

Moses – Prepared and Awakening

Cycle #1 – Session #3

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Text: Exodus 2:1-23

Gathering

Opening Worship

Light a candle – God’s light is always present among us. The candle which we light at the beginning of each session is a reminder of the light in our midst, a light that shines even in times of darkness.

Song: *In the Bulb There Is a Flower* – #632 Chalice Hymnal

Litany

Sing a new song to the Lord;

Sing to the Lord, all the world.

Sing and bless the name of the Lord;

Proclaim God’s salvation, day after day.

Speak of God’s glory among the nations,

Of wonders from God among all peoples.

For the Lord is great, much to be praised,

More fearful than all other gods.

Majestic and grand is God’s presence;

Strength and splendor are in God’s temple.

Let sky and earth rejoice and shout;

Thunder, you sea and everything in you!

Let the desert and everything in it rejoice;

Let all the trees of the forest sing

Before the Lord, who comes,

Who comes to rule the world,

Who rules the earth with justice,

Faithfully judging the peoples.

Psalm 96 1-1-4,9,12-13, tr Gary Chamberlain

The Psalms, a New translation for Prayer and Worship

Welcome One Another. Share with one another one place you see your life having prepared you in a special way for what you do or who now are. (Depending on group size, not more than 2 minutes each.) It might have to do with the family into which you were born, the place you grew up, past work, special friends who have affected your understanding of life or periods of difficulty.

Cycle # 1 – Session #3

Scripture

Exodus 2:2-23 (NRSV)

² Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.

⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. *'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,'* she said. ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, *'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?'* ⁸ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, *'Yes.'* So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, *'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.'* So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, *'I drew him out of the water.'*

¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. ¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, *'Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?'* ¹⁴ He answered, *'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?'* Then Moses was afraid and thought, *'Surely the thing is known.'* ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

¹⁶ The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. ¹⁸ When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, *'How is it that you have come back so soon today?'*

¹⁹ They said, *'An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.'* ²⁰ He said to his daughters, *'Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.'* ²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. ²² She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, *'I have been an alien* residing in a foreign land.'*

²³ After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God.

Dwelling in Scripture Exodus 2:1-23

1st reading -- Allow people time to reflect on what they have heard.
Note the word or phrase which drew your attention this time.

2nd reading -- Invite people to talk about what they have heard and
where it might intersect with their lives.

Behind the Text

Imagine the story of the Exodus as movie series along the lines of **Star Wars**. Where and when does it actually begin? With **Star Wars** at least three sequels have already been made. Moses' story, as with most stories, has its real beginning deep in the past. Even Moses' part in the bigger story begins quite some time after we first encounter him in the wilderness. So it seems like a good idea to go to his beginnings at least. Moses is pivotal to the Exodus and the story of Israel. Moses not only led the people out of Egypt, he led them through the years of growing into God's people.

While there seems to be a disconnect of many years between the end of Genesis where we left Joseph's family living comfortably in Egypt and the beginning of the Exodus when the Hebrew people have become slaves of a Pharaoh who no longer remembers their ancestor. In fact it appears that not only does the king not remember, the people themselves have pretty much forgotten who they were and the promises of God. The writer or writers of Exodus very carefully connect this story to the ancestors and insist the promises first made to the patriarchs are still in operation. The ancestors went into Egypt to escape death from famine and the people now are to be led out of Egypt in to the wilderness where they will come to know God.

During the Bible studies at *Journeying the Good News Road*, Rick Lawry mentioned that the stories were not shaped in their present form until the time of the Exile in Babylon or shortly thereafter. Some of the shaping of the Exodus account reflects the shaping which was going on in the time of the Exile. The result is a story with a sense of timelessness. It is much more than a story of a particular time in a particular wilderness. It is at home in the wilderness of Exile or even the wilderness in which the church finds itself in this early 21st century. It continues to be story of the Jewish people in every time and every place. Each year when families gather at the Passover meal the question is asked, "*Why is this night different from all other nights?*" and the story is told again and ends, "*Next year in Jerusalem,*" the hope and promise of the exile, then and now.

The story of exodus moves from liberation through years of hardship and wandering to life in covenant with God who is both the source of their life and the giver of laws by which they may live. (*If you want to explore that, Deuteronomy and Leviticus provide an interesting look into the development of the structure by which they are to live.*)

Let the story begin....

Observation: A child is born into a dangerous world among people who are experiencing great hardship. His community and his mother protect him. The midwives refuse to kill the baby boy as they are supposed to and his mother hides him until he is

too big to hide. Obviously she was a woman of intelligence, strength, and courage and probably knew more about a woman's heart than Pharaoh did. She set him afloat in a place she knew he would be found by someone who was far more likely to care for him than to kill him. When he is found, the princess immediately recognizes him as a Hebrew baby and offers her protection. By offering that protection she took him out of danger, but she probably ran some risk in defying her father's decree.

With the protection and even the financial support of the princess, Moses is returned to those from whom he came. His parents were Levites and as such likely remembered the old stories of their people. We have no idea how long he was with his mother, certainly until he was old enough to be placed in Pharaoh's court where he was educated. There was within him a mixture of two cultures, that of the Hebrew slaves and that of the slave owners.

Consider

- 1) What it is like to live between two cultures, particularly when those two cultures seem to be at odds with each other? *(If you haven't had this experience yourself, it's likely within your congregation or community there are people who "live between the cultures." You may want to talk with them. You may want to talk to them about what it is like.)*
- 2) What are the elements in this first account which begin to make it clear why Moses was the one to lead the people out of Egypt?

Observation

We next encounter Moses who has grown into a young man. As such he is given more freedom and begins to not only hear what has happened to his people, he begins to see with his own eyes. Somewhere in him there is a well of anger at the injustice of their situation. Things are not as they should be. The anger boils over and in a moment of rage he kills an Egyptian. He thinks he is not observed or at least he hopes he was not.

When he sees his own people fighting he challenges them. Clearly he is not a hero in their eyes. Perhaps that isn't surprising. He was after all an outsider in both groups and the Hebrews didn't see him as one of them. Perhaps they saw him as an enemy.

In his fright we see him run away.

Consider

Did he know where he was going or was it a headlong flight? Was his only thought to escape the long arm of Pharaoh?

Observation:

Moses has now gone into a wilderness place, Midian, about which we know only that it isn't Egypt. It appears to be a pastoral place free from the threats and abusiveness of Egypt, a place where Moses will learn and grow into leadership material God can use in the unfolding of the story.

His first encounter is with a group of seven sisters who are having a hard time taking care of their father's flocks. Moses comes to their defense and rescues them which leads to a dinner invitation. Their father is a priest, but at the beginning of this part of the story, it's more important that he has a marriageable daughter. In this account he is called Reuel and in later accounts he is named Jethro.

The daughters recognize him as Egyptian, so there must have been some visible things about him which made them see him that way. Their father recognizes his own debt to Moses and also as someone who is unusual. Moses has again sided with the weak against the strong, those who have an unfair advantage.

The story now moves quickly. He is invited to share the hospitality of the family, a step not lightly offered and yet very important in a time and place where travelers had to depend on the people of the land for their welcome. And then he is invited into the household as a son-in-law. In a short time Moses has moved from being an alien in the land of his birth, to refugee, to being an alien in an alien land.

Consider

What are the transformations which take place through the course of this account, particularly in Moses' life? How does his story affect the stories of others? What are the pieces in this story which will connect to the ongoing story of the transformation of the Hebrew people?

Activity (Optional)

Begin to draw a map of your own life. What are the important events which have led you to where you now are? How does your story connect with the story of your congregation?

Additional supplies you will need:

- ▶ Paper
- ▶ Colored pens/markers/crayons etc.

Practicing the Presence

- 1) This week you may want to continue exploring Sabbath, not as a whole day, but as your day in which to become aware of God's presence. Welcome the morning and offer your day to God. When you eat, pay attention to the food and give thanks for that which nourishes you. As your day is ending, take a moment to welcome the night and the gifts of silence, rest, a place to sleep.

If you choose you may want to copy the two Jewish prayers on this page to a card or cards and as part of your prayer connection with your small group, use these each day.

Blessed is The Lord our God, Sovereign of the universe, who sustains the entire world with goodness, kindness and mercy. God gives food to all creatures, for God's mercy is everlasting. Through God's abundant goodness we have not lacked sustenance, and may we not lack sustenance forever, for the sake of God's great name. God sustains all, does good to all, and provides food for all the creatures whom God has created. Blessed is The Lord our God, who provides food for all.

O Lord, grant that this night we may sleep in peace in the morning may our awakening also be in peace. May our daytime be cloaked in your peace. Protect us and inspire us to think and act only out of love. Keep far from us all evil; may our paths be free from all obstacles from when we go out until we return home.

- 2) Continue the practice of scripture reading. This week read Exodus 3 which is the focus for Session 4. After you have read the whole chapter a few times, you may want to focus on a portion of the passage which particularly draws your attention.

Suggested Reading Pattern

- 1st Read and listen to the text. Notice phrases that seem familiar or stand out for you. You may want to read it out loud or you may want to read it with someone else.
- 2nd Choose a word or phrase to carry with you and reflect on it as it comes to your mind through the day. (If you read at night – let the word or phrase rest overnight and pick it up in the morning. Remember the pattern of creation – “evening and morning.” You may receive fresh insights when you waken.)
- 3rd During the week read “Behind the Text” and the “Observations/Consider” on the text. Even a few minutes spent each day or several times a week, will enrich your experience of the study and the experience of your small group.

Closing Worship

Meditation

Who we are depends on many things –
Our genetics – It took the universe 20 billion years to create us
each wonderfully unique and yet related and connected to all
those who went before us...

Add your own responses.

Hair like

Eyes like....

Height like...

Gifts like...

And even when our ancestry is unknown it will be seen in
our children and their children

Our family – Our parents and their parents teach us how to be who
we become. Did they invite us to ask questions and look for
answers? Did they welcome us? Did they help us on our life
journey? Have we had to spend years recovering from that family
and becoming stronger so things will be different for those who
follow us?

Teachers, church, our community, or world all have a piece in our
becoming. What we do with what we have will help shape the
future.

Video clip – Ch.1 *Leave a Legacy* from a video that accompanies Stephen
Covey's Book: ***The 8th Habit*** (optional but recommended)

Reading – (*Alternative if clip isn't shown*) God is love. God loves each one of us.
We read something beautiful in Scriptures: 'I have called you by your name, you
are mine. Water will not drown you, fire will not burn you, I will give up nations for
you, you are precious to me. I love you. Even if a mother could forget her child, I
will not forget you. I have carved you on the palm of my hand. This is God
speaking to you and to me, to that leper man and that alcoholic woman, to the
person with a mental handicap and to the little child: 'You are precious to me. I
love you'.

*From **The Wisdom of Mother Teresa**, compiled by Kathryn Spink
Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY*

Prayer – Notice who is on your right and who is on your left. During the coming
week remember these two persons in your prayers. Continue to pray
for your congregation and give thanks for the work God is already
doing among you.

Unison: Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life into our hands; Now we put
ours into yours. Take us, renew and remake us. What we have been is
past, what we shall be through you, still awaits us. Lead us. Take us
with you.

Amen

Song – Lo, I Am With You -- #430 Chalice Hymnal