

Shaping A Nation - Human Reluctance

Exodus 3:1-12; 4:1-17

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Scripture Reading: Exodus 3:1-12; 4:1-17

No, not me.

Please - someone, anyone **but** me.

I don't know how.

I'd make a mess of things.

No - not me.

Sound familiar - ever found yourself saying something like that?
Perhaps your supervisor had a task she wanted to assign to you.
Perhaps some friends wanted you to try a new adventure.

I can tell you this was **exactly** my response a number of years ago when a group of young adults came to me, all bright eyed, and suggested -

"Pastor Ken, how would you like to go sky diving with us?"

Didn't take long for my imagination to visualize the mop up crew heading to the field where I had landed.

No sir, those young people could - for **whatever** reason - jump out of that perfectly good aeroplane all by themselves!

Hesitation and list of excuses as long as my arm.

I had that for skydiving. Those of you that know me well know that I had a list like that keeping me from entering the ministry, too.

Perhaps somewhere along the way you have written up a list of excuses.

Someone wanted you to serve on a committee, or join a group, or take on a project, or make a move, or commit to a relationship.

And your response was: "*But... but... but... but... but...*"

After which, perhaps, they wanted to kick you in yours.

Moses gets a call from God.

Far more than a quick trip out of the sky, God's call would be radical, life-changing, and full of apparent risks.

To which Moses responds, "*But... but... but... but... but...*"

He feels totally inadequate to the task at hand and is more than a little reluctant to commit to the mission of being the liberator of the Hebrews.

Moses displays what in systems or organizational theory is known as *homeostasis*.

People like to leave things the same.

If someone pushes for change, we tend to push back.

Don't believe me? Take something simple and try to implement change.

Try, say, sitting in your father's place at the breakfast table.

Try, say, sleeping on your wife's side of the bed.

The response you'll get - the strange look, the pinch, the shove - that's *Homeostatis*.

Well, God was agitating for a wee bit of change in Moses' life, wouldn't you say? And Moses' homeostatic response was entirely predictable.

Just like mine - *ain't no way you're getting my feet off this ground and into that plane!*

Moses - *ain't no way God was going to get him out of the desert and into Pharaoh's palace, where his face is still displayed on a faded "wanted for murder" poster.*

Perhaps you're a better person than me, but friends, I can certainly feel for Moses! Fact of the matter is, though, that God isn't in the habit of giving up quite that easily. Not with Moses. Not with me. And not with you, either.

Poor ol' Moses. Trying to wrap his 80 year old mind around the idea of a career shift, and having a bit of trouble with it.

Thank God for divine patience.

One by one he deals with Moses' objections. He even provides signs of assurance that there is more than just human power underwriting this mission. Which is something that we see God do for other believers in Scripture, too.

I'm not talking about stubborn, defiant unbelief. What I'm talking about is doubt and the need for reassurance. Years after Moses, a tribal leader named Gideon is fingered by God to become a liberator in Israel, chasing out Midianite oppressors (Judges 6). Gideon hesitates, and prays for some divine confirmation of his call, which the Lord generously supplies. The disciple Thomas is having some issues with the idea of Jesus rising from the dead, and Jesus generously shows up to put those doubts to rest and to give Thomas and his colleagues a new commission and direction in life.

All of that is Exodus 4. Which is part of the long story of salvation in which we, too, have a part. It is the great account of salvation that climaxes between Moses and us in the person of the Saviour,
the great Liberator of the whole World
Jesus Christ.

Jesus said this of Himself in Luke 4:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors,
and that the time of the Lord's favour has come."

That friends, on spiritual and social and political and emotional terms is the full-orbed ministry of Liberation that belonged to Jesus and **STILL** belongs to Jesus.

Jesus continues to be engaged in the work of liberation.

He brings liberation into human hearts through the healing, forgiving, refreshing power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

And then -

- **through** those liberated human lives -

Jesus is in the business of bringing liberation to other corners of Creation.

After Jesus rose from the dead, breaking apart the greatest slave chains of all, the chains of death -

- after that -

Jesus appeared to his disciples and He said, "Peace be with you."

Now, if he had stopped speaking there, the Christian faith would be very simple.

Because, you see, it would just be about me.

It would be about me finding peace for myself, with myself, inside myself.

And perhaps, if it was a good day, I'd share a bit of that peace with you, too.

However,

(and if we are into *homeostasis* we'd have to say, "*unfortunately...*")

Jesus **doesn't** stop speaking there.

He continues.

"Peace be with you...."

...**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**" (John 20:21)

Whatever the Father has given to Jesus to do, we are now assigned to move forward. What Jesus began, we must continue.

That is the mission and challenge given to the Church.

In Moses' case it was given to him as an individual.

In our case it comes as a collective assignment.

Jesus spoke to **all** the disciples together when he gave that command. And that is how the whole New Testament speaks to believers - it speaks to us together.

We come one by one into the kingdom of God.

One by one we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ.

But as soon as we reach that point, the solo trip is over. The life of faith in Jesus Christ is **never** alone. It is not designed by God to be a **solitary** existence. It is a life, a journey, a mission and a challenge that is experienced **in Community**.

So the call comes to us here at Calvin CRC **as a community** -

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

He brings us peace.

And calls us to share it.

Does that help explain the formal mission statement of this congregation?

Say it with me:

*As members of a community
that seeks to glorify God
we commit to sharing
the life-changing message
of Christ
with our neighbours
and each other.*

That's why the four foundations of ministry in this congregation, in addition to *bowing down* and *reaching up* - which are focussed on our relationship with God, also include a focus on relationship with other people:

reaching in (sharing with each other)... and...

reaching out (taking the peace out of these walls).

We are called to a ministry of liberation.

Now, we also are people of *homeostasis* - just like Moses, we're not really sure we like to get involved in change. Hurts the mind to even think about it.

So we can rhyme off all sorts of excuses -

our age (too young or too old)

physical limitations (too big or small or handicapped)

emotional barriers (can't take the stress)

health issues (what about my heart)

other responsibilities (my family)

limits in education (not trained to do that)

Hey, as we've been introducing the whole *Micah Challenge* project over the last few weeks, have you found any of these objections bubbling to the surface in your mind?

Friends, let's not fool ourselves into thinking that we're the first creative people to list these off when the Lord calls us to active service for Him.

Know what drives many of these objections?

Fear of failure.

We're not sure that we will succeed, so rather than try and **risk** the possibility of ending up with an incomplete project and maybe even some proverbial egg on our face, we just say "No."

Fear of failure.

That's what drove Moses.

And God comes to him saying, "*Moses, what is in your hand?*" (4:2)

That very ordinary thing in Moses' hand, his walking stick, becomes one of the key tools in the ministry of Liberation. The stick becomes a sign to the Hebrews that God's power is with Moses. The stick

becomes a sign to Pharaoh that he had **better** pay attention to Moses' message. The stick, when held high, signals the parting of the Red Sea and a path to freedom for Israel. The stick, when held high again, signals the collapse of the sea and death to Israel's oppressors. The stick, when beating the rock, brings water for a thirsty nation to drink.

The ordinary thing in Moses' hand.

People at Calvin CRC, what is in your hand?

This past week dozens of people filled out a questionnaire and discovered, some to their surprise, that they had more in their hand than they thought. They had gifts and abilities they weren't even sure were there. And God is calling them to use what He has placed in their hand.

What is in your hand, believer? Has God granted you a healthy body, a sound mind, a solid income, a family that loves you, 24 hours in the day?

These things may seem very common place; as ordinary as a weathered walking stick. God says today, "*What is in your hand?*"

In the gospels we read of Jesus standing in the middle of a crowd of 4000 people - Matthew 15. They are hungry. The disciples ask, "*Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?*" And Jesus asks, "*How many loaves have you - what's in your hand?*"

Then he orders them to get the crowd to sit down.

That's all he says.

He doesn't tell the disciples exactly what he will do next.

They have to take the first step of obedience. Then more action and instructions will follow.

For Moses it was the same thing - he did **NOT** receive a multi-volume instruction manual and road map from the Lord there at that burning bush. Just a command to take the first step of obedience. Further action and instruction will follow.

Someone said, "You can't steer a bicycle that is standing still. You need to give it a good shove and get it rolling first. Then you can steer." [Bruce Larson, *The Presence*, p.32].

That's how it goes with the life of faith, too. For Israel, and for us.

When they moved, God provided.

When they stopped and objected, God gave them a shove.... and then provided.

Each step of obedience along the way God supplied what was needed. He put it into their hands.

As much as was needed.

No more.

No less.

At just the right time.

No sooner.

No later.

That's how Israel got manna throughout their desert journey.

And that's how God continues to supply His people today.

That's how God has supplied this congregation.

Where we worship today began as a whole in a ground along a gravel road on a patch of dirt purchased by a bunch of post-war immigrants trying to carve a living for themselves and their huge families in a new country.

They didn't have a clue how it would all work.

But they firmly believed God was calling them to this task.

And step by step, for over 50 years, in good times and times of objection, times of faithful ministry and times of tragic sin, God has faithfully guided and provided. Today Calvin CRC is a thriving, healthy, serving congregation.

That's how God has provided for and led the Christian Reformed denomination. In the 1950's this little group of churches in Canada and the United States began a post-Korean war orphan rescue program in South Korea known as CAPOK - *Christian Adoption Programme Of Korea*. Some of you remember that? Didn't know all the what's and how's. Just believed that God was calling them to this mission of liberation and

hope. Over the years the Lord directed and supplied, and today the *Christian Reformed World Relief Committee* is working with hundreds of relief workers and millions of dollars to bring hope and aid all across the globe.

It is the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee that is one of the driving forces behind the *Micah Challenge*. Because, you see, CRWRC recognizes that we're no different than Moses. We don't want to change. And we've got the long list of excuses. And we hate failure. Just like he did. So, in the name of God they are poking us.

In **Jesus'** name they are prodding us.

And asking, "*What's in your hand?*"

Challenging us to believe that the Lord can use it to bring liberation and hope to others on this planet.

Can we take a fresh step?

Perhaps in how we consume.

Perhaps in how we give donations.

Perhaps in where we spend our time.

Perhaps in whom we befriend.

Don't be afraid of failure.

Friends, I never thought that a chemical engineer could ever make it through theological training. My objection list made Moses' list look tiny. The Lord had the last laugh with me on that one.

God has used former addicts to give others the courage to kick their habits.

He has used poor people like Mother Theresa to bring hope to countless suffering people in India.

He has used young people.

He has used the elderly.

He can use you.

It may well be risky.

You may not be able to see where it will all lead.

It will certainly disturb the status quo.

Martin Luther King Jr once said, "The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may."

God has blessed us with much here at Calvin.

Hear His call -

What are we willing to do with it to make a difference in the lives of those who need liberation?

What are we willing to do to carry forward the ministry of Jesus?