

## Exodus 3

Once again, we have a chapter that deals with identity, the identity of both Moses and God. As a reminder, Moses is not only bi-national (Israelite and Egyptian), but he is now also Midianite, having lived with his wife's family for close to fifty years. In addition, he is also now a shepherd, which adds to his previous job descriptions of foundling, prince, murderer, outlaw, exile, husband, and father. Though he may be satisfied with his current situation, he will still ask, "Who am I..." when confronted by God's call. In the same way, it is not at all clear who this God is who is calling Moses to action. We will watch as God offers us insight into God's identity as well.

The story opens with the very familiar burning bush story. Moses has gone out beyond or deep into the wilderness, which is always the place where strange things happen. It is also a dry place (which is the meaning of Horeb) where the man drawn from water might not feel quite at home. There Moses turns aside to see a bush burning but not consumed...meaning he is a curious fellow. God informs Moses that Moses is on holy ground, not only because God is present, but because it is a space set aside for a particular Godly purpose, their conversation. God makes the first introduction. God is the God of Moses family (which is a beginning of Moses discovery of his identity). Moses is afraid. Afraid in this case is word containing awe, fear, and reverence; a fear that does not cause flight but creates connection.

God continues God's introduction with a series of verbs. God is the God who observes (misery), hears (cries of distress), knows (deeply cares) and acts (to liberate). The object of these verbs is the misery of God's people. The purpose of these verbs is the liberation of God's people. In a sense these verbs act to liberate life in the same manner God's words, "Let there be..." in Genesis create life. This introduction then leads to the first defining moment of Moses' new identity, Moses is now an employee of God. Moses is to go to work for God to help free God's people. Moses response is, "Who am I that I should go...?" God's response is "I will be with you", or to put it another way, that Moses identity is now the one who travels with God.

Still not convinced of his calling and unsure as to this God's identity, Moses asks for more information. "What is your name?" God's answer is, I am the one who is always the same (I am who I am) but is free to act in new and bold ways (I will be who I will be). In addition, we find YHWH (Lord) given as a name, but it also simply means "he will be", a reminder of the ancestral connections.

Now that Moses knows who he is (the one with whom God travels) and who God is (the one who is the covenant keeping liberator), we can discover Moses' new job description. He is to assemble the elders of Israel, go to Pharaoh, ask for a few days off for the slaves (which by the way was an Egyptian custom...to give slaves a few days off) in order to worship this ancestral God and then be rejected by Pharaoh. In other words, here is your task and you will fail. However, God will not fail. God will do what is required to insure this recreation of life in God's people and world. The result will be that God's people leaving Egypt become just as wealthy as Abraham and Isaac became when they left their encounters with Pharaoh's of the past.

**Reflection:** There have been multiple studies that show that an individual's perception of God is either more closely tied to the individual's experience of their fathers or of the images held by the individual's parents, rather than the images of God in the scriptures. In other words, rather than allowing God to define God's self, we define God. One outcome of this defining is that we can define ourselves in ways that allow us to stay comfortably complacent. If we allow this story to speak to us however, we are called to understand that God, while always being the same promise keeping God, is a God who will always come to us with new adventures, challenges, and opportunities. This is a God who never allows human beings to become complacent because there are always people who need to be liberated and find the life God offers.

Questions:

1. Have you ever asked God, "Who am I that you want me to do something?" What answer did you get?
2. Where have you witnessed God's verbal identity (observes, hears, knows, acts) at work?
3. How are you allowing God to define you in the light of God's promise to always be with you?