

I Am Who I Am . . .

What's it going to take for God to finally get your/our attention? Would winning the lottery do it? How about a cancer diagnosis? The sun being blotted out? How about five broken ribs?

Wait, just a minute . . . I'm guessing some of you are stripping a gear here! Does God work that way? Does God get our attention by throwing us something completely unexpected? A "change-up" when we were expecting a fastball? A voice mail saying, "The doctor wants to see you this afternoon." When what we were hoping for was "See you in twelve months"? A deeply rutted dirt road, hidden just over the hill, when we were expecting—when I was expecting—smooth sailing, or at most, a thin layer of sand?

For Moses, it took a burning bush. But not just any burning bush. (We see those all the time. Right? Don't you see a burning bush every day when you go out for your walk?) But the Bible was very specific. The bush Moses saw was "blazing, yet it was not consumed." It's as if without that added detail Moses might have walked right on by. As if God knew he was busy thinking about other things. The flock of sheep that he was tending. The wife that was waiting for him. The father-in-law he was trying to please. The nice, quiet life I have back home . . . [Mindlessly] Oh, there's a burning bush . . . Wait a minute! This burning bush isn't being consumed! That's crazy! I better stop, and check this out." (Notice it was only after Moses stopped that God called out him. Sometimes getting us to stop is God's greatest challenge.)

To Moses' credit he doesn't try to ignore the voice, or pretend he hadn't heard. Instead, he says the one thing—and really the only thing—you can say when you realize that God has just called you by name. Do you remember what he said? He said, "Here I am." We can see him shaking his head in shocked disbelief if not in absolute fear. And just in case Moses missed the significance of the event, God tells him to remove the sandals from his feet, because the place on which he was now standing is holy ground. It's like God telling me, "Oops! Better take your motorcycle helmet off, Tom. Now take a deep breath. Take a break. Pun intended." And I've since spent the last thirteen nights sleeping in a chair. Oops, make that twelve. I spent one night in the hospital.

The Bible doesn't say whether Moses ever did take his sandals off. But it does seem clear that he was finally listening as God continued to speak. "We got us a situation here, Moses. I have observed the misery of my people. I have heard their cry. I know their sufferings. I have come down to deliver them." Did you catch the crucial sequence of verbs here? God sees. God hears. God knows. God comes. It's like God's MO—God's method of operation. We're barely at the beginning of Exodus, and already we're discovering it. God sees. God hears. God knows. God comes.

There is a story-changing, life-transforming fifth verb implied by the first four in this sequence. God sees. God hears. God knows. God comes. Holy cow! God cares! Which means that this is a God like no other. We better prepare ourselves to be astounded, over and over and over. This God cares! So go ahead, take a moment if you need to. Pick yourself back

up. Brush yourself off. Pick your motorcycle up (if you can). Take a deep breath (if you can). Are you okay? Are you good? Good.

Because I have one final verb to reveal to you. “I see.” “I hear.” “I know.” “I come.” Which means (by implication): “I care.” And now comes the last verb in my MO, and arguably the most important verb in this adventure, this little covenant we have between us. Ready? “I send.”

What? Moses is incredulous; how ‘bout you? Who am I that I should go to Pharoah and bring our people out of Egypt? Isn’t that your job? Isn’t that why you came down here from heaven? To fix everything that’s broken? (Including my ribs?)

God isn’t thrown or angered by our objection. God just keeps on going. “I will be with you. And this—what happened here today—shall be your sign. You know, in case you’re ever tempted to forget or downplay what happened.” “Oh, it was just a burning bush.” “Oh, it was just a minor motorcycle spill on the way back from watching the eclipse in Nebraska.”

Moses had one more excuse in his traveling pack, one more attempt to wheeze out of this little encounter. He decided to ask God the question. “Who are you? What is your name?”

Hey, what do you know! That’s our excuse too! That’s also our attempt to wheeze out of God sending us. Because, to be honest, we really don’t want to go. So we pretend to be all distracted by what God’s name is. Is it El, or Elohim? Adonai or Allah? Or we pretend to be all side-tracked by who God is, or what God is, or where God is, or whether God is. It’s like we’re hoping we can get away with just talking about him; that way we won’t ever have to get around to actually doing what he asks of us.

But God’s answer “does an end run” around our questions (Do you know that football metaphor?). Who am I? What is my name? Who is it that is sending you? “*E’heyeh asher e’heyeh.*” Which means, roughly translated, “I am who I am.” The Hebrew word *asher* is a relative pronoun so it could also mean “I am what I am.” I am timeless. I am eternal. I am mystery. I will not be controlled by your need for a name. I cannot be contained by your quest for knowledge. There’s only one thing you need to know at each day’s start, and at its end: “I am.”

And as we put on your sandals and pick up our motorcycles, as we rest our solar-eclipse, burning bush eyes and nurse our sore ribs, there is no need to get all caught up with how God works and how God reveals God’s self in people’s lives. Because the answer is obvious. And only one thing really matters: does God have our attention?

Amen.