

Proper 17 A August 31, 2008 POP Kathie Clark +

Exodus 3:1-15

I love the Old Testament stories of the heroes of the past. I can remember my father, who was not a Christian, reading to me or telling me some of the classic stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, ~~Joseph~~, Moses, Ruth and Esther, Daniel and many of the prophets. His face seemed to shine as he did this. It was obvious to me that he loved them too.

At that time in my life, church was a once in a while experience, where I was dropped off by one of my parents and picked up later. I went to Sunday School but really didn't know anyone there. It just seemed to me to be OK and I sort of sensed a God presence.

It wasn't until Jr. High, when my very best friend invited me for a sleep over and to go to church with her family that I began to experience, learn about, and understand who God was and who Jesus was. I don't want to dwell on this period of my life except to say something to all the parents present here today who have children. Never, ever doubt the influence and impact you and your family can have on other children as well as your own. Saying grace at meals, reading Bible stories, prayers at bedtime, bringing their friends to church with your kids and all other kinds of interactions DO/WILL have an impact on others; some will be life-changing, as they were in my life.

Fast forwarding through high school, ~~and~~ college, ~~and~~ marriage and raising a family, I became aware of a stirring within my heart, of hearing God's voice in some new ways. It was different from the "get more involved at church" or "take on a new task." It was as though a strong hand was on my shoulder blade pushing me, pushing me. And the hand wouldn't go away or this nagging, ~~even~~ uncomfortable stirring within.

One day I finally made an appointment to see my Rector, Fr. Andy Keady, at St. Patrick's Church in Thousand Oaks. I had several agenda matters to discuss with him regarding various ministries at the church but last on my list was the question, "Am I being called by God to the ordained ministry?" And underneath that question was a very long list of all the reasons why this was the most ridiculous, preposterous question in the world.

As I sat in Fr. Andy's office, my list in hand, he said to me, "I know you always come with an agenda ~~list~~, but I want you to put it aside for the moment." Then Fr. Andy picked up his weathered bible and handed it to me. He said, "Turn to Exodus 3 and begin reading from the first verse." I was puzzled by his request but did it, silently reading the beginning verses. Fr. Andy stopped me and said, "I want you to read it out loud." As I started again, the tears came. I could barely finish those 15 verses. Fr. Andy just handed me some tissues, took the bible from me and said, "God has called you, Kathie, not your husband, to be one of his priests. Now what is on your agenda?"

I'm glad _____ read this passage from Exodus today, because it is still hard for me to get through it without choking up. My life story is not anything remotely like the story of Moses. However, there are a lot of similarities that fit all of us. Let me briefly touch on them.

Moses had been raised in Egyptian affluence, in the palace of the pharaoh, a privileged lad. But one day, in a fit of passion, he killed an Egyptian overseer who was abusing the Hebrew slaves. He then fled, becoming a fugitive. Like so many other outlaws he went into the desert, changed his identity, and became a shepherd.

While tending to his sheep, he met the daughter of a very wealthy and influential man. Moses married this woman and so recovered the good life, with nobody the wiser, as he took on the role of a rich shepherd and land owner. Moses was safe and secure in his new role—until that day when he spied the burning bush. Or, more accurately, when the burning bush, like some divine bounty hunter, spied him.

Further on in this story we find Moses declining four times to take part in God's plan to "go save my people."

His first excuse was: I am nobody. "Who am I that I should go the Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Well, who was Peter, but a traitorous fisherman that he should lead the band of apostles? Who was Mary Magdalene but a woman of the streets that she should become a saint? Who was Zacchaeus but a corrupt official that he should be called by Jesus? "I am nobody" doesn't wash with God. It never has. For us to use that excuse, out of a sense of false humility or self-doubt is as lame an excuse as it was for Moses.

Moses' second excuse was: "I don't know your name." Whose fault is that? Do you read scripture? Do you ever read a spiritual book? We all know about Michael Phelps and the Redeem Team and the ~~latest sales at Wal-~~ *best labor day sales* ~~Mart~~ but do you know Jesus as your personal savior? A lot of people don't know the answer to that question because they are not sure who Jesus really is. Are you one of those people? Then maybe, you too, say, "I don't know your name."

The third excuse: no one will believe me. Suppose they don't believe me or listen to what I say? Suppose they just look at me and say: "you're just getting religious; you'll get over it." What if I make people uncomfortable because of changes in my life and behavior? People will just turn off and tune out when I talk about Alpha or other ways God has touched my life. So we back away from the burning bush. I have my image, my reputation to think about.

The fourth excuse is one we all have used in one form or another: I am no public speaker. Our version is more like: I am ungifted, unimportant, slow of speech, too busy. I will bury what little talent I think I have and hope God calls someone else.

Excuses, objections, rationalizations: I used them all for months even after that meeting with Fr. Andy. We all have our ways of avoiding the Lord. And you know what? We succeed at doing it, we duck our call. And yet...and yet...there is a burning bush inside us, a fire in our guts that won't

be stilled; a hunger for God, for the divine in our lives; a profound need for meaning, commitment, acceptance and love. Like Moses, we can offer our objections but that burning bush will not go out. It will continue to burn and beckon us.

None of us are going to be like Moses; not everyone is called to be a priest or a deacon; or a teacher, or a vestry person. But we all are called! Don't turn your back on that burning bush or ignore the burning in your soul. It's not indigestion. If you want help understanding what is going on within you, listen to Bruce Roe's story. Talk to any number of us and we will pray with you for clarity and discernment. Attend Alpha and find the burning bush there. Amen.