

Rev. Heike Werder  
Exodus 3 and 4

### Why Me...?

“How did you first feel called to ministry?” is a question often asked of us most obviously in this profession. Sometimes it’s an idle question; small talk from strangers trying to be polite and seemingly interested, while they scan the room for someone safer to talk to. Sometimes it’s a probing question, asked by someone earnestly seeking signposts in their own discernment.

Stories of call. Our Holy scriptures are full of them. Moses saw a burning bush. Isaiah experienced an earthquake in the temple. A young unmarried country girl by the name of Mary found herself pregnant with God’s child. Saint Paul was temporarily blinded and thrown to the ground. High drama examples from scripture.

Or listen to how 11<sup>th</sup> century mystic Hildegard of Bingen described her call experience: “ a burning light of tremendous brightness coming from heaven poured into my entire mind. Like a flame that does not burn but enkindles, it inflamed my entire heart...just like the sun that warms an object with its rays...All of sudden I was able get a taste of the understanding...” (1)

I always feel my own story of call pales in comparison. No special effects. No earth-shaking experience. No throw-down. No major crisis. Just a simple knowing one day in a class on worship that my place to serve God’s church would in a congregation, and not a seminary or university, not primarily as a professor and teachers, but as a pastor embracing all of God’s people in all of life’s experiences and stages. It simply was a knowing, a moment in time when my path and calling became clear. Or to say it with Hildegard’s words a “taste of understanding.”

When I served on the Committee on Ministry for the MBA (Metropolitan Boston Association), the candidates who presented themselves to be ordained into ministry all had a story to tell about being called. Actually it was one of the requirements to be able to articulate that sense of call, to share that moment when God said, “I want you!”

If Moses would have come before the Committee on the Ministry with his call story and all the excuses he had, I don’t think he would have even been allowed to start the process. What we know about this great leader would actually have disqualified him from any position in ministry. His people skills were poor. He had a temper. He wanted things done his own way. He killed a man, and then ran away to avoid punishment. He had a speech impediment (he stuttered). He had no confidence in himself that he would be able to do the job.

Nothing in his resume said, he is the right man for the job. And yet, God called him despite his shortcomings. Actually each and every person called by God in the Bible had some major obstacle to overcome to be the person God wanted them to be: too young, too old, too doubtful, too poor, too afraid, too depressed, too burnt out, too lazy, too arrogant, too drunk, too rich, too unfaithful, too dead (as in Lazarus' case). And yet, God called them. (2)

The question of call should not be limited to the biblical cast of characters and those in professional ministry. Each and every one of us has to discern our sense of call and vocation by asking the question: what is it that is distinctly ours to do in the tapestry of creation? Or to use a phrase from the poetry of Mary Oliver: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" (3)

God is calling us constantly into being. Call is not a one time event. God is not just some Divine Career Counselor picking us up by the scruff of the neck and plopping us into this office or that church or this MBA program or that factory. God is constantly calling us into being who it is that we alone can be ... the one thing in life that cannot possibly be delegated.

In her book about listening to the voice of the Spirit, Christina Baldwin helpfully poses two questions to the soul: "What do you want me to do?" and "How do I need to change in order to do it?" Call inevitably means change, and resistance can naturally and quickly set in. (4)

Throughout the Bible people of faith protest that they do not have the courage or the words or the power to accomplish what God asks of them. Moses, our example at hand had a whole litany.

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" and "They will not believe me or listen to my voice" and "oh. My Lord, I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech and of tongue" and in spite of all of God's reassurances Moses final counter "Why me? Please, Lord, send someone else!"

You and I are in remarkable company if we feel a certain resistance when it comes to change; when it comes to God's call. We come up with all kinds of reasons why we can't do what is truly possible with God. Yet no one of us wants to be less than who we are, who we fully can be.

How do we actually know that it is God calling us to do whatever God wants us to do? How do we recognize the Divine call in our lives?

We do so by paying attention. We must look for God in the ordinary, in the everyday, and recognize that all moments we are given are holy. God's presence can be experienced everywhere, any time, at work, at school, at home. God's presence happens to ordinary people going about their ordinary routines. It's important to be watching and listening for those holy moments. It is the only

way to avoid the common disconnect between our faith and our daily life and work.

Words from Frederick Buechner come to mind:

“Taking your children to school and kissing your wife goodbye. Eating lunch with a friend. Trying to do a decent day’s work. Hearing the rain patter against the window. There is no event so commonplace but that God is present within it, always hiddenly, always leaving you room to recognize him or not to recognize him, but all the more fascinatingly because of that, all the more compellingly and hauntingly...Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness – touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it – because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.” (5)

We got to pay attention to whatever is going on around us on the outside, and to listen to that still small voice within. When our lives are not fulfilling, or we dread going into our jobs, or even when we get fired, there may be something better lying ahead, and the boredom, or dread, or fear and anxiety may be just what we need to push us in a new direction.

There are times when we recognize God’s call by listening to the voice and reason of other people. When life presents us with challenges, other people might have more clarity about what is going on in our lives than we do. They can step back and take a more objective look at the situation. At times in our lives, especially those times requiring discernment, it’s important to seek out wise counsel. Friends, family members and even strangers can be messengers for the Divine, often without realizing it.

But the best explanation for recognizing God’s call in our lives comes from the South African UM Bishop George Irvine who said: “If it’s loving, if it’s just, if it promotes right relationships, and it scares the h-e-l-l- out of you, it just might be a call from God.”

Moses’ life changed dramatically after God got hold of him. It actually was when his real life began, and his real troubles. Pharaoh’s army tried to kill him. The people that he liberated complained and griped for 40 years; and when he finally arrived at the Promised Land, God decided that someone else, Joshua, should take them over to the other side. Moses died in the land of Moab without ever reaching his goal. The people grieved for him for about a month, and then went right on without him.

Whatever it is, God has a calling or series of callings for every person. Every time we open our ears and hearts to hear and discern that call, life inevitably changes, for God calls us to the intersection of the greatest hunger and joy of our true self on the one hand and some real need in the world on the other.

God does not call us to fulfill a personal need or to get all the glory. That is really missing the point of God's call. The purpose of human life has always been about being part of that which is larger and more enduring than one's self. But if we pay attention and ask the probing questions, we'll discover the places where our great hunger and joy and the world's great needs meet.

But it up to us to ask the questions, "What do you want me to do, God?" and "How do I need to change in order to do it?" We've got to ask, often, even daily. Only then might we experience a taste of understanding, and instead of asking "Why me?" ask "Why not me?" Amen.

### Sources

1. Bowie, Fioan and Oliver, eds, Hildegard of Bingen: Mystical Writings, new York: Crossroads, 1990
2. Just for fun! The next time you feel bad or useless and are too far from God to do any good, just remember ...

Noah was a drunk, Abraham was too old, Isaac was a daydreamer, Jacob was a liar, Leah was ugly, Joseph was abused, Moses had a stuttering problem, Gideon was afraid, Sampson had long hair and was a womanizer, Rahab was a prostitute, Jeremiah and Timothy were too young, David had an affair and was a murderer, Elijah was suicidal, Isaiah preached naked, Jonah ran from God, Naomi was a widow, Job went bankrupt, John the Baptist ate bugs, Peter denied Christ, the disciples fell asleep while praying, Martha worried about everything, the Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once, Zaccheus was too small, Paul was too religious, Timothy had an ulcer ... AND Lazarus was dead!

No more excuses now. God can use you to your full potential. (Found it on the internet, somewhere)

3. Line taken from Mary Oliver's poem, The Summer Day; New and Selected Poems, 1992, Beacon Press, MA
4. Christine Baldwin, The Seven Whispers, Listening to the Voice of the Spirit, New World Library, Novato 2002
5. Frederick Buechner, Listening to your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner, New York: HarperCollings, Publishers, 1992