

FINDING GOD IN OUR BEING & BECOMING

Exodus 3: 1-14

Let me begin with a few stories...

Dalia is a busy young woman. As the oldest daughter of immigrant parents she has not known a time when she was not on the run doing things and covering bases. She's been a top student graduating with an honours degree, and is now working long hours as a professional on her way up the promotion ladder. She checks in on her parents and helps them out every way she can. She checks in on her younger siblings and makes sure they will not let down, upset or embarrass their parents and the family name. Their parents have risked everything to bring the family to Canada, the least they can do is fulfill the dream of every immigrant – to succeed in this new country and make their family and community proud.

But lately, Dalia has had some troubling thoughts. What is it that she wants for herself outside of what she feels pressured to do? Is success for the family a good enough motivation to live her life? What is good for her? What does she need to do and be in herself and not just for everyone else? If she doesn't find a way to just stop all her running and doing and just be, how can she truly discover and discern her way forward outside of fears, pressures, "shoulds" and "musts" that have grown inside her? What judgements is she afraid of? What truth is she running away from?

Well, aren't these good questions for any of us? Whether our lives feel like a lot of running and doing with little time to stop and be or not, where are the obstacles in our lives, the pressures, the "shoulds" and "musts" that undermine our freedom to be and become from deep within ourselves?

And then there is Clifford. Clifford suffers from the opposite problem Dalia does. Clifford isn't running with a fear of stopping long enough to figure things out. No. Clifford is stuck, fearful of the future and what may come. He has faced illness, a chronic condition, a failed marriage, estrangement from his children, missed promotions, and feelings of being left out as life moves on.

Clifford cannot find the freedom and courage to rise above and beyond this pit growing into a chasm where he's stuck and afraid of crawling his way out. He feels isolated and alone. He sees himself through his failures and resentments, what people have communicated by what they have done or failed to do for him. His body and his spirit are also failing him. How may he rise above his rut, his negativity, and believe something new and better is possible, that his life is

worth much more than he's imagined its worth based on what's been dealt him thus far? Good questions!

Are you more like Dalia, busy running and doing, and challenged with the need to just be in order to figure things out more authentically for yourself? Are you plagued by too many shoulds and musts, by some kind of guilt or obligation, judgement or expectation that won't let you off the hook in some way? How can you claim the right and necessity to just be in order to see what may be spoken into you more genuinely as a word from God nourishing your soul?

Alternatively, are you more like Clifford, having come to a place for any number of reasons apparent or mysterious, afraid to hope, to risk, to try, to move forward in some way? Are you stuck in some way, trapped in some way, caught in some web of realities that convince you there is no future just right for you beyond limitations, discouragements, shame, blame or just lowered expectations?

Let's ponder our scripture reading in search of some answers to such questions.

Freedom to be and to become is a huge concept in the biblical story of the Hebrews. And the masterful and enticing way this story is told over many books of the bible is by intertwining the story of the people as a whole with stories of individual persons and their inner struggle for freedom. This is very much the story of Moses. Moses has spent much of his life running. It all began as he felt a huge weight of responsibility for his people. As an infant, Moses survives a genocidal campaign by the then ruler of Egypt, seeking to kill the hope of the Hebrew people by murdering their infant children. Moses' mother and sister hide him and through the compassion and love of a young Egyptian princess, he is taken, adopted and raised as an Egyptian with his nanny being his own mother in disguise. Moses is raised with the unique opportunity to live fully inside the Egyptian world of privilege, but with his heart fully devoted to his people and their struggle for freedom. Can you imagine the pressure on Moses to fulfill his duty and obligation to his people given his privilege?

So what does Moses do? As the pressure is building inside him living his privilege in a palace while his people are being brutalized and humiliated daily, he witnesses an Egyptian foreman beating up a Hebrew slave. Something breaks inside Moses and he explodes with rage. He grabs hold of the Egyptian foreman and hits him, hard. Oh no! The man doesn't move. Moses has hit him so hard he has killed him. What happens now? Not only is Moses not thanked for intervening, but the Hebrews are now upset. Moses has caused trouble for them. He can go back to his privilege while they must deal with the consequences of a murdered foreman. No doubt they will be punished.

But Moses can't go back to the palace. Word will get out that it was he who killed the man. Even though you'd think Moses could cover it up given his status in the palace as the son of a

princess, Moses can't live with it and with the inner conflict he suffers in himself anymore. He runs and runs and runs. He ends up in the desert and comes upon a community of farmers and sheep herders. He meets the woman who will become his wife and joins the family business. Even though he stops running on the outside, however, the torment within him, this sense of duty, responsibility and guilt, the "shoulds" and the "musts"... none of it will leave him. How will all this be resolved in Moses? Can he leave it all behind once and for all with time and distance? Or will his past catch up with him and the pressure inside him break him?

Well, now we come to this epic incident in our reading that is credited as the call of Moses. Moses is managing his sheep as they move through the base of the mountain called Horeb. This mountain has a sacred quality to it and Moses feels something stirring within him. In biblical story telling, what happens within a person is described using external events in nature. There is this bush super dry and smoking under the hot sun. It comes aflame and somehow it is not consumed. How is it that Moses not only stops to look at it, but also feels God is present here? Somehow God is speaking to him. Moses is confronted and forced inside himself to listen. He's been running away far too long. The pressure in his soul, the dissonance between his life of escape and his duty for his people... Unless Moses finally stops his running and listens, nothing will be resolved in him.

But listening is not just words. Moses struggles. There is a back and forth between God's voice inside him and Moses' resistance to what he's being called to do. If you read the whole of this chapter you get to witness this back and forth vividly. In our reading, though, there is an important moment when God reveals to Moses who God is. The name of God is an invitation to spiritual intimacy. It's not just a name but a revelation of who God is.

But here's the thing about God's name. In Hebrew, it's just 4 letters. The best English version is: Y H W H. Depending on the vowels we choose to insert between these letters we can make it sound like YaHWeh or YeHoWaH (Jehovah). Regardless of the name and pronunciation though, there is another issue that scholars are divided on. The word itself basically means in present tense: I am who I am, as in our reading. Or it can also mean in future tense: I will be who I will be, as in other translations. What's the difference?

I am who I am is about being. Moses needs to hear this because it's God inside him calling him to be who he is. Is Moses the fearful man running away, trying to forget who he is because it's too painful to go there, or will he stop and just be so he can hear who he really is and then figure out what he must do with the courage and faith he needs to become the person he will become?

But then there will be the people, Moses' people. Will they reject him or open their hearts to him? This all depends on whether they are open to hope. After generations of humiliating and

abusive enslavement will they find the courage to rise up and claim their freedom? Will they open their hearts to faith and hope again? God may be who God is, but only if they rise up and make a go of it will they discover the God who will be what God will be for them.

Do you hear the difference? Some of us need to encounter God speaking to us within as: I am who I am. We need to stop, get grounded, listen and just be. Only then can we tap into a more authentic call for our lives outside of what circumstances, expectations and requirements imposed from outside us have defined and driven our being. But others of us need to encounter God within us as: I will be who I will be. Only as we step out of our cave which we've been stuck in for any number of reasons, may we also experience what God will be for us as faith, hope and love take us into the freedom of new becoming.

Sometimes we need to just stop and be. Other times we need to trust that God will become in us as we trust the journey of becoming, taking steps forward beyond our fear of falling or disappointing others or making a bigger mess of our lives. God will be there for us even as God is here for us now. We need to stop and witness the burning bush for ourselves, the bush that is never consumed. This is the motto of the Presbyterian Church: "*Nec Tamen Consumebatur*" in Latin, or "It was not consumed" in English. God is here calling us to be. God is also ahead of us calling us to become. God is who God is and God will be who God will be in our lives. How do you need God to be so that you can be and become in your life?

Dalia needed to stop and just be. Clifford needed to find the courage and faith to risk the journey of becoming. Moses needed to just be so he could face what he was running from. An encounter with God as "I am who I am" was what he needed to make him stop and let go his fearful running, to open his heart in faith. The Hebrew people needed a revelation of God as: "I will be who I will be" so they could rise up and become with God above, beside and within them empowering them to go for it. How must we encounter God anew for ourselves at this time of our lives?

For me, I'm probably like Dalia in some ways and like Clifford in other ways. I need to encounter God anew as I am who I am and as I will be who I will be. What about you?
Amen.