***MOSES: WHY ME?***

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Texts: Exodus 3:1-15; 4:1-20 and Luke 9:28-31

Why me? It is an oft-repeated question. I have heard those words voiced in hospitals after a dire diagnosis and after a remarkable recovery too. Why me? Why am I afflicted with this awful disease? Why have I recovered when I was ready to die? Why am I so cursed? Why am I so blessed? Why me?

Some years ago Kris Kristofferson wrote a song entitled “Why Me, Lord?” He was not a church-going guy, but one Sunday after a Saturday night concert he happened to be in church at the invitation of a friend and unexpectedly found his heart deeply moved and tears streaming down his cheeks and an overwhelming sense of forgiveness that he didn’t even know he needed. By his own account it was something that had never happened to him before, a profound religious experience that gave rise to the song:

*Why me, Lord? What have I ever done to deserve even one*

*of the pleasures I’ve known?*

*Tell me, Lord. What did I ever do that was worth loving you*

*or the kindness you’ve shown?*

His words express the wonder of amazing grace, of humble gratitude, of unexpected and undeserved blessing. Why me, Lord?

Have those words ever crossed your mind or escaped your lips in a moment of grace or in the face of a dire circumstance or when an unexpected opportunity took you off guard? This summer we are considering some of the leaders God has called to a host of different tasks across the ages. In some way, shape or form, most of them have raised this same question: “Why me, Lord?” “Why me?” is thus the title of this summer sermon series, but it is also a continuing question for each of us as we face whatever it is we face day to day. Today we consider Moses whose “Why me?” question is “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?”

When it comes to paragons of faith among our ancestors in faith, Moses is the shining example. His name appears 870 times in the Bible in 19 Old Testament books and another 12 New Testament books – more than twice as many times as Jesus’ name appears. Moses is the one who was plucked from a basket in the Nile and raised by an Egyptian Princess. He is the one who was called by God from the Burning Bush. He is the first to hear the holy name of Yahweh. He is the instrument by which Yahweh inflicts plagues upon Egypt in support of the Lord’s demand of pharaoh: “Let my people go!” Moses is the one who leads the Hebrews out of Egypt through the wilderness to the verge of the Promised Land. He is the one who holds out his staff to part the Red Sea and bring water from the rock at Meribah. He is the one who endures forty years’ of whining complaints from the Israelites as they make their way across the wilderness. He is the one who stands in the presence of God on Mt. Sinai and brings down the Ten Commandments only to find the people at the foot of the mountain worshiping a golden calf. He is the one who smashes the tablets and goes back up the mountain to come down with another set etched in stone. He is the one of whom movies and Veggie Tale stories are made. He is the one who appears on the mountaintop to stand with Elijah and a transfigured Jesus to talk about what is to come. Most of you knew all that already, because Moses’ story is almost as well known as the story of Noah that we heard last week. When it comes to leaders in the Bible, there ain’t never been a leader like Moses! But Moses was a reluctant leader. Leadership was not something he sought. It was something thrust upon him by a God who refuses to take “No” for an answer.

Moses was in the midst of no spiritual journey or self-examination when God found him. He was looking for no bright stars to follow or great quest to undertake. He was just tending sheep. That was his job; watching the flock of his father-in-law Jethro. It was there in the ordinary routine of a shepherd’s life that Moses encountered God at the Burning Bush with a call to leave his flock and the serene life of a shepherd to go to Pharaoh and be the instrument by which God would deliver God’s people from bondage. Why Moses? He wasn’t a righteous man like Noah. Moses had killed a man and fled from Egypt. He had no real experience leading people. He was a shepherd! What made God think Moses would be a good choice for this impossible task? That was Moses’ question. Noah obediently did whatever God asked of him, but Moses resisted God’s call and understandably so, for God wanted Moses to go to the last place Moses wanted to go – back to the scene of his crime, back to Egypt, back to Pharaoh with a message Pharaoh definitely did not want to hear: “Let my people go.” “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” he asks. “Lord, you‘ve got the wrong man. If you want an heroic act, go find a hero. I’m just a humble shepherd watching sheep. Shepherds don’t fare well against pharaohs; there must be some mistake. Why me? Can’t you choose someone else? I am comfortable where I am!”

When I was practicing law and beginning to feel the stirrings of God’s call to ministry, I really wanted God to just leave me alone and let me do my job. I knew that I could serve God doing what I was doing, what I knew, what I was good at. I was happy there and wondered why God couldn’t just call someone else who was unhappy with what he or she was doing. Then it dawned on me that maybe it was *because* I liked what I did that I knew the call to ministry was real. I wasn’t running away from a job I hated; I was being called to leave a job I liked to serve God in a different way. Sometimes it is not when we are restless that God calls, but when we are comfortable where we are. We can ask God to leave us alone and choose someone else, but if God chooses you, you are not likely to get away, no matter how many excuses you make.

Sometimes that desire to have God choose someone else reflects not our comfort where we are, but our own insecurities about where we might go. Moses doubts his abilities as leader. He assumes that it will be up to him to deliver the people, and he knows he is not up to the task. His talents, gifts and charms fall short of what will be necessary to carry out that miracle of mercy for God’s people in Egypt. Moses knows himself better than God knows him, or so he thinks. So he questions God choice, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” There must be better qualified candidates!

Perhaps you too have questioned God’s call to step away from the comfortable routine of life to assume some new task in God’s service. Why should I teach Sunday School instead of sleeping in or going to a class I like? Surely there are others who could teach better than I? Perhaps you have wondered why God could not choose someone more qualified. Who am I to serve as an elder? There are better Christians who could serve! Who am I to feed the hungry at Valley Mission or clothe the naked or shelter the homeless or go on a mission trip? Who am I, Lord, that you ask of me what I cannot comfortably give or do? Why me? Why not someone else?

God’s answer to Moses is God’s answer to us as well: “I will be with you.” Who are you to go where I send you and do what I ask of you? You are the one I have chosen, says God, but you will not go alone. I will be with you. God’s call comes with the assurance of God’s faithful presence. The God who calls us will be with us every step of the way! God calls us, not because of what we can do, but because of what God can do through us. It is not really about us, but about God. Moses could lead the people of Israel out of Egypt because God was with him.

For Moses that was not enough. He had a pocketful of additional excuses. “What if they don’t believe me?” he asks. So God makes his staff turn into a snake and back. “What if they still won’t believe me?” he asks. God tells him to put his hand into his cloak and when he pulls it out it is leprous; when he puts it back in and pulls it out again it is healthy. God gives Moses miracles to perform in order to prove the power of God at work in him. “But I don’t talk so good!” protests Moses. “Send someone else!” At that point you might agree with Moses that God should choose someone else, someone willing and ready to serve. But God persists because God chooses whom God will choose. And no excuse will stand in the way! God has called. Moses will go. And because Moses goes, God’s people are delivered. Looking back over Moses’ life as he stands there on the brink of the Promised Land, Frederick Buechner reflects:

*Like Abraham before him and Noah before that, not to mention like a lot of others since, the figure of Moses breathing his last up there in the hills with his sore feet and aching back serves as a good example of the fact that when God puts the finger on people, their troubles have just begun. And yet there’s not a doubt in the world that in the last analysis Moses, like the rest of those tough old birds, wouldn’t have had it any different.*[[1]](#endnote-1)

Those tough old birds are our ancestors in faith. Are you any different? When God puts the finger on you and calls you to whatever God calls you, you can respond like Moses and offer up all the excuses you can think of – someone else is better, smarter, more prepared, more eloquent, better looking, more faithful. But if God is calling you, then God’s response is simply, “I know. But I choose you.” And if God chooses you, God will get you and be with you. That is enough for whatever God has in mind. It doesn’t mean that it will be easy, but it does mean it will be faithful and fruitful and fulfilling in the end. “Why me?” you may ask. Or perhaps instead just say, “Okay Lord, let’s go!” Amen

1. Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who’s Who*, Harper & Row: New York, 1979, p.111 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)