
And Moses Said, “Who Am I?”

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 3 September 2023

Exodus 3:1-15 • Romans 12:9-21 • Matthew 16:21-28



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

And Moses said, “Who am I?”

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Thus Moses responded to God, speaking out of the flame which did not consume the burning bush: “Who am I?” He might have said, “Why me, Lord? Why have you chosen me? There must be many others you could choose.” Perhaps Moses was thinking, ‘I know nothing about meeting with kings and Pharaohs! I am just a shepherd, just an ordinary man, not a leader of any kind. You need a general, Lord! You need a soldier!’ He doesn’t say this, of course; but he is surprised and can hardly believe that God would choose him, out of all the Israelites.

It is the same sort of surprise that Saul felt later, when God chose him, through the prophet Samuel, to be the first king over Israel. When Samuel told him he was chosen, Saul replied:

I am only a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why then have you spoken to me in this way? (1 Samuel 9:21)

Or David, chosen out of a family of shepherds — Moses and David were both shepherds. After all seven of his tall, strong older brothers have passed before Samuel, God chooses the youngest to be the great future king.

Does God always choose the unlikely, the unworthy, the unready to do his work? It sometimes seems that way. But we do not have the perception of God. On the occasion of David's choosing, God tells Samuel:

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Sam 16:7)

It is the heart, the innermost part of us, fashioned by God and known intimately by God, which makes the difference. God knows us and his plans include us, at his good pleasure. David was not the likely choice, in our eyes; but he proved to be a worthy servant; and God knew that he would be.

This lesson, by the way, was the focus of our latest after-school programme at Prebbleton, which started Thursday and runs for two more Thursdays. The children learned the verse I've just read, about the Lord not seeing as mortals see. It's a good lesson for all of us, but particularly so for our children, I think, who will sometimes judge their classmates harshly if they are different from them.

God chooses us from the beginning of time to serve him in particular ways. It may be a while before our particular purpose is revealed to us, and it can happen in different ways: through prayer, or discernment by others, or just in the way that things open up to us. I felt that during my calling into ordained ministry. The Lord opened doors for me which I didn't even know were there, and made it possible for me to make those good choices. Coming to New Zealand was one of those choices — and once we got here, Melissa and I, God really set to work on me! Thanks be to God. The phrase we often use, being in the right place at the right time, certainly applied to me, and it was all the Lord's doing.

It's an interesting thought, that God chooses us from the beginning of time to be where he wants us to be at the time he wants us to be there. It might seem to us that if this is so, then the world should be running perfectly: no one starving, no one suffering, everyone living lives of perfect fulfilment, contentment and happiness. Is the world this way? Certainly not. Yet may it still be a "perfect" world? As humans, we can't help but put our own interpretation of "perfect" on what we see around us. Perhaps it is as perfect as it can be, given that God uses us, his imperfect servants, to do his will. As Paul says, "All [people] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God can act on his own, but so often he works through us, and so it is perhaps not surprising that the world is not what we

would call perfect. But Paul goes on to say that we are now justified by grace, which is a gift of God, through the redemption which was brought about by Christ's sacrifice. God makes us perfect in the end, because he loves us, as imperfect as we are to start with.

Today we celebrate Fathers' Day. I lost my own father about 25 years ago, too young, through an accident. He was 70 when he died, when his small plane went in to the ocean, off the California coast. But I always carry him in my heart, and his influence on me lives on. He instilled in me a love for honesty and truth, for the mechanical objects that he was always working on, and for jazz music. And of course he brought me to New Zealand for the first time, as captain of our small sailboat, the good ship Troubadour; and that was surely part of God's plan for me.

God tells us to honour our father and mother, for their love for us echoes God's own love. God is the pattern for any father, giving love, teaching the right and guiding away from the wrong, reprimanding when necessary. Some fathers are less than perfect — and some families have suffered in these situations. But still, God bless all fathers this day. May those of us whose fathers are still living celebrate them; and may those of us who have lost fathers remember them, not with sorrow, but with joy and thankfulness for all they have done for us, or have tried to do for us. In Jesus' name, amen.