

A couple of Fridays ago, Hannah came down,
and we went through the upstairs bonus room closet,
which really hasn't been touched
since we moved in July 2022...

What I call the Closet of Memories,

full of pictures, mementos, and brochures
from many of our trips...
so while Inside Out played in the background,
we dove into our family past, boxed and forgotten...

Back in 2017, Hannah and I went to a father-and-daughter,
or any parent-and-child, retreat called The Outback...
Where I learned the most important lesson of parenting
Being a Coach and Consultant...versus Commander
Moses is about to have one of those kinds of moments in his life today.

1 Moses was taking care of the flock for his father-in-law Jethro, Midian's priest. He led his flock out to the edge of the desert, and he came to God's mountain called Horeb.

I wonder if Moses was enjoying the scenery
as he wandered around on that mountain,
following his father-in-law's sheep.
Did he bother to look at the majestic mountain
pressing upward into the cloud-strewn sky?
Did he see the wind-carved sandstone sculptures
on the rocks that surrounded him?
Or was he more worried about what he might step in
as he made his way up the mountain with the sheep he followed?
Or maybe he was more focused on
something you don't see every day.

2 The LORD's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames, but it didn't burn up.

Well, at least that bush caught his eye.
We can thank God for that. Literally.
Who knew that on that mountain
in the back of the big beyond,
Moses would stumble across God?
Not Moses, surely.
He wasn't looking.

He didn't want to be found.
He was in his self-imposed witness protection program,
hiding out from the authorities back home
who had placed him on the most wanted list.

Remember that part of Moses' story?
When he had let his temper get the best of him.
Call it righteous indignation if you want;
call it an act of justice, protecting one of the browbeaten
who was being oppressed.
But Pharaoh's police force called it murder,
and even the adopted grandson of the king himself
couldn't get away with murder.
So, he ran for his life.

3 Then Moses said to himself, Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't burning up.

4 When the LORD saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses said, "I'm here."

Way back then across the desert, he ran,
feeling like blood was still dripping from his hands.
And maybe his dreams were filled
with a nightly nightmare of his crime.
They must have been, at least for a while.
Maybe, as the years passed,
the hot sun and dry dust
eroded his memories enough to forget.
Maybe he forgot what he did,
where he came from, even who he was.

Has that ever happened to you when
something traumatic has happened in your life?
I have been there for sure.
Thinking you could never go back or forward.
This rescued Hebrew baby boy
from last week's Moses moment,
who grew up in the palace of the greatest
king in the known world, wanted to forget everything—
except how to follow sheep up a mountain.
"That's all I am," he thought,

“all I’m good for, following sheep through
the dusty middle of nowhere.
Where nothing happens.
Where no one goes.”
Except for, guess who? God.

5 Then the LORD said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground."

“Take off your shoes,” the bush said.
The bush? Yeah, the bush.
The burning but not consumed bush.
Burning but not consumed?
How does that even work?
Maybe that’s what drew him.
Maybe after all these years of burning and being consumed,
he wanted to see how it was possible
for something to burn and yet not be consumed.
Maybe it was the promise,
maybe it was the hope,
that caused him to step aside long enough
for his whole life to be turned upside down and inside out.
That maybe he could be accepted again.

6 He continued, "I am the God of your father, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the LORD said, "I've clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain."

8 I've come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that's full of milk and honey...

“I’ve come to help,” said the bush,
or the angel in the bush,
or the voice that wasn’t the angel
or the bush but seemed to transcend both and was all around.
“My heart is broken with the pain of my people,
so I have come to help. To set them free.”
Great, thought Moses, what’s a bush going to do
against the might of a nation like Egypt?
Oh no...you have got to be kidding...

10 So get going. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

"I've come to help," says the voice, "I'm sending you."

"Say what?" stutters Moses,

"I just follow sheep. I'm not a hero."

I can remember thinking a similar thing
the summer before I was about to begin seminary.

I still wasn't fully convinced that I was
good enough or smart enough or,
with my stutter, able to speak the word of God.

I want to serve you, God, but I don't see how
this introverted person who never spoke
in public before MTSU and the Wesley Foundation
can actually lead a church.

Which I was also set to do starting in July
in a small town called Statham on 316 just outside of Athens GA.

12 God said, "I'll be with you. And this will show you that I'm the one who sent you. After you bring the people out of Egypt, you will come back here and worship God on this mountain."

"I will be with you," says the voice
as the flames crackle in the silence,
while Moses chews on this bit of news.

"And who are you?" he wonders inside and eventually out loud.

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

And here comes the answer above all answers...

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

As he made his way back across the desert
to the land he had abandoned
(but this time with a mission, an impossible mission to be sure),
did Moses roll that name over in his mind with every sandy step?

"I am who I am," said the voice.

"I will be who I will be."

Tell them "I AM" sent you. I AM will be with you."
He probably shook his head at the strangeness of the thought.
I know I would and did.
As I read this, I kept wondering if God in the burning bush
was God's way of trying not to
overwhelm Moses with too much too fast.
Stepping in to be his coach and consultant
like I learned to be for Hannah at the Outback.

I had those along the way too.
I never grew up in church.
Had no clue what that was really like.
Baptized at 20 at the Wesley Foundation,
in no small part through the extraordinary
efforts of my Campus Minister Bill Campbell,
and went to Exploration 94 in Virginia
to just explore maybe a call to some kind of ministry.
Met a Campus Minister there as my group leader.
And an Elder like myself and even a Bishop
who laid hands on me.
Someone all along the way coaching me and being my consultant.

God sends a burning bush with a sense of knowing
the other person will not respond well
to what God was saying, yet knowing that
they need to move from resistance to acceptance.
How often are we on the receiving end of the call to lead,
ready with all the reasons we can't or shouldn't or don't want to?
I certainly had plenty of my own
that summer and into 3 years of seminary.

Let me ask you a question.
Have you ever been resistant to what God is calling you to do?
Where it is clear as day, like a burning bush on fire,
what God is calling you to do?
Calling you to go?
Calling you to leave behind?
And then God, somewhere somehow,
steps in as the commander directly
or through someone else, perhaps.
And helps us move from Resistance to Acceptance.

**We don't know whether that is what Moses
came to as he trudged out of his desert sanctuary**

and headed back to the scene of his crime.

But somewhere along the line,
he claimed the call laid on him
there in the glow of the burning bush.

Somewhere in the courts of Pharaoh,
he accepted what he was there to do.
Somewhere in the face of the rejection
and suspicion from his own people,
somewhere with an army behind
and an impassible sea before him,
he accepted the burden and the joy of being
where God wanted him to be.
It can't have been an easy process,
this coming to acceptance.
It wasn't for me and ministry.

Perhaps God gathers us together here
where we can help one another move
through our resistance toward
the acceptance of God's call in our lives.
Though we all have unique calls,
we share a mission to live as the body of Christ
and to build the kingdom of God
on earth as it is in heaven, or,
as the Council of Bishops recently expressed,

"to form disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections."

However we describe our mission,
we can probably all agree that it's not an easy ask.
There are many barriers to loving boldly,
serving joyfully, and leading courageously in our world.
How do we address those barriers in our lives
to see and listen to our burning bush from God?

Maybe it is taking time to sit together
with all the "I don't want tos" we all have.

And then what if we take the next most faithful step toward acceptance?

Set aside our resistance and live into our shared mission.

And remember to remind each other

of the most important thing when it comes to following God's call...

remind one another that we are not alone;

God is with us and has given us

this faith community to help us on our way.

Could we commit to moving forward together in grace,

while acknowledging that some days

acceptance will seem far away.

Remind one another that on those days,

we lean on God and our fellow members

in the body of Christ to keep going,

believing for and with one another that God who calls us

will never leave or forsake us as we learn

and re-learn these lessons in leadership.

What do you need to hear from God

to move from resistance to acceptance?