

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses' Curiosity

Moses was a big character – a real hero – a warrior, mystic, political leader, prophet – all rolled into one. His relationship with God was profound and intimate, and his influence on the history of the people of Israel second to none. No one is born like that. It takes decades of gradual transformation, and today's story shows part of that process.

Moses' early life was turbulent. As an infant, he was marked for death, then rescued and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Although he lived his early years in comfort, he was doubtless confused and conflicted, sharing the heritage of enslaved people and the privileges of their oppressors. By the time we get to the point in his story which is described in today's reading, he's a fugitive, having killed an Egyptian taskmaster who had beaten a Hebrew slave. Fearing for his life, Moses fled to Midian, where he became a shepherd. But where to from here?

One day, while grazing his sheep, a nearby bush burst into flames. It wasn't an extraordinary event. Occasionally a dried brush caught fire in the hot sun, blazed a moment, and died out. This time the fire didn't die out, and he said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

We're warned against curiosity, after all, it killed the cat. Yet the desire to know is a powerful instinct, and this day curiosity got the upper hand. It seems to me that God uses our curiosity to draw us on. If Moses hadn't given into it, he might have stayed as a shepherd, and he would've never become the hero he became. Curiosity can lead us away from the familiar. It involves us in change and searching and, for sure, that can disrupt our lives. But if we're to realise our potential we need to allow ourselves to be caught by curiosity.

I see two approaches to life. One is not to question or search out, but to simply accept things as they are. The other is to inquire and follow our curiosity. It's the approach that asks questions – and yes, it can be disconcerting at times, but it also enables an exploring faith out of which can emerge a deep spirituality. This is Moses. He asks questions and wonders what's happening with the bush. As he nears it, he hears a voice: "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then it says said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Up to now Moses has known God second-hand – an impersonal power in whom he believes in a vague kind of way. Now he encounters God in relationship. It's the move from knowing about God to knowing God. Whatever happened that day, Moses experienced it as a moment of meeting with God.

I respect experiences like this, rare though they are, because they help us to know God more intimately. They're moments of change, enlightenment, and challenge. That's how it was for Moses. Life will never be the same again. It's an awesome experience, but it's not an end in itself. It never is. Moses is called to work with God. God sees the people's misery and suffering in Egypt and wants to bring them out to freedom – to a new place – a land flowing with milk and honey. "So come," God says, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people... out of Egypt." That's how it is with us. We're called to work with God to set people free from whatever enslaves them and prevents them from being who God calls them to be.

It's quite an ask. Not only will Pharaoh laugh at the idea, but Moses is wanted for murder. Yet, God is

calling Moses to be a hero – to accomplish the seemingly impossible... Here's another absurd idea. We're called to be heroes. We're not called to become a Moses, but we're called to become the person God has created us to be. God sends each person into this world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special act of love to bestow. No one else can speak that message, or sing that song, or offer that act of love. These are entrusted to us alone. When we accept that task, then we too have set out on the path that Moses took.

I'm like Moses. I find good reasons not to set out on this journey. I'm too old... I don't have the gifts or the wisdom or the experience... It's too scary. I come up with excuses. Familiar? Moses says he doesn't know what to say if the people ask him who has sent him. After all, who is this divine being that has sent him?

In Hebrew thought a name reveals something of the inner essence of the person. It gives us a 'handle' on them. God grants Moses his request, and reveals the Divine name: "I AM WHO I AM." ... "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

What does this mean? Perhaps, that God is beyond time and space. God is the great I AM, the holy One whom we can encounter but never totally comprehend. It's as if God is saying, "Don't box me in. Don't try to tie me down. I'll be who I'll be." Before this moment, God was simply 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob', the God 'of our ancestors' ... a tribal god... but now God can be known by all people.

Moses is also discovering that he can only learn who God is by following God on the path set for him. It's like that for us. We come to know God as we become the person God is calling us to be... as we step out and begin the journey. So, after more protest, more excuses, more self-doubts, Moses will go to Egypt, confront Pharaoh, and lead his people out of Egypt. Our story isn't that dissimilar. It's only as we step out, trusting God's call to us, that we come to know God.

To know God, we have to go with God. Faith isn't a spectator sport. It involves participation. We have to follow our curiosity, take risks, and be willing to try something new.

I wonder, where is God calling you – where is God calling this faith community? What's the special message you have to deliver, the song you have to sing, the act of love you have to bestow? It doesn't have to be spectacular. Yet, you've got the makings of a hero, and if you think this sounds absurd, then you're in company with Moses. But God has this habit of using very ordinary and fallible people (like you and me) to do extraordinary things.

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