

EXODUS 3:1-4:17
A WORK IN PROGRESS

We need good leaders! The Church, the nation needs good leaders! We need strong, charismatic leadership; leadership that is magnetic, fascinating, stunning, attractive, glowing, dominant, forceful, energetic. "People who pass us on the street can't know we're clever and charming unless we look it." This list and that quote came from the success guides of 1920's America, led by men like Dale Carnegie. They have never quite gone away. We still look for leaders to be personalities, to be strong, to unleash the power within themselves for good of others and to change the world. Leaders have to be like salesmen or women, developing that cult of personality, which changes a room when they walk in, because all of a sudden they are the centre of attention. This cult of personality is the kind of leadership that the world seems to admire more than any other; we need our heroes!

We have a curiously double-sided attitude to this kind of leadership in our British culture. We look for strong leadership and complain about leadership that is weak and unclear; "we need someone to give us a lead, to show us way." Then when that leadership does emerge, we complain that people are domineering and we make it our aim in life to bring them down a peg or two, to knock them off the pedestal on to which we put them in the first place. We look for strong leadership, then complain that people are self-seeking and simply out for what they can get out of it for themselves, to line their own pocket. "Lead us, please, but on our terms and don't get too big for your boots!" When the Speaker of the House of Commons was appointed (I don't think they do it now!) he was dragged backwards by 2 MP's to the Speaker's Chair, symbolic of his reluctance to take on leadership.

Christian leadership is a mix of 3 things: firstly, a sense of call from God, that this is something to which God is leading or calling us; secondly, having the gifts and talents that are needed to exercise leadership; and thirdly, a function, a job, something to do. We need to hold that mix together. I've met lots of people who felt that God was calling them to be Christian leaders, ministers, but they patently didn't have the gifts, talents or abilities to exercise the functions of leadership and ministry. I have also met people who sensed that God was calling them, leading them to some kind of leadership, but their view of themselves would suggest to them that they can't possibly do it; they didn't see the gifts and talents in themselves, but maybe others did! It is this mix of calling, gifts and a job to do that we see in the next chapter in the story of Moses; what kind of leader will be Moses be?

The story so far: the people of Israel are slaves in Egypt; Pharaoh is frightened that they will grow to be an enemy within, a nation within a nation that will ally itself with his enemies; so he has begun to oppress them; they are slaves, made to build some of his landmark cities; there is a genocide plot, to kill the Hebrew sons and allow only Hebrew daughters to live. One of these sons, Moses, has escaped, hidden by his mother, who trusted God rather than being afraid of Pharaoh; when she could hide him no longer, she put him in a basket in the Nile from where he was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and so Moses became her adopted son and went to live in the royal palace. His mother has told him the stories of his faith; his instinct is to belong to the slave people, to his Hebrew flesh and blood and he tries to be their leader, But his naiveté and foolishness have got in the way and all that he has succeeded in doing is to make himself a wanted man and to make his people angry with him. He has run away!

Meet the burning bush! This is our Church badge. The words that are found underneath that badge come from this story. Did you notice when you came through the front doors today, that the badge is over the door? Moses is going about his shepherding business in the desert and the bush is on fire; there is nothing special about that; it would happen all the time. This bush was on fire, but it was not turning black – *“It did...” (Exodus 3:2)* So it attracted his attention and he went to see and so this became the changing moment of his life, an encounter that was to change the course of his life for ever. God was in the bush. *“When the...” (Exodus 3:4)* Fire suggests the purity and holiness of God and Moses caught that and hid his face; he is in the presence of the great God; the bush didn't burn up or go out suggests an unchanging God whose presence goes on and whose people go on; that is certainly the sense of the motto under our badge: God's presence and His people are unending!

Here is Moses' new mission in life: *“I have...” (Exodus 3:7-10)* We know from last week that God has heard His people's prayers, that God has looked on their need and that He knows their situation. Here, finally, He does something about it! He calls Moses. Moses' new mission in life is to go back to Egypt to save his people! It sounds simple when you say it quickly. Not only is he to save them out of Egypt, but he is to lead them to the Promised Land, to place his fathers called 'home'. Wow! What a job! Here is a once in a life-time opportunity; it needs someone with proven leadership abilities, someone who can motivate people, someone who can hold his own in debate with the highest in the land; someone who can organise people who have been leaderless for generations. Well, that might be our version of the job description; if that were for real, Moses probably wouldn't qualify. Magnetic, stunning, forceful, energetic leadership? God calls Moses and if we have doubts about that choice, Moses has even more doubts about himself!

There are five reasons that Moses gives to say 'here's why this is a bad idea, Lord!' These are found in Exodus 3:11-4:17

1. *“Who am I?”* “I'm not the person that you need; I'm not up to this job in any way, shape or form!”
2. *“What shall I tell them?”* “I don't know things; I don't even know your name, if they ask”.
3. *“What if they don't believe me?”* My ministry failed last time; what if the same happens again?
4. *“I've never been eloquent!”* “I can't speak; I don't have the gifts needed for this important job.”
5. *“Please, send someone else!”* There are two ways of reading this sentence: the way in which the NIV reads suggests Moses is not willing to do it; or it can be read “have it your way” which is willing, but only just! This is summed up by Alec Motyer: “I can't, therefore I won't!” Moses sees his own faults and failings, his own sense of inadequacy, all the reasons why this is such a bad idea and in the end suggests to God that someone else should go instead. Surely we can sympathise with him. In his shoes, we'd say the same things or wish we'd thought of them earlier!

If someone said these things to us – “I'm not up to it” – we'd say “of course you are!” and try to persuade them. God doesn't do that. What does God say? 1. *“I will be with you”*. 2. *“I am who I am. Tell them I am has sent you!”* 3. *“Here are 3 signs to help persuade them”*. 4. *“Now go, I will help you”*. 5. *“Aaron will go with you too”*. God doesn't disagree with Moses' view of himself; He doesn't argue with Moses; He knows that Moses is inadequate for job and that he can't speak and that he failed last time. But who are you

looking at? Moses is looking at himself. God invites Moses to look at God and understand that God is able to make this happen. If before Moses was saying “I can’t therefore I won’t”, Alec Motyer says that the Lord brought Moses to the point where he could say “I can’t, but He can, therefore I will.” The challenge for Moses is to look at what God is like, to see that God is there and to trust; to trust that God keeps His promises. We are introduced to one of the most fascinating descriptions of God: “*I am*” – the living God, who is present everywhere, all of the time, who never gives up, who never goes away! This ever-present, ever-active God is Moses’ God and will be there, with His people, in the days that are to come. The challenge for Moses to believe that and look at God instead of himself.

“Unleash the power with in” – that’s what we’re told in the self-help books, the success guides! Be proud, assert yourself; you have the power! Actually many of us don’t think we have the power! Most of us don’t feel strong at all at times! Most people that I meet, faced with the kind of situation Moses faced would say exactly the same as he did: “I’m not up to that; I can’t do it; send someone else! I can’t, therefore I won’t” and overwhelmed by the task, overwhelmed by our circumstances, we turn away with a sense of hopelessness in our hearts. But we’re looking in the wrong direction. I came across a quote this week on the Bible reading website that I use, from RM McCheyne, a minister in Dundee in the 1840’s – “do not take up your time so much with studying your own heart... for every one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.”

“I can’t, but He can, therefore I will.” We look at the mess we’ve made of life at times, the things we’ve got wrong, the words that have hurts others, the sense that we’ve let God down, and not always been the people He wants us to be; and even when we try to put things right that doesn’t work either. Jesus came to be the Saviour of the world. He came to take all of that mess on Himself and set things right for us. “*Christ died...*” (1 Peter 3:18) Jesus can save us completely. Trust Him; put our faith in Him as the Saviour and He will not let us down. A leadership task, or any task in the life of the Church, or to serve the community, whatever it may be, and we see all the reasons why this is bad idea and we can’t do it; yet God has promised to be with us and help us. Paul could think of all sorts of reasons why he should never be Christian leader, but he marvels at the grace and patience of God in changing him; now he has the joy and privilege of telling others the good news and being a mentor to Timothy, all because of the grace and patience of God.

Do you believe in a great God? Does Moses believe in a great God? If he does, he will go! He will go because God is who and what He is! He will go because he trusts in the promises of God. “*I will be with you*” He is not the finished article, he is a work in progress as we shall see, but he goes; he takes the step of faith; he looks at God and says “He is able; He can help; He will be there with me!” Christian leadership is not modelled on the salesman or charismatic business leader; Christian leadership is modelled on a man who was crucified, a servant who loved the world. The Church needs strong leadership, but of a different sort, with different kind of strength, leaders that depends on God, seeing that He is able! Christian life is a work in progress: we are still not the people we are meant to be, but we are people who are being transformed, reshaped by the grace and power of God. We are people who are learning to look to Jesus, learning to trust Him because He is able to save us; He is able to help us in hard times; He is able to guide us; He is able to answer our prayers.