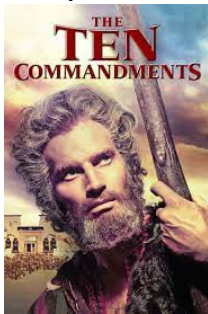


13 June 2021
Exodus 3:1-4, 7-12;
Exodus 4:1-5, 10-16
Afraid of Sharing
God's Story
First Mennonite
Church

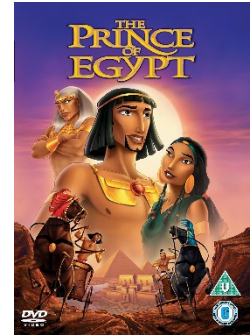


The story of the Exodus is a great story. So good in fact that it has captured Hollywood's imagination over the years.



In 1956 it was through the movie, the 10 Commandments.

Then in the 1990s it was an animated movie called, The Prince of Egypt.



In 2014, it was depicted in the movie, God and Kings. This story of God's encounter with Moses in the burning bush is near the beginning of the Exodus story. And it's a great, miraculous, yet strange story.



What makes it appealing to me is that it's a story that happens to a very ordinary person in a very ordinary place. And you and I are people like that. To ordinary Moses, the voice of God comes, and speaks, and calls. And what is Moses' response?

What a story! Moses is out at Mount Horeb, alone. The name Horeb means "wasteland," a lonely, desolate mountain. Just the sort of place for a man on the run. You may recall, Moses struck and killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a helpless Hebrew slave. After this, Moses fled to Midian to live in exile. Midian was the area where Mount Horeb was located. There we find Moses alone in a desolate wasteland of a place taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. He is not in a temple or church, where one might expect to be met by God. In fact, Moses is not looking for or expecting a meeting with God. Moses is no priest or prophet.

As you heard Shirley read portions of this story earlier, did you hear any lessons that might shed light your own story? I hear at least five.

Lesson One: Sometimes God comes to us when and where we might least expect it. I wonder if some of us have experience with running away. Not necessarily from a crime, but maybe running away from a family conflict, running away from a relationship or commitment, avoiding some changes you need to make in your life, hiding from something you don't want to admit is true. Could you tell a story of when you ran away, hid away in some desolate place? Did this experience also include an encounter with God? That supposedly lonely place was the very place where God found you, caught you, called you to live a different story?

A bush bursts into flame. But it is not consumed. Then, in the flame, there is a voice. How would you have responded to such an unexpected sight?

Moses turns toward the flame, fascinated, curious at what he sees there. God has created us as curious creatures. We want to know why. Something intrudes into our lives, something that we have not seen before, something that has no place within our accustomed frame of reference, and we turn toward it.

Lesson Two: Sometimes God is revealed in our unsettled questions, moments of mystery, those times when we wonder why certain things are the way are. Some of you may be here this morning, in church, because you are curious. Maybe life for you is more mystery than rational or scientific. Perhaps, you can be lost in time watching ants, leaf-cutter bees, or staring at the night sky. Maybe, you're fascinated by things that others may find odd, things that don't easily fit into our accustomed frames of reference. Some people, when seeing something strange and mysterious say, "That's weird. I can't explain it so I don't want to bother with it." There are others who say, "that's weird, that is wonderful. Let me turn toward it and find out more about it." God can work with that. Keep your curiosity. Like Moses, be open to seeing and experiencing something new. Turn toward the flame and see what you can learn.

Most of the time, we live in rather flat, predictable lives. There are moments, however, when God pulls back the curtain between eternity and us, sometimes there is a hint, a fleeting peek that God gives us. It's like getting a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. A burning bush, a glimmer of light very early on a summer day, a late evening sunset, the face of a child, the touch of someone you love, a word, a line of music sung by a choir. Go ahead, relish, enjoy, turn toward the flame, and see. And learn.

Lesson Three: Just as God chose an ordinary bush in the desert as a means of self-revelation, so God seems to choose ordinary, everyday objects and experiences in the world to confront and call. Everyday objects and experiences through which God speaks to us. Ordinary things and experiences that we can integrate into how we share God's story.

After this story, perhaps you will pay better attention to once seemingly ordinary people, places, and things. Who or what might be that lowly bush that bursts into flame, that becomes the very voice of God calling you by name? Keep cultivating curiosity about such lowly things that have, in the hands of a revealing God, the capacity to be holy.

Once seeing, hearing, Moses is now filled with fear, afraid to look at God, yet he stays and speaks, speaks face-to-face with no one less than God Almighty. It is God who has spoken to him, called him by name, broken forth in this spectacular, attention-getting manner in the bush that is burning but not consumed.

Lesson Four: When God calls Moses to go to Pharaoh to share God's story, Moses doesn't want to: *'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'* (Exodus 3:11)

In a similar way, when God called Jeremiah to share God's story, Jeremiah said, *'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy'* (Jeremiah 1:6). Like Jeremiah, Moses pleads to be excused from the call. Moses is certain that God has made a mistake, dialed the wrong number. There's an extended argument in which Moses gives God a shopping list of reasons why he's not the right person for the job.

1. First, I'm not worthy. I'm not good enough. Not faithful enough. Not spiritual enough. Not eloquent enough. All of us have this natural tendency of wanting to look—on the outside—as perfect as possible even though we know that on the inside we hold past mistakes, regrets, and failures. There's nothing special about my story. I'm not worthy to share my story. Look at me? I'm only a shepherd. Don't send me.

2. When that doesn't work Moses tries the ignorant approach:

'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' (Exodus 3:13)

People aren't going to believe me when I talk about my experiences with God. I don't know enough about God. I haven't studied the Bible or theology. But God says, that's okay, you'll learn as you go. You'll learn more as you follow me.

3. Moses isn't convinced and pulls out all the stops and offers up a sure-fire excuse for why he can't share God's story.

When we talk about different fears in English, we often add a Greek prefix that represents the object of our fears and add the Greek suffix, phobia, at the end of the word. For example:

- **Claustrophobia** are people scared of small spaces.
- I know someone who feared getting the Covid vaccine not because he feared what is in the vaccine as some apparently are, but because getting the vaccine meant getting a needle. Some people have **Trypanophobia** (tr-pan-i-phobia)—a fear of needles.
- Unfortunately, this past week the murder of the Muslim family in London Ontario by a 20-year-old man forced us once again to confront **Islamophobia**.

Moses' last excuse goes like this: *O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.*' (Exodus 4:10)

I like to think Moses had **Glossophobia**—an intense fear of speaking in public. God wasn't just asking Moses to share God's story of salvation with one of the



most powerful persons in the world—something that would be terrifying in and of itself—but God was asking Moses to share the story in a public forum. It's one thing to talk to yourself as you're in the shower or walking along the river; it's quite another thing to speak in public.

There is a reason why churches have big wooden pulpits. The reason is not because they are so imposing or holy but because they prevent you, the congregation, from

seeing the preacher's knees knocking together in fear!

O my Lord, I have never been eloquent... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.
Don't ask me to go, God. I can't speak in public.

How many of us can identify with Moses on this one? I know I can. Someone once said, the second greatest fear for the average person is the fear of death. The number one fear? It's public speaking. If this is true, then most people would rather die than talk in front of a crowd.

I remember when I was a teenager and was asked to read the scripture lesson one Sunday morning. I said no because the prospect of doing so was terrifying. Years ago, when I attended Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, I deliberately chose classes where I didn't have to present my research papers in front of the class. I breathed enormous sighs of relief when I found out that my classes had huge number of students in them because then I could blend in with the crowd. Yet, here I am today sharing God's story with all of you.

I think God has a real sense of humour!

Moses was scared, terrified. Don't choose me. Please choose someone else. Anyone else. I don't care. Anyone but me. And do you know what God said? No. I'm going to do great and wonderful things—salvation things—for you and for all creation, and guess who's going to help me? God gave the **glossophobic** Moses, a spokesperson by the name of Aaron.

Lesson Five: All of this has been at God's gracious initiative. This entire encounter was God's idea. This is not something that Moses sought, or a matter for which he prepared. Moses was not looking for opportunities to learn more about God by sharing God's story with others. Moses wanted no special task, especially no intensely fearful task of sharing God's story in a public forum. The call, the choice of Moses to share God's story with Pharaoh—all of this was God's idea.

God has heard the cries of an oppressed people. God is now on the move, beginning to overturn present power arrangements, preparing to make a big move against big Pharaoh. And guess who is going to help God? God will take those gifts and abilities that Moses has, along with Moses' weaknesses and utilize them for good in the world.

Later, when Pharaoh will want to know, “Moses, who sent somebody like you to come, and harass, and command me?” Moses will reply quite honestly, “This is all the Lord’s directing and doing.”

So Moses must take off his shoes. The ground on which he stands is holy. It is holy because an exchange has taken place here between God and humanity, incarnation, God with us, God calling a human being to divine service. Here, on this holy ground, God Almighty reached down and grabbed one ordinary human life for extraordinary purposes. Moses’ story is about to be caught up, commandeered as part of God’s story.

I’m telling you all this, along with these five lessons, because I wonder if Moses’ story is your story. Some of you have had God come to you at some “Horeb,” in that desolate and lonely place in your life. God came to you when and where you least expected. God revealed God’s-self to you because you were curious enough to take that step of faith into the unknown by simply checking out that ordinary, but unusual bush. God has given you opportunities to share your story of faith even though you’ve resisted many times. Finally, you weren’t out looking for God. To your surprise, God was looking for you!

God chose an ordinary, everyday experience or person to speak your name, to call you forth, to enlist you in God’s service. Your friend or neighbour, perhaps. Or maybe it was a quiet moment when you thought you were all alone, just enjoying a beautiful day. Or in the outstretched hand of someone in great need. You heard your name called. At first, you, like Moses, didn’t want to share the story. You, like Moses, knew you weren’t eloquent in speech, terrified to share God’s story in public. Yet, God chose you. And all this was God’s idea, not yours. Later, if someone asked you “What is a person like you doing in a place like this?” all you could answer was, “God called my name.”

What’s your story? Does the story of Moses fit your story of faith? If this it doesn’t relate to some experience of vocation that you have had, be open to God’s Spirit and just wait. It will. Amen.