

Can You Hear Me Now?

“Moses’ Call”

[Exodus 3:1-12](#)

“Where have you seen God since we met last time?” “What was your God moment?” These were the questions the participants of *Engaging Spirituality*, one of the study groups of our church, asked one another every time we gathered for the last 9 weeks. Initially, I think we all thought that they would be difficult questions to answer. But, as we began to share the stories of our God moments, we soon realized that God was ever-present in our lives -- in ordinary places and in ordinary times! As we faithfully continued to practice this discipline of testimony, we were amazed at the richness of our stories of the divine encounters that were captured in our ordinary, everyday lives.

Here is one of the stories of a God moment that I shared in the class. It happened after the first good rain we have had since I moved here. As I got out of my car and was walking into my house, I noticed in the garden area some green looking things shooting up from the ground. With no rain over the past several months, the garden had looked pretty barren. The ground was very dry and most of the plants there either had already withered and died, or were barely surviving. Now, one night of rain had brought things back to life. While I was admiring the beauty of those new shoots, suddenly, I heard the voice of God: “These mere plants have responded to the small amount of rain this quickly. How about you? How do you respond to the abundant grace and mercy I have shown you?” The encounter was probably less than a minute in my ordinary, daily routine, but it was truly an extraordinary, holy moment. Something that I still vividly remember...

Meeting God in the midst of his ordinary life was also Moses’ testimony.

When God appeared to Moses, he was going about his daily routines, tending to his-father-in-law’s sheep. On the day of his encounter with God in the burning bush, Moses rose and probably went about his morning doing what he had always done. At the age of 80, having spent the past 40 years of his life working as a shepherd, he was not looking for a change of direction in his life. He certainly had no expectation of encountering God either. It was not as though Moses was heading to a special place, about to do a special thing. He was just an ordinary shepherd, who was doing his ordinary work when God showed up. That’s right, God appeared to Moses on an average work day. Like with many others in the Bible, Moses’ God moment caught him completely by surprise.

Last Sunday, we heard how God appeared to Samuel in the temple as he was going about his normal business -- completing the ordinary tasks associated with being the assistant to the temple priest, Eli. God also appeared to the prophet Isaiah in the temple as he was going about an ordinary day -- carrying out his daily ritual of worshipping God as a devoted worshipper. You will hear more about his call next Sunday. Jesus appeared to Peter while he was engaged in his ordinary routine as well of casting nets to catch fish as a fisherman. And the risen Christ appeared to the apostle Paul on his commute to work of chasing after Jesus’ followers as a fervent believer in Judaism.

What these biblical accounts tell us is that we can experience God’s presence anywhere and anytime. It can happen at work, or on the way to work, at school, sitting at home, or even while we are at the gym. It can be while you are at the park or inside a shopping mall. It can be while you are hiking up a mountain or lounging out on a beach. It can occur in the quiet stillness of the night or during the busiest hours of the day. As it happened to Moses, God still appears to ordinary people who are going about their ordinary routines.

The American writer and theologian, Frederick Buechner, had these words to say about encountering the holy in the ordinary in his book *Now and Then* (p.83):

“Taking your children to school and kissing your wife good-bye. 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.”

When God appeared to Moses, it was to call him to fulfill a specific task. God wanted Moses to liberate the enslaved Israelites, God’s chosen people, to freedom. God still needs people like you and me to do God’s work in the world today. There is work to be done, and God chooses to work through human beings. We are in partnership with God. We are God’s hands and feet. When God calls us, God has something specific in mind. It can be as momentous and big as Moses’ task, or as mundane and small as helping someone with grocery bags. It may be to do something somewhere far away in a foreign country, like the ministry of AMDCF Sahr Moiwa created and many of you are supporting, or somewhere closer in America, participating in the ministries of Nomads and Caravan and SSP Mission trips, or here locally in the city of San Jose or Campbell, doing the homeless ministry, going on the Crop Hunger walk, helping in the reading program for Rosemary School children, or even right here at our church campus, singing in the choir, teaching the Sunday School, helping with the youth ministry, joining the Wednesday Wonder workers, serving in the kitchen, and so many other hands-on ministries.

God still calls people out of their everyday routines. When God appears, their ordinary life experiences are turned into something extraordinary, even holy. This was how the weekly tutoring program for the underprivileged children in the neighborhood of my first church started. There was a neighborhood child whose name was Jaris. One day, during my routine daily work as pastor, I saw him and a few other boys throwing rocks at our church parsonage window. When I told them to freeze, of course they ran. Without thinking, I gave chase. I don’t know what possessed me to do this. I was just caught up in the moment I guess. Well, they ended up running into a high-rise, public housing apartment complex and I followed them inside running right behind them.

By the time I got into the building, all of the boys were out of sight except for Jaris. Being the youngest of the bunch, he wasn’t able to run away as quickly as the others. When I asked him where his parents were, I discovered that there were no caretakers around for him and his brother. As I surveyed the surroundings, I noticed that there was nothing to entertain the children living in the building -- no indoor playroom or outdoor playground. When I returned home, I could not get him out of my mind. My heart ached for him and the other children in the building. So, I decided to approach the church leaders with the idea of starting an afterschool tutoring program for our neighborhood children.

Our weekly tutoring program began with my two teenage-children and two ladies in their 70’s serving as volunteer tutors. Humble beginnings, I know. But, we continued to grow as word spread among the children from the high-rise building. Eventually, more volunteers came to help. And slowly, we had a packed church basement filled with kids and mostly elderly volunteer tutors. Our tutoring program even inspired a young man from our church to attend seminary! While serving as a youth group leader and helping with the weekly tutoring program, he discerned a call

into ordained ministry. I am proud to tell you that he and his wife are United Methodist clergy and new church planters in the Portland area. For an old and dying congregation, what God worked in our midst was truly a miracle.

Our ordinary places and common human experiences can be the ground where we sense God's call. When the voice larger than life itself calls us, we know we must respond. What specific task is God calling you to perform in this specific stage of your life? Is there something that is gripping your heart, persistently lingering and not letting go? Is it something that you can do with your labor? or with your time? or with your knowledge? or with your skills or with your money? Is it a task that you feel unqualified or ill equipped for? If so, don't worry because that's exactly how Moses felt about his task.

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? (v. 11) This was Moses' initial response to God's call. The call was too overwhelming. Even though God was speaking to him from a burning bush, it seemed all too impossible of a task. Moses was fearful and felt inadequate. So, he resisted the call. Actually, this was not the only excuse Moses came up with. Here are some other excuses found in the second half of chapter 3 and chapter 4 that I have paraphrased.

1. People will ask me, "What is the name of God who sent you to us?" Well, I do not even know your name!
2. What if people do not believe or listen to me and insist that you never appear to me?
3. I have never been good with words. I stutter and stammer!

According to a Jewish Midrash, it took God 7 days to convince Moses that he could accomplish his mission!

Making excuses for our actions or inactions comes very natural to humans. We tend to make excuses for our inadequacies and mistakes. We make excuses for breaking promises. When we do something wrong, we try to place the blame on something or someone else. We change the story a little bit here and a little bit there in order to rescue ourselves from embarrassment or blame.

Like Moses, we make excuses when God calls us to a task. We often ask ourselves self-defeating questions like, "Who am I?" or say things like, "I am too old." "I am too young." "I am just a student." "I am just a woman." "I am just a minority." "I am too shy." "I am too busy." "I am new." "I have never done it before." "I don't have enough time." "I don't have enough money." "I am not a good speaker." "I do not speak English well." I confess that quite a number of these excuses were mine whenever God called me.

Some people say that feeling inadequate is better than feeling overly confident. Actually, recognizing our limitations can be a good thing because it can help us to fully rely on God instead of our own knowledge and strength. However, we must remember that just because we are limited does not excuse us from answering God's call. God did not call Moses because he had the right qualifications for his assigned task. He was already 80 years old. He had been away from Egypt for 40 years and no longer had any inside connections there. By our human standards, he was not close to being the best candidate for such a politically-charged task. Yet, this is who God chose!

May this give us the courage that we need to say Yes to God. Please, no more excuses when God calls you! For with God, nothing is impossible! God will provide for you with whatever you need to do the work God has called you to do. God will equip you with the right abilities and capabilities to complete the specific task God is calling you to. Do you believe it?

To the reluctant and less-than-perfect future leader and hero, Moses, God gave a promise: "I will be with you." And God was faithful to this promise. God would go with Moses down to Egypt. God would work with him and work through him. God would show him and those around him his presence through signs and miracles that demonstrated God's glory and favor.

Whenever God calls, God also promises. God promises to be with us. Whatever God may call us to do for the sake of those who need our presence and compassion, we have the blessed assurance of God's presence, which abides with us.

Brothers and sisters, God is still speaking. God is still appearing in our midst. It may not be a burning bush, and it may not be such a dramatic encounter that you feel like you must take off your shoes. You may not be called lead an entire people out of exile like Moses. You may not have to confront any persons of great power, either. And, yet, God still calls you. And God sends you. And God makes the same promise to be with you as you walk by faith.

Thanks be to God! Amen.