

**“Where Is A Superhero When You Need One?”**  
**Series: “In the Beginning...”**  
**Exodus 3:1-4, 7-12; 4:1, 10-17; Acts 7:30-34**

“I wish I had a pencil thin moustache, the Boston Blackie kind;

“A two tone Ricky Ricardo jacket,

“and an autographed picture of Andy Devine.

“I could be anyone I wanted to be, the suave Errol Flynn or the Sheik of Araby, if I only had a pencil thin moustache, I could solve some mysteries, too.”

Well, now courtesy of Jimmy Buffet and Mark Kemp you don’t have to be my age or older to remember the cool, mustached detective known as Boston Blackie. He was in that first array of television stars, a string of heroes who would come and go as a part of our cultural background.

But even though some of our heroes fade, some remain, usually with adaptations. Though not quite as super as he once was, I can remember when Superman was the supernatural hero of television. “Look up in the sky. It’s a bird; it’s a plane; no, it’s Superman.” I can’t count the number of times I slipped an old bath towel out of our home closet, tied it around my neck, and used this makeshift superman cape to fly all over the house.

And, today, though the toys and names have changed the principle remains the same. Batman, Iron Man, Spiderman, all of them possess super powers that enable them to fight crime, or bad guys, or as in the case of Superman, “the never ending battle of truth, justice, and the American way.” Even the more human James Bond carries gadgets, sophistication and beautiful women in order to save the world.

And it is the lack of any of these superhero characteristics that so strikes us about the story of Moses. Our text is drawn from the narration we find in chapters three and four of Exodus. It is God’s call of Moses to free the Israelites from Egypt. But it is also reminiscent, a model, of how God calls each one of us.

Our saga begins with Moses spying a burning bush that is not consumed. Turning aside to observe it, Moses hears the voice of God. Told to take off his sandals because he is on holy ground, the voice declares, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” God tells Moses He has observed the suffering of his people, the Israelites, in Egypt. Oppressed as slaves, God intends to bring them out of Egypt and have them occupy the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, what we call Israel. And Moses is the one God has chosen to accomplish this task.

So, Moses replies to this great honor, this once in a lifetime commission with, “Now, wait a minute, God. Who am I to appear before Pharaoh and bring them Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God says, “I will be with you.”

“Well, ok,” grimaces Moses, “but if I tell them the God of your ancestors has sent me, they’re going to want to know your name. Then what do I say?”

In the Ancient Near East, a name explains the character of the person or god. It was also believed that to know a god’s name provided the ability to call on the god, to invoke the god’s power.

But God answers Moses, “I am who I am.” Otherwise, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob cannot be defined, controlled, or manipulated. The God of Israel is self-contained and eternal, the God of the past, present and future.

Likely, Moses was not asking for the Israelites, but for himself. He was asking God, who are you really? And, are you someone I should obey?

God, then, once again explains how all of this is going to work and Moses responds, “But suppose they don’t believe me or listen to me and says, ‘The Lord didn’t appear to you’?”

God says, “Watch this.” Then he turns Moses’ staff into a snake and makes his hand leprous and then heals it, informing Moses he will be able to employ those signs to convince the Israelites and the Egyptians he was sent by God.

But once again Moses turns to God and says, “I admit, Lord, these are some serious special effects. But I am not a good speaker. I really think it would be better if you would send someone else.”

Now, God is irritated, angry. “Alright,” God relents, “I’ll send your brother, Aaron, with you. He’s a silver tongued devil, but you are still in charge.” And Moses heads for Egypt.

After being interviewed by the school administration, the eager teaching prospect said: “Let me see if I’ve got this right. You want me to go into that room with all those kids, and fill their every waking moment with a love for learning.

“And I’m supposed to modify their disruptive behavior, observe them for signs of abuse and even censor their t-shirt messages and dress habits.

“You want me to wage a war on drugs and sexually transmitted diseases, check their backpacks for weapons of mass destruction, and raise their self esteem.

“You want me to teach them patriotism, good citizenship, sportsmanship, fair play, how to register to vote, how to balance a checkbook, and how to apply for a job.

“I am to check their heads for lice, maintain a safe environment, recognize signs of anti-social behavior, make sure all students pass the mandatory state exams, even those who don’t come to school regularly or complete any of their assignments.

“Plus, I am to communicate regularly with the parents by letter, telephone, newsletter and report card.

“All of this I am to do with just a piece of chalk, a computer, a few books, a bulletin board, a big smile AND on a starting salary that qualifies my family for food stamps!

“You want me to do all of this and yet you expect me .....NOT TO PRAY???”

The difference between a teacher and Moses was the Moses could pray all he wanted.

Here is what jumps out at me about this episode, this call of Moses. Moses is the same person after he meets God as before he encounters God. He sees a burning bush that is not consumed, watches his staff turn into a snake, and his hand become instantaneously leprous. The name of God is revealed to him. God tells him he is not only sending him to Pharaoh, He's going with him. And yet, through all of this, Moses makes one excuse after another.

Nor is he transformed into a super hero. He is still a nobody who doesn't like speaking in front of people. God does not miraculously cure his speech deficiency.

Rather, the crux of the passage, the turning point of the account is found in God's words to Moses in 3:12: "I will be with you." The solution to this problem is not and will not be found in Moses. The solution is found in God. The reasons for Moses being sent do not rest on Moses' abilities, but on God's abilities. God doesn't "fix" Moses. He simply guarantees Moses He will be there with him.

God does not call perfect people to leadership. In fact, Moses makes some pretty good points. Who is he to approach Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth? And why would the Israelites believe this guy who isn't even living among them? And Moses does struggle to convey his thoughts. Some traditions report that he stuttered. So, if you had been warming yourself by the burning bush that day, and you took a good look at Moses — Boston Blackie, Superman or Batman would surely not have come to mind.

And that is what makes the passage so powerful and so relevant for you and me. No matter how many towels you and I wrap around our necks, none of us is Superman. Rather, we are just like Moses, a little unsure of ourselves, armed with a less than adequate grasp of who God is or what tools we possess to speak for God.

But the Moses' story reminds us that God still calls us "warts and all." God uses who we are to accomplish what God desires. Imperfect people speak God's word and accomplish God's will because, like Moses, God is with us. The power of God works in spite of and through our deficiencies.

God calls every single one of us to speak His word and work to accomplish His will. And every single one of us, like Moses, begins to list our deficiencies, our concerns, our excuses.

"I don't have time."

"I don't have money."

"I can't teach, visit, attend, work, fix, help, etc., etc., etc."

And God's reply is, "Yes, you can. Because I will be with you."

God's call is not an unknown leap into the dark, but a promise of the presence of our God.

John Newton is best known for his hymn, “Amazing Grace.” It profoundly spoke to the guilt and forgiveness experienced by this former slave trader turned minister. But a lesser known story involves the love shared by Newton and his wife Mary Catlett when he was fourteen and she twelve. They loved each other very much. Newton spent years at sea on merchant ships, warships and slave ships. He saw Mary infrequently. Yet their love for each other was undying.

By age thirty-nine Newton had become a beneficiary of the “amazing grace” for which he would be known ever after. He was now finished with the sea and would spend the rest of his long life as a preacher and pastor. He had always assumed that he would predecease his wife, unable, as he was to imagine living without her. She, however, died first.

Mary was buried on a Wednesday. Four days later, on Sunday, Newton stood up in the pulpit of his church in London. Everyone wondered what text the broken-hearted man would preach on that day. It was from the book of Habakkuk. “Through the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

Whether it is death, tough economic times, or the call of God to something we find daunting, the promise is always the same: “I will be with you.”

“But Moses said to God...” This is a reoccurring phrase in this story. “But Moses said to God...” Every time God told Moses what he wanted him to do, Moses came up with a “but.” “But God I can’t do that because...”

I love this story because I am right there with Moses. My conversations with God contain a lot of “buts.” “Good idea, God, but...”

Actually, I’m on Moses’ side in all these questions. I think Moses makes some strong arguments. “I’m out here keeping sheep and you want me to go see the most powerful man in the world, the one with pyramids, gold, the biggest army in existence, and demand that he free his slaves? And you want me to do this with a stick that turns into a snake, something I know Egyptian magicians can already do? Plus, I don’t even know these Israelites. I don’t have any friends there. What makes you think I can just show up and they’ll listen to me? And, I am not Barack Obama. No one has ever accused me of inspiring hope or change.

Notice that throughout this dialogue, God does not prevent or discourage Moses from questioning, rebutting or arguing with Him. God’s holiness nor call is a demand that Moses just shut up and listen. The passage implicitly acknowledges that Moses has a choice. God listens and responds to Moses’ concerns with seriousness and patience.

Faith is not blind acceptance. God does not fear, nor should we, questions, contemplation, reasoning. Asking questions, seeking knowledge are part of the process of discerning both God’s nature and God’s will. This cannot be a substitute for making a decision. But the search to know, to understand, to discern

God in our lives is valid. We possess free will, a say in what we do. But for the Christian, those questions, those discussions, those arguments ultimately find their answer in obedience.

The most downloaded NY Times article of 2006 was written by Amy Sutherland entitled “Modern Love: What Shamu taught me about a happy marriage.” She writes:

After two years of exotic animal training, my marriage is far smoother, my husband much easier to love. I used to take his faults personally; his dirty clothes on the floor were an affront, a symbol of how he didn’t care enough about me. But thinking of my husband as an exotic species gave me the distance I needed to consider our differences more objectively.

I adopted the trainers’ motto: “It’s never the animal’s fault.” When my training attempts failed, I didn’t blame Scott. Rather, I brainstormed new strategies, thought up more incompatible behaviors and used smaller approximations. I dissected my own behavior, considered how my actions might inadvertently fuel his. I also accepted that some behaviors were too entrenched, too instinctive to train away. You can’t stop a badger from digging, and you can’t stop my husband from losing his wallet and keys.

God understands our humanity, our reticence, questioning, and excuses. But even in the midst of these, God will work to enable us to hear the voice of God and respond with love and obedience.

“Where Is A Superhero When You Need One?”

The position description obviously called for a superhero, but instead God chose Moses. We may not have to stand before Pharaoh, but fellow employees, teachers, and spouses feel just as daunting. And being loving, kind, forgiving and generous often strike us as just as difficult as leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. And through all of these we are just as reluctant and just as ill prepared as Moses. But God’s promise to Moses is God’s promise to us: “I will be with you.”

No task it too difficult, no impediment too high, no pharaoh too powerful, to stop the will of God being accomplished through those who allow God to work through them. God doesn’t mind if we turn our call every which way, look at it from every angle, question each element. But in the end you and I choose whether to quit arguing, stalling, and questioning, and head for Egypt. God doesn’t need you to be a superhero. But God expects you and me to listen and obey.

This morning, are you on your way to Egypt, or still warming yourself by the burning bush?

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