seems to be a way of referring to God's direct appearance to an individual. God's appearance at Mount Horeb was in the form of flames in a bush. God often appears in Scripture in the midst of flames. In Genesis 15:17 God appeared to Abraham as a "fiery flame." Beginning in Exodus 13, God would lead the Israelites as a "pillar of fire" (NRSV). Later, when God appeared to the Israelites in Exodus 24:17, "The Lord's glorious presence looked like a blazing fire on top of the mountain." In Daniel 7:9, God sat on a throne ablaze with flames. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples, the Spirit appeared as flames of fire. And Hebrews 12:28-29 (NIV) tells Christians to "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" . Here Moses encounters God in a fire of an infinite being and power - Moses has a radical, life-changing fiery encounter.

Blaise Pascal, a brilliant French philosopher in the seventeenth century, after believing in God, writing about God, and understanding God, had an experience/encounter with God one night. He wrote a little journal account of it, and he actually sewed it into the lining of his coat, so that when he died it was found.. What the note said was, "In the year of grace, 1654, on Monday, 23rd of November ... from about half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve. FIRE! God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace. [...] Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. [...] This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Has that happened to you? That's what happened to Moses too

Some of you are going to say, Yes but "That's Moses. Moses, of course, got this call because he was an extraordinary leader. But that's wrong. because we find the same pattern through scripture and church history witnesses to the same. The Bible says that a search for the real and true God doesn't originate in our hearts. God has to come, intervene and reveal. God comes and disturbs us and gets our attention. In the very beginning, notice Moses doesn't really sense God after him. He just sees a bush burning, a very strange sight, and he goes to see.

I wonder what originally disturbed you, when you became interested in God. Meeting someone? Events in your life that made you think "What am I really living for? What are the problems of life? Do I have what it takes to face death? Do I have what it takes to have a full life?" and suddenly your interest is awakened and your own condition becomes clearer? Now the call can come any old way, mildly or dramatically. It can come through trouble in your life. It can come through a sermon (even!), through the Bible, a book or a friend.....

At first, you don't think God isn't involved, but eventually God starts to call you out. "Moses, Moses!" . It's the most beautiful sound in the world to hear God speak your name. Do you know that? Have you heard God speak your name? (Les Cooper) Then, what does God say immediately? "Take your sandals off. I am not a tame God. I'm a holy God, don't mess with me." All through the Bible the presence of God was lethal and fatal to flawed, sinful human beings. Moses knew it and responded. (Intimacy and Reverence in the same place)

Here's how you know that God is calling you to himself. You start to say, "If this really is God, then that's all that matters. Instead of God being on the periphery, helping you through life, suddenly God becomes central. You take your shoes off. You hide your face. Because you're in the presence of Almighty God. Has that happened to you?"

Consider what God says next to Moses:⁶ *Then he said, "I am the God of your father, 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.* ¹⁰ *So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."* (Ex3:6-8, 10)

Occasionally, we may have the kind of burning bush experience Moses had when we hear the audible voice of God or when events clearly reflect God's call on our lives and it's dramatic and overwhelming, and we're in awe. But in my experience, God also calls us in a whisper or through a feeling, nudge, or compulsion that I can't shake. I hear the voice of God most often when I'm reading, praying, or discussing the faith with others or when I'm worshiping, singing, or listening to the Scriptures read aloud or preached.

2. How God sends Moses out

Notice how, having seen, heard, and known the pain of the Israelites, God responded. He did not send a legion of angels to liberate the Israelite slaves from Egypt. No, God showed up in a burning bush to an eighty-year-old shepherd! And not just any eighty-year-old shepherd. He found a shepherd who was fluent in the Egyptian language, who had been an insider when it came to Egyptian power and rule, and who knew philosophy, religion, law, governance, and leadership. He called an eighty-year-old shepherd. God called and sent a person. God said to Moses, I have a mission for you now "Get going! I'm sending you!" We're not meant to miss this: God sometimes chooses, calls, and uses the most unlikely of people to do his work in the world. Because God sees the whole picture.

This is such an important point that I want to make sure we get it. God's usual way of working in the world to alleviate suffering, injustice, and pain is not to intervene miraculously, or sending angels to make things right. No, God works through people. Mostly his people. You and I. We are God's hands and feet. God sees, hears, and knows the suffering of others. God expects his people to do the same. And God's response is to call us to step up as instruments of his aid to make a difference in the world.

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 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. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”*

God says “Now go. I have work for you to do. I’m a holy God. You’re not living for yourself anymore.” You see, when we come to God hoping he will sort our problems out so you and I can live the life we want to, we’re not grasping who we’re serving. You see if everything is about us and you have nothing bigger than yourself to live for, nothing more significant than your safety, your needs, your comfort, here’s the irony. Your life is making no difference, and in the end, because nothing is more important than you, it’s all about you.

God says, “If you know me, my cause, my truth, my nature, my name and my people are more important than your safety and your comfort and your bank account and your reputation. I want you now to live for my glory, and your neighbour, not for yourself. Ironically, we long to be fulfilled, but the only way you’ll be fulfilled is if you fulfill my calling. Now go!”

Do you notice what happens when he says, “Now go”? This is wonderful, isn’t it? Moses says, “O Lord, please send someone else, Moses doesn’t feel up to it and chapter four has this ongoing dialogue as Moses wrestles with feeling inadequate and not up to the task of being sent out by God.

But God is so patient. Never giving up on us, he gives Moses a message, a team, some signs, in a wonderful dialogue between Moses and God. God says ‘Say that I AM has sent you’ ...the pre-existent, self-sufficient eternal One, the One with no beginning or end has sent you...God is saying to Moses like Jesus in the storm on the boat “O ye of little faith.” We have a God who is so patient with us and so committed to us that he acts anyway. He rebukes the storm and He acts anyway. He works with us. He doesn’t despise the day of small beginnings.

God is calling us. To himself and to the world. He’ll continue to call us.. He’ll say, “Get out of yourself. It will be such a relief to stop thinking so much about yourself. Honestly! Lose yourself in my service and you’ll find who you really are and what you were made for. GO...He works with us because he’s that patient and he has a purpose for us.

God loves working with very unpromising material. Look at Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Look at how God used them. Paul talks about it when he says, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” 2 Cor 4:7. God made Moses into a great leader. He made Peter into a rock. Who knows what he can make of you and I?

What a God. He’s not a tame God, he’s a fiery God, he’s the real God, who calls our names and calls us out into the world for his purposes. Are you listening and will you respond? Is today a defining moment for you?

Let’s Pray

Give us, Father, the ability to see the real you, to hear your call and Go in obedience.

May St Swithin's be a church longing to do God's will, God's way, at God's time - all of the time.

We thank you that you work with unpromising material.

We pray for those who long for a Powerful encounter, that you would come to them

We ask for us as individuals in your church that we would know what this season is about

We would hear your call and respond, not tomorrow, not retreat in fear but Step out in Faith- TODAY

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.