Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17
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We Are the Someones

Our text for this morning leaps ahead from Jacob and his astonishment that God was in the wilderness with him. Jacob goes on to father 12 sons and a daughter. One of those sons is named Joseph, the favored younger son whose dreams get him in trouble with his brothers, the same sorts of dreams that later garner him a privileged spot in pharaoh's court. Because of his favored position in Egypt, Joseph is able to save his family from starvation during a famine. Jacob and his sons wind up migrate to Egypt, and they thrive there. And their thriving becomes a problem. The book of Exodus begins with an ominous shift. The pharaoh who knew and trusted and valued Joseph has died. The new pharaoh decides that the Israelites are a potential threat. They outnumber the Egyptians, and this pharaoh determines that in the event of a war, the Israelite people could turn on their hosts and help an enemy defeat them. His solution is to overpower them and enslave them, thinking that will solve his problem.

Moses is born into slavery to Hebrew parents, and the baby in the bullrushes grows up in the palace. After killing an Egyptian he sees beating a Hebrew, Moses runs away to the wilderness and begins a new life as a shepherd. In the meantime, God has taken notice of the Hebrews' suffering and has a plan to help them. [Read Exodus 3:1-15]

It turns out that Jacob's is not the only wilderness where God is present. Moses has run away from everyone and everything, or so he thinks. The suffering of the Hebrews has grabbed God's attention. God now knows how deeply they are struggling, and God has decided to do something about it. And that something has everything to do with Moses. So, God seeks Moses out in the wilderness beyond the wilderness, the backside of nowhere, as one of you taught me this week. In

this seemingly godforsaken place, God sets fire to a shrub, and the shrub is miraculously not burned to a crisp, displaying the power of God within its glowing leaves. And Moses cannot not turn to look. He has run from his crime and run from his past. He cannot bring himself to run now. And once God has Moses' attention, God cries out and calls him by name and tells him to take off his shoes. He is on holy ground.

With Moses grounded, God paints a vivid picture of what God has witnessed and what God has in mind. The Hebrews' suffering has moved God not simply to throw thunderbolt or wave a wand and set things right but to come down himself and save them. And God wants Moses to be the one who leads them out. God has been the Hebrews' God all along, but somewhere along the way that relationship faded or frayed. Maybe life was so good in Egypt early on that the people began to think that their ancestors had saved themselves from famine. Maybe life had grown so desolate under slavery that they had convinced themselves that no one could hear their cries, let alone save them. So God begins with reintroducing himself to Moses: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

During my first month of seminary, I began worshipping at a church in downtown Richmond. Over punch and cookies one Sunday morning, a matriarch in the congregation sought me out because she had heard I was from Nashville. Her first question to me was, "Who is your motha?" She wanted to figure out if she knew my people, and by extension, me.

God already knows Moses' people, and God's connection with them—and with Moses—is deeper than being able to swap stories about shared third cousins twice removed. God made a covenant with Abraham and by extension with Isaac and Jacob, to be their God, to claim their descendants as his people, and to bless the nations of the world through those descendants. Even if

the people's memory is faint or faltering, the covenant still holds. And this God of this enduring covenantal relationship is determined to save his people, who happen to be Moses' people, too.

It's a doozy of a recruiting pitch. How do you say "no" to the God of creation calling you by name from a flaming shrub that is miraculously not burned to bits? While Moses doesn't exactly say "no," he does raise concerns about God's choice.

First, Moses asks, "Who am I to do this?" God replies, "I will be with you." No *yes* yet. Then Moses asks, "***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?" Not *when* I go, but IF. God then gives Moses God's name, sort of: "I AM WHO I AM." On the one hand, God answers Moses' question. At the same time, God makes it clear that God is beyond anything that can be monogrammed on a set of towels or golf clubs. God is who God is and will be what God will be. This God has taken note of deep suffering and has chosen not to ignore it and asks Moses to do this holy work of liberation in God's name.

In the rest of chapter 3, God paints a picture of what this work will look like, work that Moses will not do alone but alongside the Hebrew elders. And Moses is still unconvinced. At the beginning of chapter 4, God shows holy power working through Moses with the help of a staff turned snake turned staff again and a hand that is diseased and then healed in the blink of an eye. And still Moses does not say "yes." Moses points out that he is not gifted with eloquence, and God promises to give him just the right words at just the right time. But Moses is still unconvinced. [Read Exodus 4: 13-17]

"O my Lord, please send someone else." After numerous excuses and questions and objections, the truth spills out. And God says, "No." *You are the someone. I will be with you. I will give you strength. I will give you a partner. I will give you the words to speak. There is no someone else. You are the someone.*

When I arrived at seminary, I honestly had no idea what I had gotten myself into—or what God had gotten me into. We played one of those silly icebreakers where we were supposed to choose a biblical character we related to. I was hard pressed to think of any, so I went with Moses, simply because I could relate to his "Who me, God?" questions. And now 33 years after that first fall in Richmond, I am more struck by Moses' plea to send someone else. In a world fraught with meanness, hatred, ugliness, and cavernously deep division, it can be so hard to keep trying to do what God asks. Can't you find someone else to do the whole love neighbors and enemies thing, God? Can't you find someone else to stand up for the ones who are crying out now? We could really use a Moses, or a Harriet Tubman, or a Nelson Mandela, or…or…or… Could you just get on outsourcing all that, God? And then I hear God persistently replying, "There is no someone else. You are the someone. All y'all are the someones."

Some of you may remember Kid President, the jovial kid whose videos pointed to hope and joy and neighborliness a few years back. The producer of those videos was a man named Brad Montague, who happened to be the Kid President's brother-in-law. Montague has written children's books as well as a book for adults entitled, *Becoming Better Grownups: Rediscovering What Matters and Remembering How to Fly*. He also writes a substack or newsletter that shows up every week or so in my inbox. Last week he shared a poem of sorts, entitled, "A Thing For Me To Read When I Need Reminding What Silly, Sacred Things We All Are, Because I Will Forget."

> Humans are silly things.
> We tug on doors clearly marked push.
> We name our cars and shout at toasters.
> We save twisty-ties from bread bags,
> because, *you know,* just in case …
> We're sometimes overthinking, sometimes thoughtless.
> Sometimes standing in line rehearsing what we'll say when it's our turn,
> and then blurting out something else entirely.
> We search the fridge for what isn't there,

and then search again,
because, *you know,* just in case …
We are ridiculous.
And yet . . .
the same hands that drop phones in toilets
also cradle newborn heads.
The same mouths that mispronounce *quinoa* with confidence
can whisper prayers and sing lullabies.
Ridiculous and astonishing.
I know. I don't get it either.
And here's the great mystery,
the ridiculous, astonishing truth:
we silly things are built for connection.
For each other.
We are cellos meant for symphonies.
We are sparks meant for bonfires.
Puzzle pieces that only reveal the picture
when we find each other's edges.
And yet, we live on the edge.
Disconnected.
Fractured in a world
splintering into camps and corners,
breaking into loud noises and quieter despairs.
Some aim to keep us there,
but if you listen..
underneath, behind, beyond the clangs
there is a steady hum, reminding us:
we need each other.
Not cleverness, not power, not speed
What we need
are the silly things right in front of us,
the ridiculous and the astonishing.
And I know it's not what you want to hear.
And I realize it's not ideal.
And I agree that it might sound overly simple and maybe it is
or maybe we just make it overly hard,
Still, I bring before you
a silly idea
that maybe the answer lies in strange, simple, stubborn acts
like reaching for one another in the dark
and finding,
miracle of miracles …
a hand reaching back.
because,

you know… just in case.[1]

A few years ago, this congregation heard a cry for connection with one another, with our neighborhood, and with our siblings in Bayonnais, and the Market for Mission was born. This effort—and it is a massive effort—has raised tens of thousands of dollars for our friends in Haiti AND it has forged friendships within the congregation AND it has offered friendship and joy and fellowship and treasures at a fair price to our neighbors. This year's sale will be bigger than ever before, and its impact will stretch across the ocean to Haiti and to the Rebuilders Campus just a few miles away. The Market has been and still is a hand reaching for connection in the dark, a stubborn refusal to sit and wish and wait for someone else to do something.

Following worship we will join in our own version of the Exodus. In a practical sense it is a way to liberate the treasures stored on the top floor of the Will Young Building and get them down to a good and broad space in Davis Hall in record time. It also reminds us how we too have been liberated and called out of the tight spaces of futility and disconnection that try to hold us in. In case we have forgotten, we are among the someones called to do God's holy work here and now. The forces of division and cruelty want us to feel helpless; they bank on our believing we are not up to the task. They count on us staying stuck. And yet, each time we hold the door for a friend carrying a lamp or smile at a child cradling a toy or two on the elevator, in our own strange, simple, stubborn way we are proving those forces wrong. In our own strange, simple, stubborn way we are answering God's to get going, God's call to stare down the pharaohs in our midst and declare that the great I AM has a different way and a different world in mind for us and for all.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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[1] https://bradmontague.substack.com/p/hello-human