

“MOSES’ LENTEN CHALLENGE”

Lent 3C March 7, 2010

Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 63:1-8;

1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Introduction:

In today’s lesson from Exodus we encounter Moses at a crucial point in his life. He has a meeting with God that is so remarkable it graces the pages of Holy Scripture and will live forever. Moses receives a challenge from God – we might call it “a Lenten challenge”. Let’s review

What Took Place Between God and Moses:

You remember about Moses, don’t you? He was born at a time when Pharaoh had ordered all male Hebrew babies to be killed. Moses’ mother couldn’t stand that thought, so she put him into a reed basket and set him adrift on the Nile, thereby placing him into God’s hands.

Moses’ basket ended up being discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter who took him into the palace with the intention of raising him as her own son. Moses thereby grew up a Prince of Egypt. He received the finest education available and all the privileges of royalty. He also knew he was a Hebrew which eventually began to work on his conscience. Therefore, Moses began to establish contact with the Jewish community.

One day he observes an Egyptian overseer

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mistreating a Hebrew worker. Interceding, Moses ends up striking and killing the Egyptian. To his surprise, the Hebrew worker reacts in a way that causes Moses to fear for his own life, so he decides to flee Egypt.

Moses leaves behind all the privilege he was raised with, plus the guilt that the people of his parents were being terribly mistreated at the hands of the Egyptians, but what can he do? Moses flees into the wilderness east of Egypt putting his fate into the hands of a God he knows of, but doesn't yet know.

Eventually, Moses encounters a family who make their living herding sheep. The father invites him to join their family, and Moses ends up marrying one of his daughters. Life goes on – forty years pass. Moses, the Hebrew baby saved from the waters of the Nile, the Prince of Egypt, is now a Shepherd.

Then one day Moses is out with the sheep when he sees something that makes him stop in his tracks. It is a bush that is burning – but more. The bush is burning but is not consumed by the fire. Moses decides he needs to get closer and see this wonderment up close. As he draws near to the burning bush an angel of the Lord speaks to him out of the fire telling him to take off his sandals because he is now on holy ground.

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Then begins a conversation with God that results in the greatest challenge Moses has ever faced.

It Is Moses' Lenten Challenge:

I'm trusting you understand that when I say "Lenten Challenge" in regards to Moses, I am not being literal. Moses predated the church season of Lent. However, what God asks Moses to do involved what I've challenged us to do this Lent; to listen to God and 'give-up', or 'take-up' whatever God challenges us to do.

Moses met God at a burning bush. Have you been having a 'burning bush' experience with God? That is, has God been speaking to you in the midst of unusual circumstances? It might be that your life is a bit 'topsy-turvy' lately – the bush is burning but not being consumed. As crazy as it can get, those are the circumstances out of which God often speaks in our lives. So, what did God say to Moses, and how did Moses react?

After telling him to remove his sandals because he was on holy ground, God introduced Himself to Moses: *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* Then, Genesis says Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. It's interesting to me that Moses couldn't even look at the glory of God emanating out of a burning bush. The Bible

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says, “no one can look at the face of God and live”.

Sometimes, in the wacky circumstances of our lives, God makes an appearance. We see God, but not directly; and though we don't actually look on the face of the living God, we glimpse the glory of God shining through whatever craziness is going on.

Having Shannon's sister move in with us has been a crazy, stressful time. Her daughter, Jennifer, was already living with us for over two years when her Mom moved in. Now, there is her Mom and a younger brother, and a second dog. It has totally changed the dynamics of our family. I can't exactly put my finger on it, but I have sensed for several months now that God has been speaking to Shannon and me out of this burning bush living arrangement. It has stretched us, frustrated us, angered us, and frightened us in ways we never expected. What exactly is God saying to us and how will we respond? I don't know the full answer to that yet, but I already sense that our ability to reflect God's grace in all circumstances is the challenge – and, it is a huge one; one we cannot accomplish without God's Spirit filling us, and guiding us every day. It is truly fearful sometimes to be in the presence of the living God. There is a tendency in unusual circumstances to think, 'my situation is so

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unique that no one can possibly understand what I am going through.' However, that is a lie the Devil wants us to believe because it isolates us and turns us inward. The truth though is found in today's Epistle lesson. Paul is reflecting on the Exodus. He says what happened to Moses; the things that happened to Israel in the wilderness are examples God uses to teach us. And then there are these two sentences: *"No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."*

The next thing God did was tell Moses that He was aware of Israel's suffering; that he had come down and was going to deliver them from the Egyptians into a land flowing with milk and honey; and – 'Oh by-the-way-Moses, I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring the people out.' And, of course Moses said, 'right on God! I'll gladly take-up that responsibility. Bring it on'- No, of course not. Moses responded out of his fear: *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

Moses responded more out of fear than faith; and I suspect that is the condition of most of us when God challenges us beyond our current image of ourselves.

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When we are not as close to God as we might be, or need to be, than our faith in God is not developed enough to quickly overcome the natural fears life raises within us. God calls us to a challenge, and we fear the call because we see ourselves as limited, as fallen, as unable to do God's will. We need to repent of our sin-induced image, and see ourselves as God's own; able through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit to be God's person in any circumstance. It is the point Jesus is making in today's Gospel lesson: *"Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did."*

Moses had to repent before God, and I suspect you and I have to repent whenever God challenges us to the next test in our lives. We need to repent of our stinking-thinking, maybe of resentments, or other issues; but we need to repent so God can forgive us and fill us afresh for the new challenge.

What happens next is God seeks to assure us. God said to Moses: *"I will be with you."* That is a promise God repeats over and over within the covers of Holy Scripture. God wants us to know – to believe – to trust – that we are never left alone. God doesn't just call us and

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send us on our way. God goes with us. Jesus said, "*I am with you always*"; "*I will never leave you nor desert you.*" That was new information for Moses. He knew the idols of Egypt were always there – standing in their temples, but here was an encounter with the living God. The idols never spoke to Moses, but the God of his fathers was speaking to him from within that burning bush – telling him that he wouldn't be going to Pharaoh alone, God Himself would be going with him.

Then, because He knows us so well, God went the extra mile by promising Moses a sign that He really was going to be with Him. He instructed Moses that after he had brought the Israelites out of Egypt he would worship God on the very mountain where the bush was burning. That might not seem like a significant sign such as a rainbow after a rainstorm. However, God is not trying to show off for us. God is trying to build our faith, our confidence, that we can trust God to do whatever He says.

God has put it into my heart that there is a spiritual agenda attached to Shannon's sister and son being with us. In my heart I know that is true, yet I look for a sign that God is with us. Sad, isn't it? Why did Moses need a sign? Why do I need a sign? Is it that we need an

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extra boost, an encouragement to do what we know we need to do? Sometimes, it has to do with our feelings of unworthiness or our sense of brokenness compared to the worth and glory of God? I guess we humans want to be successful at what we do, so God gives us a sign that, indeed, because of His presence, we will succeed.

Even after receiving the promise of a sign from God, Moses still voiced his doubts: “What if the Israelites ask me what your name is, what will I tell them?” All the gods of Egypt had specific names; and if you wanted to invoke their presence you spoke their names, so the assumption was that the living God also had a name. If you know the god’s name you can summon him to your cause. Moses was asking a legitimate question based upon his Egyptian upbringing. He and the Israelites who had lived in Egypt for four hundred years, had forgotten, or never knew, that Almighty God is not an idol. He doesn’t come when His name is called, like one of our pet dogs. He is not under our authority; we are under His – even if we don’t yet realize it.

God had some educating of Moses to accomplish if Moses was going to be God’s ambassador to Egypt. God instructed Moses this way: *I Am Who I Am. Thus, you shall say to the Israelites, I Am has sent me to*

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you.” What is interesting is that God answered Moses with the Hebrew verb ‘to be’. “Tell them, ‘I was, I am, and I shall always be’, has sent me to you.” In that answer, God teaches us something about ... God. Idols are created, and can be destroyed. God Almighty always was, is, and ever shall be. God has no beginning and no end. Even as our study of the Cosmos has convinced us of the notion of infinity, God teaches us about the reality of eternal.

When God issues our Lenten Challenges it is from the perspective of a life we cannot comprehend. We understand life and death. That is a learned reality we accept. But, what is eternal? What has no beginning, always is, and always will be? I try to stretch my mind to comprehend that, but I can't get all the way there. God is greater than my imagination. So why do I think I need to know God's name? Why do I think I can somehow control God's actions? Why don't I just give myself to God, and trust God completely? God has already proven to me He loves me, wants what is best for me, will never leave me or desert me, so what am I waiting for?

What are you waiting for? Are you ready to trust God with your whole heart? Maybe that is our collective Lenten Challenge. If it were easy everyone would already

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be doing it, wouldn't they.

"O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water."