“Through Heaven’s Eyes: Bearers of God’s Name”

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Exodus 3: 1-15

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God isn’t going to give you a burning bush. Wish for it all you want, because you aren’t going to get it.

When Moses first caught sight of the burning bush, he wasn’t sure what he was looking at. In the way the story is told, we hear a progression of Moses’ comprehension of what he was seeing. First: “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush.” There’s an angel in a flame. Out of fire. Out of a bush. What? Then, Moses looks closer. “The bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.” Astonished, Moses says, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” It’s only then, when “The Lord saw that Moses had turned aside to see,” that God called to him from the bush. Moses! Moses!

You aren’t going to get a burning bush, because if God gave you a burning bush, you’d know exactly what it is. You’ve heard this story more than once. You’ve wished God would talk with you in such a clear and direct manner. You’ve begged God to lay down some holy ground in front of you and just TELL you what to do. But according to this story, that isn’t how God’s call works. Curiosity will lead you to God’s call. When you turn aside to look and see what it might be about, God’s call is going to lead you to know God and God’s people. Which will lead to uncertainty and more questions. Curiosity will lead to God’s call, and God’s call will lead you to curiosity.

Last week, we heard the stories of the 5 women who helped deliver and protect Moses’ life as a baby. He’s grown now, and after escaping Egypt as an outlaw, it seems he’s just trying to keep his head down and live a normal life. He got a job, found a wife, and had a kid. He’s just minding his own business when a “flame out of a fire out of a bush” shows up on the path.

You’re not going to get a burning bush-but God is inviting you to be curious. What about? Here’s what we can learn from Moses’ encounter:

* You don’t have to go anywhere special to encounter God. You might even find God at work.
* When you recognize something unusual-stop what you’re doing and get closer.
* God will wait for you to be curious and take notice-the call isn’t forced upon you.
* When the call comes, ask questions. God will talk with you about it.
* Wherever the call leads you, God promises to be with you.

Recent graduate of Georgia College and State University, PHPC member Courtney Henry is about to begin a big step towards God’s calling for her life-she’s about to start seminary, at the best seminary around, Columbia Theological Seminary. I met Courtney while she was interning here in High School, and have watched her curiosity grow as God has led her closer and closer to this next step. From coming to youth group, to interning at PHPC, to choosing her major, to her first summer job in college, Courtney’s curiosity led her to get to know God’s people in a whole new way when she worked at Memphis Youth Mission where she had the opportunity to work alongside people who were experiencing homelessness, communities with food insecurity, and faith traditions unfamiliar to her.

She describes this part of her call in her application to seminary, she wrote, “As the summer wore on, I began to not only learn the names of my new city neighbors but learn their stories. Their stories of how the racially discriminatory systems in the United States had failed them. Stories of children who have big dreams but are unsupported by the education system. Story after story that not only challenged my world view, but taught me to sit in discomfort and reconsider my own privileges in the world. It was in those moments that I knew I was called to vocational ministry and to help change the church to be a place for all of these people.” Courtney didn’t get a burning bush. Courtney got a job that led her to people that brought up questions that pushed her forward in the direction God is calling her. A place where more questions will be explored, and callings pursued.

Now we aren’t all called to seminary. That would be boring. We are called to many different places in life to work, and serve, and love, and care in endless combinations. But whatever our call, as Christians, we believe that it is the same God who calls each of us. The God who introduced God’s-self as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Is the same God who calls Moses and the same God who calls Courtney and the same God who calls you.

God says, “Call me, ‘I Am Who I Am.’” There’s much scholarly discussion on how to translate this, but I wonder if this mysterious name that God gives Moses is an invitation to ask more questions? To inspire curiosity and engagement with the divine?

In these 15 verses, we learn that God is the God who has always been there with the Israelites, is present with them now, and plans to be there in the future. God has observed the Israelite’s misery and heard their cries. And not only has God seen it, and plans to come do something about it, the text tells us that God KNOWS their suffering.

During our Exodus sermon series, Pastor Katie and I are preaching under the theme, “Through Heaven’s Eyes,” the title of the song from the film *The Prince of Egypt* which Drew Philipp’s just sang. Last week, I preached that when God looks at us through heaven’s eyes, God sees God’s good creation, valuable life worthy of preservation and freedom. In our story today, we learn something new about God, thanks to Moses’ curious questions. God *knows* God’s creation intimately. God could have chosen to remain safe and secure in the heavenly throne room, separate from the sufferings of the people. Instead, God chooses to know God’s creation. Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim writes, “God does not look at the suffering from the outside as through a window; God knows it from the inside…For God to know suffering is…to allow suffering to enter deeply into the divine being.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Through heaven’s eyes, we are seen and *known* by God, in our every breath, thought, and feeling.

God *knows* us. God created us to be curious, and uses that curiosity to invite our attention towards God what God’s attention is turned towards: God’s people. And in this particular case, the suffering and deliverance of God’s people.

So if we aren’t going to get a burning bush (because that would be too obvious), and we aren’t all destined to be pastors, what might you need to get curious about? What will cause you to want to turn aside and get a closer look? What questions will you ask and demand answers to? What will all of these lead to for you?

I don’t know! I’m still figuring all this out myself. I am sure though, that cultivating curiosity for myself and others is part of God’s call for me. As your Pastor of Christian Education, I believe that Youth Group, confirmation, and church school for everyone from preschool to adult, and small groups are not about *what* you should believe and *how* to believe it. These are opportunities for you to get curious, and cultivate your own curiosity. I want you to hear Bible stories in a way that brings up new questions. When you walk into any of our church school classes, I want you to leave a little riled up, thinking on something that you hadn’t considered before. When you encounter injustice or suffering or grief in the world, I want you to see it, and hear it, and KNOW it. To get curious about it.

As just another human trying to pay attention to how God might be flagging me down-I suspect that with the overload of information available to us, sometimes my curiosity gets drowned or numbed out. There are SO many links to click, shows to watch, pictures to see, catastrophic news reports to stay up to date on and memes to giggle at, that I find myself clicking on things all the time that I’m not truly curious about-I’m just filling space. It’s certainly possible that God could be trying to get my attention through a click-bait headline that reads something like, “Psst…you don’t want to miss out on this” (oh wait, that’s not God, that’s Baby Gap), but it seems unlikely. Most things I click on only lead to something I already know about and agree with. If your curiosity doesn’t lead to questions like Moses had of “Who Am I?” and “What should I say?” then perhaps it isn’t worth your time.

You aren’t going to get a burning bush, but you can be sure that it’s God who is doing the calling, when your curiosity leads you toward better knowing God’s people. Perhaps for you that means getting involved in a local advocacy group that you’ve been nervous about because it feels “too political,” or taking time to have face to face conversation with the neighbor who is always posting the craziest stuff on Next Door, or joining one of our small groups that will start in September to connect with other church members over matters of faith that have implications for how we live everyday life.

Whatever it is that is making you curious-turn aside and look at it. God is waiting to see you turn and will call out your name. Even though you aren’t going to get a burning bush, God is present in your life. God is waiting time and time again for you to see and turn to find out more about what it is that makes you question deeply what you know of yourself, God’s people, and God. Curiosity is call. God’s call will lead to more curiosity. And “I Am Who I Am” will be right there with you.

1. Interpretation, p. 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)