


Part 2: refusal of the call

Exodus 3: 6-13

Part 2: Moses refuses/questions the call

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.' **But** Moses said to God, '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?'

SERMON:  sermon22.01.23.pptx

When I was in chaplaincy training, we spent a lot of time thinking about how we talk with one another. We used a communication tool called SAVI¹, (SLIDE 1) that provided a systematic, objective analysis of what makes conversations move toward greater understanding and connection, and what gets in the way.

SAVI uses the image of a traffic light - with the red, yellow and green gradients showing when communication works well, and when it comes to a stop.

SAVI focuses both on what we say, and *how* we say it. In that time of training, (SLIDE) we learned there are ways of communicating that make it much more likely that a message will get through accurately and effectively, and others that either confused the message, or stopped communication all together.

In that year of chaplain residency, we sometimes would take apart whole conversations, mapping them with this SAVI grid to understand what helped and where our habits of speech might trip us up.

For some of us, the “Yes, *but*” (SLIDE) - there in the top right) was an unhelpful habit that kept showing up. You see, the “yes, but” is in the red light box. It’s a conversation stopper. The shared flow of ideas often comes to a halt when “yes, but” enters the conversation.

Last Sunday evening, (SLIDE) as the newly formed State College Interfaith group met to begin planning to welcome an Afghan refugee family, there was a moment in that conversation when I heard it - there was an implied “yes, but...” a moment when it looked like this potential... this possibility... was about to close. New beginnings are fragile. Sometimes it doesn’t take much to end something before it’s even begun.

Moses, our reluctant hero, (SLIDE) is full of Buts; of yes, buts - not just in today's scripture reading, but throughout his journey.

¹ <http://saviccommunications.com>

But before we jump into today's scripture, let's take a step back, for a moment, to last week's sermon. Some of you may not have heard it, others may have no memory of it.

Last Sunday we explored the story of Moses' stopping and turning to look at the bush that was burning and not consumed. We looked at this story specifically through the lens of the hero's journey.

The hero's journey (SLIDE 6) starts in the midst of an ordinary life, with a call - maybe an unexpected idea that carries enthusiasm, maybe a text or email inviting you to something different, maybe just a thought that opens up possibilities that were unseen before. Maybe the call is something dramatic like a burning bush. The journey starts in the ordinary, and quickly moves on. Danger, fear, uncertainty show up. (SLIDE) Today, we're going to focus on what trips us up. The Refusal of the call, and what comes next.. The refusal of the call is a perilous moment, when, like in that meeting last Sunday night, the fragile new thing can easily be destroyed.

Here, in our scripture today, (SLIDE) as God speaks to Moses out of the bush, this as yet unnamed God who grabs Moses' attention and calls him to active solidarity. For though Moses doesn't recognize God yet, God is the mentor who will see Moses and the Israelites, through all the trials ahead.

From our scripture, we learn a few key bits of information about this God,

(SLIDE 9)

(click 1) The first piece of information related to this call is: God names godself in relationship to Moses - the God of his ancestors, Abraham, Issac and Jacob.

(click 2) The second bit of information revealed is that: God names God's understanding of the plight of Moses' relatives, his people; the suffering of those enslaved in Egypt. God understands.

(click 3) And the Third piece of information lodged in God's response: God lays out a plan - 'I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.'

God is clear in the call - I see their sufferings, I hear their cries, and I, God, will deliver them to a good land, a broad land, a place of abundance and refuge.

So come - (SLIDE) God says 'so come' Moses, join me in this work. I'm going to send you to Pharaoh, that place of your past - the power center - to bring about change.

Moses' response?

Don't you love how human Moses is? It's the classic refusal. **SLIDE** , then click)

But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

(**SLIDE**)

God offers reassurance - I will be with you...

Again, a second refusal:

(click) **But** Moses said to God, '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?'

(click)

As the dialogue between God and Moses continues over the next several chapters, so too do the refusals. As the story continues, we hear:

(Click) in chapter 4:1 Then Moses answered, "BUT suppose they do not believe me or listen to me..." God's response?

God gives Moses 3 signs to use.

(Click) it doesn't stop - BUT Moses said to the LORD "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent..." Moses plays the personal card here. Moses is saying why he, specifically, is not cut out for the job. Once again, God doesn't buy it.

Then finally, out of total desperation Moses says:

(Click) 4:13 BUT he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else."

It's then, finally, that God gets angry. Enough of this. There's work to do. (CLICK)

There's danger in refusing the call - we have examples elsewhere in scripture -

When Lot's wife (Genesis 19:17-26) was told "don't look back or stop." when fleeing her home and heading towards something new, she did. (**SLIDE**) She stopped and looked back at the devastation of her past, and was turned into a pillar of salt. A refusal that seems so small.

When Jonah was called to go to Nineveh, (SLIDE) ran away from God; headed in the opposite direction... he ended up on a boat that endangered the whole crew.

Yes, there is danger in refusing the Call.

Lady Wisdom, speaking in the book of Proverbs has much to say about the foolishness of turning away from the call of God:

(SLIDE)

Proverbs 1: 20; 24-35

Wisdom cries out in the streets...

Because I called and you chose not to listen,
because I beckoned you and you ignored me,
because you rejected all my advice
and rejected all my counsels,
I, in turn, will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock you when fear swallows you up -
when panic falls down upon you like a snowstorm,
when terror engulfs you like a tornado,
when distress and anguish knock you down.

(SLIDE)

At that time you will call upon me, but I won't answer;
when you search for me, I'll be hiding.
Because you despised knowledge,
didn't fear Almighty God,
ignored all my advice
and turned up your nose at my cautions,
now you must eat the fruit of going your own way,
and choke on your own choices.
When you turn away from me, you're choosing death,
and your complacency will ruin you, you fool!
But you who listen to me will be at peace,
have quiet, and fear no misfortune.

END SLIDE SHOW

Wow. Powerful words about the consequences of choosing not to listen.

And yet, AND YET, not all who hesitate are lost. Moses' refusal, his hesitancy remained:

Who am I?

What shall I say?

Why would Pharaoh, the powerful one, listen to me?

Throughout the questions, the doubts, the potential refusal, God remains steadfast. The conversation continues.

That's the key. Throughout all the doubts and reasons why he's not cut out for this job, Moses remains in conversation with God. The 'buts' don't stop the encounter. God stays, refusing the refusal.

Where does this fit into your life?

Is there something that keeps you from living the expansive life (which can be pretty scary to step into)?

Moses had plenty of reasons to not go... How about us? Not enough time, or knowledge, or energy, or...

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and a thought will pop into my head - something like 'what makes you think you know enough to do *that?*' - whatever the 'that' may be. My doubt may be planning an upcoming congregational meeting, or finding my place on the Civilian Oversight Board. The questions in the middle of the night are persuasive - they try to convince me I don't know nearly as much as everyone else in the room; that I'm not cut out for this work; that I don't have what it takes. Sound familiar?

Those are the stumbling blocks, the 'buts', the road blocks that make us say 'no' to the call.

For those of you who are on the edge of retirement, I wonder where this fits in for you? Retirement, even contemplating retirement, can be a place of immense change, and with change, fear. How does God meet you at the transitional times in your life? Are there refusals in your attitude or willingness to consider something different?

Do you ever sound like Moses when he said:

“BUT suppose they do not believe me or listen to me...” or

“O my Lord, I have never been eloquent...” or, when we’re really desperate,

“O my Lord, please send someone else.”

Those were all Moses’ lines, and sometimes they sound like my conversations with God too.

Scarcity rules in the land of the ‘but...’

This God, the God who has yet to be named, yet knows the names of the ancestors, is a God of Abundance - a God who makes a way out of no way. The God who stays with us.

God stays with Moses in his hesitancy, his resistance to this call. As we watch Moses wrestle with his own inner demons and doubts, God remains in relationship with him.

This is a God who hears these BUTS and doesn’t buy into the story of ‘not good enough’, doesn’t let it sidetrack the mission ahead.

Moses and God remain in relationship.

They continue to turn toward one another.

It’s a journey together.

There’s both an insistence from God, and a patience in letting Moses’ name his fears. Moses’ journey, his interior journey, right here, is one of moving from being in charge of his life, to being in relationship with God, and allowing...ALLOWING God to lead the way.

How about you? What are the nudges you sense? And what are the refusals - the interior fears? the inner dialogue that, like Pharaoh, crushes possibility?

SCARCITY; scarcity thinking rules in the land of buts.

But... or maybe AND YET...This God, this God the one who remains in relationship - knows our history, is a God of Abundance - a God who makes a way out of no way. And invites us to continue the journey together.

AMEN.