

When God Interrupts: Calling Ex. 3 & 4 (selected verses) 11/29/20

Interruptions. Most of us have lots of them. Phone calls during dinner. Kids or pets or doorbells calls interrupting an important Zoom meeting! People dropping by your office while you're up against a deadline. Appliances and other machines breaking down when you most need them. And then there is the mother of all interruptions- the pandemic!

Many of us had visits planned with out-of-town family over Thanksgiving and Christmas. Interrupted. School plans- changed and changed again and still changing! Plans for consultations with doctors or surgeries- interrupted. Business plans- interrupted. Even wedding plans and funerals- interrupted. Here at church, our year-long Strategic Planning team was at the point of engaging the congregation with their findings- interrupted. Not to mention plans for VBS, Sunday School, mission trips, rummage sales, youth groups, etc. All interrupted.

All this has caused many of us to wonder about where God is in the midst of all this interruption! The Bible gives us some answers to that question, and we're going to look at those answers over the next few weeks during Advent. This morning we look at one story out of many where God is actually the cause of the interruption! It takes place in Egypt around 1300 years before Jesus was born. God's people, the Hebrews, had been enslaved there for about 400 years, in spite of their many prayers

for God to intervene. But unbeknownst to them, God was already intervening, even when the Pharaoh, in an attempt at genocide, decreed that all the male Hebrew babies must be drowned in the Nile. Moses' mother placed her baby in a water-tight basket and floated him along the river, where one of Pharaoh's many daughters found and adopted the child. He was taken into the royal court and given the best education available.

As a young man, Moses, who knows about his Hebrew heritage, sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. Enraged, Moses kills the taskmaster and hides the evidence. Unfortunately, word begins to spread, so Moses runs for his life to the land of Midian, where he is taken in by a man named Jethro, and eventually marries his daughter. He enters into a quiet family life, caring for Jethro's flocks. We pick up the story in Ex. 3. *Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>Here the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." <sup>4</sup>When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup>Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are*

*standing is holy ground.”<sup>6</sup> He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

*<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,<sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... (Ex. 3:1-8a)*

God interrupts Moses’ quiet existence with some wonderful news. God is about to come out of hiding and keep his promise by delivering the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from Egyptian oppression. Delivering powerless slaves from the most powerful empire in the world would indeed require divine intervention, but that’s what God is promising here. Moses must have been thrilled to hear this news. And there’s more!

*<sup>10</sup>So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” (Uh, oh!)*

*<sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”<sup>12</sup> He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” (Ex. 3:10-12)*

Not what Moses had in mind. God is going to liberate the Hebrews alright, but he's going to use Moses to do it. But Moses already had a career, a wife, and an extended family. He had a good, stable life in Midian. This is an unwelcome interruption, to put it mildly. And Moses objects. "Who am I to do such a thing?" he asks. He must have been aware of just how risky this would be. After all, he had seen firsthand what the ruthless Pharaohs were capable of. Slave uprisings do not end well. The conversation continues with God's instructions to Moses.

*<sup>16</sup>Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. <sup>17</sup>I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' <sup>18</sup>They will listen to your voice; Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." <sup>3</sup>And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail" — so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his*

hand— <sup>5</sup>“so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” (Ex. 3:16-18a; 4:1-5)

Once again, Moses objects to God’s instructions. “What if they don’t believe me?” That’s a reasonable objection! He is asking the elders to risk their lives and their families in an attempt to escape from Pharaoh, who, by the way, has very powerful armies! The Hebrew slaves have none! Why would they believe him? So God gives him a sign- that staff that turns into a snake and back again- to convince the elders that he really has been sent by God. Now, so far God has been remarkably patient with Moses and his objections, hasn’t he? Let’s finish the story.

<sup>10</sup>But Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” <sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup>Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” <sup>13</sup>But he said, “O my Lord, please send someone else.” (Ex. 4:10-13)

This time Moses objects because apparently, he has a stutter. How can he rally people to follow the Lord, when he can’t speak well? That’s a

pretty serious liability for this role! “Send someone else,” he finally says. In the verses which follow, God gets angry with Moses, but finally allows him to take along his brother, Aaron, as his spokesperson. You know the rest of the story. Through a series of encounters with Pharaoh followed by powerful signs and wonders, God uses Moses to free his people from the iron grip of Pharaoh, and leads them for 40 years through the wilderness until they come to the Promised Land of Canaan. But this was certainly a giant interruption in the life of Moses and he fought it tooth and nail!

One of the main teachings of Scripture is that God is at work during all the interruptions of our lives, even the awful ones. And that during these times of upheaval, we are called to remain faithful to God, believing that God is working behind the scenes to bring about his will. So, what does faithfulness look like during a pandemic? It means acknowledging the reality that we’re in a serious, deadly crisis that shows no signs of abating anytime soon, and responding by loving our neighbors as ourselves. That means wearing masks and practicing social distancing to minimize the spread of the virus and adhering to other guidance from our doctors and scientists. And refraining from hoarding! That’s being faithful to our calling to love our neighbors, even though it can be very inconvenient and painful , and others may even laugh at us.

It also means using this time to listen, and to learn what God may be teaching us. We're trying to do that as a church. When all of this is over, what will we have learned that will guide us moving forward? I suspect that all of us could spend more time in scripture reading, prayer, and reflection as we attempt to discern what God may be teaching us in this awful time. And those spiritual disciplines will also help to sustain us through times of discouragement and even despair as we learn to trust in God to meet our needs for security and purpose and love. That's how we find hope in the midst of this mess, and hope is the theme of this first Sunday of Advent.

In the new Disney Plus series, "The Mandalorian," the Mandalorians have a simple phrase that they say to one another- "This is the way."- to which the correct response is always, "This is the way." It's how they remind each other that they, as Mandalorians, are called to live in a way that is different from the rest of the world even though it is often a hard way. And that's true of us. We're called to remain faithful to God's command to love our neighbors and trust in the Lord to sustain us during major interruptions in our lives. This is the way. May it be the way for you, too.