

Series on EXODUS 3-4 God calls and Equips

Part 1: Exodus 3: 1-12 God unsettles Moses

Part 2: Exodus 3: 6-13 Moses refuses the call

Part 3: Exodus 3:13-22 God reveals a new name (Rabbi David Ostrich preaching)

Part 4: Exodus 4: 1-17 God overcomes Moses' resistance (Leslie Laing preaching)

Part 5: Exodus 4: 18-20, 27-31 The return and beginning of new journey

Part 1: God unsettles Moses

Exodus 3: 1-12

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then God said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' God said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' God said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

SERMON:

We're returning to Exodus for the next several weeks - last January we spent a few weeks in chapters one and two, exploring the very beginning of what would become an epic journey for the Israelite people.

Now we return to this story that is at the epicenter of the Hebrew scriptures - and I want to look at Moses' journey through the lens of the hero's journey.

Why? Because the hero's journey is *all of our* story.

Back in the late 1940's ([SLIDE 1](#))¹ Joseph Campbell, a professor in comparative religion, introduced the idea of the hero's journey, outlining the structure, showing how there are patterns, stages found in all of our stories - from Greek myths to nearly all religions - and in our everyday lives. The hero's journey is not for a chosen few. We all live this journey at different times and places in our lives.

([SLIDE 2](#)) in his book "*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*"² Campbell describes how the hero's journey is woven into the human soul, it's part of the psychology of being human.

The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, our superheroes like Spiderman.

The hero's journey is my story, it's your story. It's the human story. No matter how small or inconsequential our lives may seem, each of us makes choices, and from the ordinariness of our lives, sometimes God invites us to something new. And it's not just about leaving home and venturing out on a quest. The journey may be an interior journey, where we meet dark places within ourselves, where we hear God's call to expand our internal horizons.

Before we dive into Exodus, I want to look at the outline of the hero's journey. There are 3 main stages:

SLIDE 3

Departure

Initiation

Return

And within these stages, patterns, substages, occur.

SLIDE 4

From the call to the refusal of the call, at least for a time, and then into the thick of the story - what often looks and feels like one step forward and two steps back. And yet the journey continues, with a Guide, through the deep waters, into deserts that might seem to swallow us up and take decades to cross. The journey continues on and on, with victories, accomplishments large and small, along the

¹ [PowerPoint slide show](#) to accompany sermon

² Campbell, Joseph. 1949. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton University Press.

way, and lots of trials and tribulations, until we return, not once and for all, but eventually we come back, transformed, broken and made new.

This journey is cyclical - happening again and again.

(SLIDE 5)

Some arcs are across our whole life span, others in the course of a day.
Over and over we begin the process again and again - or we shut it down.

(SLIDE 6)

It's a choice, one of the stages is the refusal of the call, which we'll look at next week.

Always a choice whether we begin; set out, depart - sometimes this stage is referred to as 'separation'.

Each stage comes with a cost - danger; loss

But when we don't engage, when we don't enter the journey, our own journey of the hero - we become smaller - it might show up in our lives as a depression, as fear, as lethargy that overwhelms us.

SLIDE 7

There's a cost to engage - but it's the road to life. Jesus showed us this road, and invites us to join him on it.

AND - There are many costs to not engaging.

The wisdom, God's wisdom, is seeing the opportunity, the door that might be open just a crack, inviting us to step into something new, unknown.

Sometimes the beginning happens by simply watching - looking. Paying attention.

Like Moses, here... out in the wilderness, beyond the wilderness, living his ordinary life.

SLIDE 8

The hero's journey begins in the ordinary.

It's there. On an ordinary day. In a place that maybe is on the edge, but still mostly known, that this revolution of Moses' journey begins.

The first task, the first step, of the hero's journey?

THE CALL

When something unusual happens, oftentimes, the hero doesn't know what to make of it. Remember - the hero is anyone, you, me...and here in our biblical text, Moses.

In the midst of the ordinary, we're told Moses is out beyond the wilderness.

SLIDE 9

It's there, beyond the wilderness, carrying out the mundane work of caring for his father-in-law's flock, that we find Moses.

"Beyond the wilderness" - what might that spacial clue say to us - is it a hint that Moses is seeking something in life? Is he feeling an uneasiness, a readiness, an itch of some sort? Was Moses ready to hear, to encounter God in this extraordinary way?

How about you?

Can you identify times in your life when you've been uneasy? Unsettled? Restless? Maybe that's the beginning.

For Moses it began with

SLIDE 10

The angel appearing out of a bush

And so here we are, with Moses, far, far out in the wilderness, Moses alone with his sheep, when Moses makes his first move

SLIDE 11

- we're told "he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed"

He Looked. Noticed. Moses saw *this* bush. This ordinary and not so ordinary bush. He looked at it. Not a passing glance and hurrying along down the path. He looked. How often are there hints of God, the fingerprints of God, here in this place, and we don't notice?

SLIDE 12

Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.'

He looked, and then he acted - not in a big way, but in a significant way. He turned aside, stopped his usual patterns, stepped off the beaten path. Not far - God saw to that, but Moses took the first step.

SLIDE 13

He moved toward the bush.

Moses was curious, willing to turn aside, to step toward this new thing.

All it took was a step, not even a step, all it really took was Moses intention, his willingness to turn aside, for God to act.

We see a God here that is so willing to meet us, to encounter us, to be in relationship with us. Moses' curiosity and willingness are the hidden ingredient in this special sauce. It doesn't take much, but it makes all the difference.

This willingness to turn aside and see allowed for the encounter.

Our scripture goes on:

SLIDE 14

'When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!'

God calls him by name. God knows him. Moses, Moses...

SLIDE 15

God desires to be in relationship with this outsider, the one born a Hebrew, raised in the palace of the Pharaoh...the one who fled all that he knew after committing murder... the one who finds himself in a foreign land, working for his father-in-law, a priest of Midian.

It's this man, a herder of sheep, an alien in a foreign land - one who doesn't quite belong anywhere, whom God calls by name.

(END SLIDE SHOW)

Moses, Moses! God calls. Insistent. Wanting his attention.

And Moses response? Here am I. Here I am.

Reminds me of roll call in school, when the teacher would call out my name, and those first days of a new school year, when everything was new - that first time or two, I'd listen especially carefully - did she say it correctly? Did she know me? Did the teacher call me Kathryn, or Kathy? Or was I called *by my name*?

Here. Here I am. Those first days of school were the beginning of a relationship. The teacher calling out a name, listening for the answer, 'Here'. I'm here, present, ready to learn.

And so the journey begins. Moses says Here I am. This flawed human with a complicated past. He says 'here'.

And God responds “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ God said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’”

I am the God of your father, of your people. God says - I know you, Moses; I know your name; I know your history.

Moses, tending sheep, living his ordinary life, notices something strange, different,

he’s curious, steps off the path, and suddenly finds himself standing on holy ground, hearing the voice of the God of his people.

Moses took that first step. A step onto sacred ground.

The hero’s journey always begins in the ordinary world.

There is the summons. The Call. - it often appears out of nowhere, like a burning bush.

Our task? To look, to listen, to stop, to engage, to be curious.

We are to WAKE up and take notice. It’s holy ground we’re walking on. Maybe right here, on the carpet, with crumbs and frayed edges... right here - the floor with dog hair and dust bunnies.

Maybe we’re standing on holy ground, right now. And God is calling our name, inviting us to a journey with God.

We don’t know where the journey will take us.

We don’t know all the trials we’ll face.

What do we know?

We know

That God is with us.

God said, ‘I will be with you’ to Moses.

Jesus told his followers - I will be with you always.

Jesus promised the coming of the Spirit, to dwell among us - to show us how to live.

Moses was the most unlikely hero. How about you?

In the ordinariness of your life, are there burning bushes in your midst?

You don’t need to look like a hero, or feel like a hero; you simply need to notice, pay attention, and be ready to take the next step, just the next step, with the Holy One guiding you along the way.