

Moses God's square peg

Through in the church library we have an awful lot of Christian biographies telling us the stories of great heroes of the faith. We have stories of missionaries who converted whole countries, preachers whom God used in great revivals, people who struggled through all that life could throw at them and maintained their faith. These books can be very encouraging, they take us out of our mundane everyday faith-lives for a time and let us catch a glimpse of how things could be.

But there is only one problem with these books. They can make us feel a bit inadequate when we read about people who by the age of twenty have trekked halfway across the globe, wrestled with all manner of wild beasts shrugged off tropical illnesses converted whole countries, tribes and nations and built hospitals and bible colleges only to come home retire and write a few best-selling books about their exploits.

When we compare these people to ourselves we can really get ourselves down, can't we? By the age of twenty I had dropped out of Queens University and was bumming about trying to find some kind of work here or there. By the age of twenty I could possibly have claimed to be a link in the chain for one or two people coming to know Christ but certainly no mass conversions or great tribes of people came to know the Lord through me. After reading some of those stories of the great heroes of the faith you could end up thinking to yourself, "What have I been doing with my life?"

When the Bible gives us a biography of one of the great heroes of the faith it is recorded for us warts and all so that although we are inspired by them we are not made to feel inadequate by them. This is one of the things that tells us just how truthful the Bible is. There is a big book called ANET which is a collection of Ancient Near Eastern Texts related to the Old Testament.

Now when you read in ANET the “histories” recorded by other peoples of the time they are full of the great exploits of their founders, how they fearlessly did this and how they heroically did that. Compare that to the story of Moses in the Bible and just how honest it is and you begin to see how reliable the Bible is as a source of history. Moses here is a normal human being, he is scared, he feels that he isn’t up to the task and in the end he even dares to turn to God and say, “Look God can you not find somebody else?”

I find Moses in all of his fear and trembling a more realistic hero to aspire to be like than some of the great stories about acts of faith that you can read in Christian literature. In his fear of failure I see my own fear of failure, in his own sense of inadequacy before the huge task that God has set him I see reflected my own inadequacies. In his desire that somehow God would occasionally call someone else I see some of my own failings and my own desire at times to run away from God.

Do you see yourself reflected in Moses sometimes? Moses is like us in more ways than we might think and sometimes in more ways than we would like to think. We too are called by God, more than likely we are not called in the dramatic way that Moses was called but we are called none the less.

We are called by God to two things just as Moses was called. We are called into a relationship with God and we are also called to a task by God. But also like Moses we are equipped by God for the task to which he has called us. We are called into a relationship, called to a task and equipped for our calling.

It would be fair enough at this point to say, “What do you mean I’m called by God?” I don’t think our little province quite has the weather to support burning bushes. They might well get blown out very quickly or washed out by the rain even if they did miraculously get started. So how does God call you into a relationship with him? I think it is safe to say that it is probably not in the same way that he called Moses.

God calls us in many different ways and this is not an exhaustive list. He calls us through the preaching of his word. He calls us through the inner workings of our mind, our thoughts, feelings and consciousness. He calls us through his word the Bible. He calls us through the actions and the words of other people. He calls us through the events of everyday life.

There are so many different ways in which he calls us but, just as with Moses, God calls us. Sometimes it is gently, through some inner prompting sometimes dramatically as the great events of our life throw us into turmoil and we are forced to reach out to him. Have no doubt about it this morning, God is calling you! He is calling you into a relationship with him, a relationship that isn’t always easy and a relationship where he is most definitely in charge at all times.

When God called Moses he did not say to him, “Here Moses, pull up a chair and let’s sit and have a wee chat about what we can do about this Egyptian situation.” He didn’t say to Moses, “Look Moses, if you are not doing anything next Saturday I could really do with a hand sorting out your fellow Israelites, do you think you could help me here?” He doesn’t do any of these things. God makes it clear right from the beginning that this relationship is not a relationship of equals.

When we start our relationship with God we start a relationship with God! God Almighty! King of Kings! Lord of Lords! The one who has always been and always will be! We are not coming to the God of the cartoons, the doting Santa-like figure with the long beard and the cloud to sit on. When Moses came into God’s nearer presence at the burning bush God’s first words to him were words of warning.

They were words designed to stop Moses short and have him think about who he is about to get into a relationship with. Being in a relationship with God can be the most amazing fun sometimes but it is deadly serious. It is never a relationship of equals, as our psalm reminded us this morning he is God indeed, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Bearing all of this in mind, the purity of God, the power of God, the infinite majesty of God, it is amazing isn’t that this same God calls us into a relationship where we can call him Father and he calls us his children. That is God’s first call on your life just as it was his call to Moses. He revealed himself to Moses in a special way, he revealed his name and how he has been the God of Moses Father and the God of his ancestors. In saying all this he is also saying to Moses, “I’m going to be your God too.”

God calls us into a relationship with him just as he called Moses and, just like Moses, he calls us to a task, a task of liberation. We are called to be liberators, to be people who point others toward freedom. We are not all called, such as Moses was, to liberate people from actual physical slavery (although there is plenty of that still about in the world and a few more Christians doing something to help wouldn't do any harm) but we are all called to point people in the direction of the one who can set them free from God's judgement.

We don't set people free ourselves, in the same way that Moses didn't set the Israelites free by himself, it was and it is God's job to set people free. We had the public information meeting on Monday night of Alcoholics Anonymous and it struck me at that meeting just how similar their twelve steps were to the Christian life.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

There is no great difference between those twelve steps and how a person finds liberation from the power of sin, death and hell in God. We admit that we are in slavery to sin, we are, to Christianise the first step “powerless over sin and death,” and it is only by realising that only a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to life that we become Christians.

It is that final part of the twelve steps that tells us our everyday task as Christians in this world. “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to our fellow sinners and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” Our task is purely and simply to point others to God, who found us freed us and saved us.

That tends to be the point where most Christians react like Moses did in chapter 4. We say, “Look Lord, it’s all very well trying to work out our own salvation and all that but telling other people that they need to be set free? Lord, I’m not a good speaker; I don’t know the right things to say!” To this God replies, just as he did to Moses, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

God calls us into a relationship with him, he gives us the task of pointing others to him and he equips us for that task in ways that only he can. He made your mouth. He made your hands. At the start of your life he gave you every aspect of your body and your mind, every talent and ability is a gift from him, whether you like what he gave you or not. God gave you these things and wants you to use them for him.

One of my favourite lines in the whole Bible comes in chapter 4 verse 13, “Moses said, ‘O Lord, please send someone else to do it.’” It is such a painfully honest verse and when we read the rest of Exodus and all that Moses had to put up with who could blame him for wanting to chicken out when he did. The faith of Moses, the faith of Israel’s great hero, ran out on him at that point and even then, even in his somewhat pathetic attempt to get rid of God and this awful task that was being placed on him God did not give up on him.

There is a running joke with some of the staff in the church office about them being square pegs in round holes. In the Bible Moses seems to be God’s ultimate square peg. They seem to travel together on Moses’ journey of faith and doubt like one of those quarrelsome couples who seem to enjoy nothing more than a good argument.

Time after time God seems to lose patience with Moses and Moses loses patience with God without this book of Exodus but in the end this scared old man who longed to shirk his duty to God right from the very day that God called him was used amazingly by God. Square peg or no square peg, God used Moses to save his people just as he can do through you and you and you and you and me and you and you and you.

We are all square pegs but a square peg in the hand of God can be a powerful thing.