

2) 2:11-4:17 - THE CALL OF MOSES

What happens to Moses from the time he is taken into Pharaoh's court as a child until he emerges as the champion of the Hebrews? Exodus is largely silent on the issue as the four gospels are silent in the case of Jesus between his birth and adult life.

But there are some small bits of information in the 2nd half of Chap. 2 that are very revealing.

- Moses is apparently "Egyptianized" at least in the externals of his clothing, speech, and manner (2:19 - an Egyptian has helped us). But at heart Moses is a Hebrew who will not forget his Hebrew heritage (2:11 - his blood boils when he sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew worker).

- Moses "strikes" the Egyptian, killing him. He tries to hide his deed, but it is found out. He then flees to the desert. His time in the desert of Midian is paralleled in the desert time of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Was it a time of discernment for the two figures?

- In Moses case, he marries and has a son; Pharaoh dies; the suffering of the Hebrews deepens under a new leader; God hears their cry and "remembers" the covenant made with their ancestors (Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob & Rachel/Leah).

1) The Burning Bush

- Mount Horeb - later Mount Sinai

Even before Moses, Horeb had been a sacred place of worship for native religions worshiping local deities and spirits of the desert. But now Horeb is called the mountain of God. The parallel in Christianity is the building of many cathedrals and churches on ancient pagan religious sites (e.g. cathedral in Mexico city built on site of prominent Aztec sanctuary).

- At first the bush is just a visible curiosity for Moses. Only when God speaks does he interpret it as a divine appearance. The fire is the result of angelic activity, not that Moses actually saw an angel. Because God is present, the site is holy, and therefore Moses removes his shoes. This requirement is found elsewhere in the Old Testament and is also a practice of Muslims as they enter a mosque. Also, Moses hides his face because the ancient belief was that one could not look directly at God and live. (The distance between us and God morally speaking is too great.)

- The divine presence on the bush is no desert spirit but the ancestral God of the Hebrews.

2) Moses' Protests

God's appearance is but an initial step to the call of Moses to be the divine agent to liberate the Hebrews from slavery. In 3:7-10 God feels the suffering of the people and takes it as God's own. But God does not intervene directly. God intervenes through people. Moses is the means to God's will being done. How is God's will accomplished through your engagement and involvement, your concern and care?

- 1st Protest 3:11: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God gives Moses a sign that he will be present with Moses. After the people come out of Egypt they will come back and worship God on this mountain. The sign of God's presence is looking back and seeing God's providential presence in his life.

- 2nd Protest 3:13: "In what name do I go?" Egypt had many gods, and the Hebrews may have forgotten theirs, or at least had not experienced God's saving power in a long time. Had many lost their faith altogether? God tells Moses God's name: "I am". The Hebrew word "hayah" means "to be". God is Being itself - the ground and the source of all that exists and all that is. For God to reveal God's name means that God makes God's self vulnerable to Moses and the Hebrews. It is a step towards intimacy and to building a relationship. This will place obligations on both God and the people. "I am" is also "The Lord" v.15 (Yahweh) the God of the Hebrew ancestors. There is continuity and newness in every encounter with God.

- 3rd Protest 4:1: "What if the people don't believe me" (That the Lord appeared to Moses and called him)? Moses was never publicly elected, nor did he pass through the accepted channels towards leadership. Indeed, he was an outsider to the Hebrew community. Why should they trust him or the God he claims to represent? God's answer is to provide Moses with three tricks or "signs" which are intended to impress the Hebrews and the Egyptians. The Egyptians put great stock in magic, incantations, spirits and the like. Their sorcerers were even able to match much that Moses had in his arsenal of tricks. The number 3 was also an important number in magic.

- 4th Protest 4:10: "I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." But God is the source of all speech and all wisdom, and God will inspire Moses' speaking.

- 5th Protest 4:13: "Send someone else." God is now angry, but still compensates for Moses' concerns. Moses' brother Aaron who is a good speaker will do the talking. God will speak to Moses, Moses will speak to Aaron and Aaron will speak to the people. Moses is the mediator between God and the people and Aaron is the preacher.

3) The Nature of God

- God is persistent and steadfast with Moses. There is always a way through our doubts, questions, inhibitions and fears. Moses' struggle was as much a struggle with himself as it was with God. For every question God provided an answer.

- Some tasks or calls seem overwhelming and we are not prepared (our call in the face of unfortunate, unexpected circumstances or limitations). What is our call from God in the midst of new situations at work, in our retirement, with our children, our spouse, the place in which we live, our church, a world of injustice? God accompanies us but does not give us pat answers. We must struggle to find our way and discern God's will. We receive signposts and directives. But the particularities of our lives and our situations will provide unique shape and colour to the answers we derive.

- There is a parallel in Moses' call and that of other prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in terms of the sense of inadequacy, of moral weakness, of a call that is both fearful and irresistible. This is something we all share in life, even as we all have a call from God. The question is: are we listening to God and discerning our call in the particulars of our life? How will we find the courage to follow through?