



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
SPOKANE

The Call Beyond Your Skills & Passions

Genesis 3-4

Rev. John Sowers

October 26, 2008

All of us encounter people in our lives about whom we see their circumstances and we wish that God would deliver them out of their hurt and pain. What if God wants you – in his name and on his behalf – to be the one who changes their circumstances, who delivers them from bondage?

Scripture

Genesis 3:1-12; 4:10-13

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?"

²The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' ¹¹He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹²The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.'

¹⁰And the LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! ¹¹And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹²When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.' ¹³Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear!'

Sermon

When Emilie was young, she did not sleep through the night. She would wake up, it would be dark and she would be all alone. And so, almost each night, sometime between 1 and 4A.M., she would cry out from her bedroom. This is what she cried out: "Mommy, Mommy, come here." Now, you will have observed that she did not cry out "Daddy, Daddy, come here." No, she wanted to be delivered not judged. Jennifer, who is good and kind, would hear her daughter cry out and she would go into her room, and gently and quietly rescue Emilie from the loneliness and the darkness of the night.

God hears the cries of his children in their night in Egypt. And like a loving parent, he will deliver his children from their oppression and their fear. For some of you, this will be the most important thing that you will hear this morning. Some of you feel just as trapped in the darkness as the Hebrews or as Emilie. In the hurt of your souls this morning you are crying out – even if it is silently – to be rescued. The consistent message of scripture is that God is a rescuer and a deliverer and that he will come and get you and bring you to the safety of his presence. He did that Cain, he did that with Noah, he did that with Samson, he did it with Ruth, and through Jesus, he does it with all who now follow Christ. Cry out and the Lord will hear you and come to bring you to him.

In our rescue and deliverance story this morning, God sends Moses to get his people out of Egypt. Moses was born a Hebrew but raised in the Pharaoh's court. However, when he saw one of his fellow Hebrews being beaten, Moses intervened and killed the Egyptian. When Moses learned that his behavior had been spotted he fled. So when our story picks up this morning we are in year forty of Moses' post-royal court life as a shepherd working for his father-in-law.

It is in the drudgery of this job and this existence that God comes to Moses. God – the Father and the Son – appear to people more often in their homes and at their jobs than at the synagogue or the temple. That's ironic of course, because most of us look for God to be present here at church but we don't often look for him at home and even less at work. Should we be looking for God on the job more often? Is it God's desire to give our vocations more meaning? And is it God's desire to give our lives more meaning within our vocations?

It is while tending sheep that Moses sees this burning bush, which is somewhat surprising, and hears the bush speak, which is downright shocking. God has heard his children's cries of anguish and now he has chosen this child of his, Moses, to deliver his family. Again, there is an important observation that transfers over into our lives as well: God desires to use his people as his vehicles to accomplish his purposes. God could have gone to the Pharaoh himself. He could have spoken to Pharaoh out of one of one of the plants in the throne room, he could have started in on the plagues all on his own, but instead he chose Moses to be his messenger, his prophet, and to wield his power.

All of us encounter people in our lives about whom we see their circumstances and we wish that God could change those circumstances. We see people that we wish God would deliver out of their hurt and pain. What if God wants you – in his name and on his behalf – to be the one who changes their circumstances, who delivers them from bondage?

So God chooses Moses to be his deliverer. Why? Why Moses? Certainly, Moses has had some unique background – he was raised in Pharaoh's Court, and perhaps that is a valid reason for God to seek out Moses. Experience is always important when you are seeking a candidate for a position. But experience is not the only criteria – what about skills?

Moses famously protests in our passage that he does not have the skills necessary for the job of deliverer. He is not articulate, he is a stutterer. Certainly, the forty years of sheep tending has removed any false sense that Moses may have had about his abilities and his skills. What if he is accurate and simply being honest with God when he tells him that he is not the smooth talking, powerfully articulate person that God would seem to need in this role? I think that our tendency is to read this story as if Moses is simply ducking the job and hence throwing out false excuses but what if he is not? What if Moses doesn't sound like Charlton Heston? Why, then, would God pick him?

Of course, this question applies to so many of you when it comes time for God to choose you as well. As a pastor it is my privilege to ask many of you to consider taking on a role in the church or the community where I can see God using you for deliverance or for discipleship, or for some form of servant-leadership. In my twelve years of church ministry I can count on the fingers of my two hands the number of times that I have asked someone to take a position of servant-leadership and had that person enthusiastically say, "Oh thank you! I was hoping and praying that you would ask."

Most of the times I ask people to take on a position of servant-leadership you give a self-assessment that sounds eerily similar to Moses' objections that we hear this morning. You don't have the skills, you're not sure that you understand God well enough to speak in his name, and you're pretty sure that the people to whom God is calling you are not going to hear your voice anyhow.

So, then, we still have the question: Why does God call Moses? Why does God call you? I cannot help but wonder with Moses if it is because of his demonstrated passion. Moses felt so passionately about the condition of his Hebrew brothers and sisters that he killed an Egyptian when he saw a Hebrew being abused. Obviously I am not advocating for killing as a measure of a person's passion but it says much that Moses, who after all was separated from the pain of Hebrew existence by his life in the palace, would still rise up to defend a brother. Moses clearly demonstrated a passion for his fellow Hebrews. God can use the passion in Moses' life.

If God can use the passion of Moses, how can he use your passions? And where do your passions lie? Next week begins our Stewardship Season and we will of course be asking you to give financially and to give more if you can. We are playing catch up here at the church and we need to move forward in ministries and mission and more dollars will help.

But there is more to stewardship than just finances; there is the giving of your gifts and your passions. We give of those gifts and passions because God is calling us to exercise them for the good of his Kingdom. Next week, in between the two services, in the gym, we will have a Ministry Fair. At the Ministry Fair, you will have an opportunity to find out about the ministries of this church. I will be praying that there you will find the intersection between your passion and the needs of the Kingdom. I will be praying that as you walk around the tables you will be listening for God and God will be speaking to you about his heart's desire for you to exercise your gifts.

The next week, during the same slot, and at the same location, we will have a Mission Fair, and at that Mission Fair there will be representatives of the missions that are supported by the church as a whole or just be people within the church. I will be praying that there you will find the intersection between your passion and the needs of the Kingdom. I will be praying that as you walk around the tables you will be listening for God and God will be speaking to you about his heart's desire for you to exercise your gifts.

And as you give your passion to God, and as he calls you to these ministries, you will be as nervous and feel as ill-equipped as Moses. You will wonder, "Is this what you want for me to do, Lord, and if so why me, and if it is me, what comes next?" And I hope that in the stillness of your heart God says to you exactly what he said to Moses, "I will be with you."