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A question frequently asked of restaurants that sell pizza, Chinese food, or other types of cuisine is, "Do you deliver?" This is a matter of convenience for us - not only do we not have to cook, we don't even have to go get the food we're going to eat. We just make a call and wait for the food to appear, hand over some money and we're set. Most restaurants don't deliver. One particular pizza chain has stressed their quick delivery in their advertising for years to the neglect of the quality of their product - you might be better off eating the box in comes in.

When it comes to evaluating forms of spirituality or religion, "Does it deliver?" is a relevant and even more important question. This is not merely a matter of convenience but a matter of meaning, identity, purpose, forgiveness, and empowerment. As Christians, we worship the God who delivers.

Today's scripture from Exodus 3 is filled with spiritual insights about God and ourselves and I am going to share just a few that stand out to me this week.

The first thing I want to say is that Moses' encounter with the Lord at the burning bush teaches us to be open to **Finding God in Unexpected Places**.

The initial encounter between God and Moses reflects a mixture of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Moses is shepherding his father-in-law's sheep as he usually does. On his own initiative, undoubtedly in search for fresh pasture and perhaps a change of scenery, Moses arrived at Mount Horeb in the wilderness that lay between Egypt and the cultivated land of Palestine. There he notices a common desert thorny scrub bush on fire and he decides to take a closer look. However, Horeb is the mountain of God, it is holy ground. This is no ordinary burning bush, this one is not consumed. This is what causes Moses to turn aside and suddenly he finds himself unexpectedly in a holy place encountered by God and his life and human history were changed as a result.

Some of us have places where we go to experience the power and presence of God. It can be a worship service in a sanctuary, a room where we live, a place we walk in the woods or on the beach, it might be a garden. However, holy ground isn't just where we think it is, holy ground can be anywhere sometimes when and where we least expect it. God may come to us when we don't have any plans for meeting the Lord and in places we don't anticipate. Keep your eyes open for God in the ordinary and the unexpected, you never know what you might see or hear.

Moses is keeping the sheep, minding his own business, when, “Wow!” what is that? Just like the Gospel of Luke tells us shepherds were doing their usual thing, keeping watch over their flocks by night, when, “Wow! What is that?”

Moses, like the shepherds greeted by the angels in Luke 2, like the disciples who are called by Jesus to follow him, and like us is being called to an adventure. Moses’ particular adventure is to leave the sheep and his good wife Zipporah and to go to the most powerful person in the known world to tell him to let his cheapest labor leave for a new land and freedom. His old life as a shepherd was ending and new life as God’s deliverer was beginning. All because he was open to finding God in an unexpected place.

If we are going to know the God who delivers we are wise to remember that God still acts in unexpected and ordinary ways to get our attention. I was feeling rushed on Wednesday morning with information I needed to leave in the office for the worship services and some other things that had to be done and I needed to get on the road to drive to Peabody to do the committal service for Juanita Lynch. I was concerned about traffic leaving the Cape on July 5, I didn’t feel well as I have been battling a bug all week, and I was going to a cemetery I’d never been to before. Feeling pressured I walked out of church making sure I had everything I needed for the service, started coughing again, got in the car and said out loud a rather short and to the point prayer that expressed my feelings. I said, “C’mon God, help me out a little bit here.” The last word was still bouncing off the windshield when instantly the thought came into my brain, “You left the directions in your office.” I kid you not, I laughed out loud and said, “That is the quickest answer to a prayer I ever had.” I went back into the building, sure enough the directions were on the table in my office. I grabbed them and got back in the car with a different attitude. I was very relaxed the whole way up listening to an audio book. I made such good time I was able to stop by my Aunt and Uncle’s house in Peabody and had a nice 30 minutes with them and a cup of tea for my throat and then my Uncle Dave rode over with me as we followed my Aunt Nancy to the cemetery so I wouldn’t get lost. As I reflected on today’s scripture while I drove home I thought - God still acts in unexpected and ordinary places to get our attention.

The second thing I want to share with you is a little about **the God who delivers**. The God we worship delivers people from bondage and affliction. Exodus tells us God **heard** the cries of the people. God **remembered** the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God **saw** the people of Israel, and

God **knew** their condition.

God **promises** to bring the people of Israel out of the affliction of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Listen to those five descriptions about God: God heard, remembered, saw, knew, and promises. God is aware of what is going on and God acts. When you read the beginning of the Book of Exodus you quickly discover the Israelites are living under a great deal of strain and pressure. They worked long hours, at exhausting manual labor in a hot environment for very little pay. When the king of Egypt died the Israelites were hoping the new king would be kinder and gentler. They hoped the new king would say, *“Read my lips, no new massive building programs.”* But they were disappointed and the people **cried** out to the Lord, and God heard their cries.

God **remembered** the covenant made with Abraham that through him a great nation would be born and all the peoples on the earth would be blessed. If the Israelites perished in Egypt, the covenant and God’s promises would be thwarted. There are principalities, powers, and even people who actively work to defy God and to oppose God’s will. However, God does not stand idly by, the Lord sees and knows what is taking place and God promises to do something about the situation to bring about a better future. This is where the story really gets interesting to me because the burning bush is not just God pulling off a pyrotechnic stunt to get Moses’ attention.

God has something for Moses to do. And part of Moses’ task will be to bring the people back to this same mountain to worship the God who hears their cries, sees their suffering, and who sends a messenger to deliver them so they can hear how they are supposed to live in relationship with God and with each other.

God is still in the habit of encountering people in the ordinary and unexpected places of life and **encouraging us to a response of obedience within God’s plan.** The story in Exodus 3 is a classic biblical story in which God’s act of revelation is joined with **a call for commitment because the God who delivers works through people to accomplish what needs to be done.**

Let’s talk about Moses for a moment. When I say, Moses, what is the first picture or image that comes to your mind? For many people my age and older it is...Charlton Heston in The Ten Commandments, strong, forceful, a commanding presence. The picture in the Bible is a little different. There is a tendency to make the great people of the faith into superhuman figures, when in fact they are much more like us than we may

sometimes realize. Moses is afraid, feels totally inadequate to do what God wants him to do, is worried about what others will think of him, and wonders whether God's plan will even work. He thinks there is nothing in his life that has prepared him for what he is now supposed to do. At one time or another some of these concerns may be ours as well. Given the magnitude and importance of what God is asking Moses would rather not have the job.

Nineteenth century American author Herman Melville wrote numerous short stories and one is called *Bartleby the Scrivener*. In the days before computers and fax machines, a scrivener spent all of his or her time copying tedious documents by hand; it was very boring, soul sapping work. Bartleby finally hits a breaking point, he can't take it anymore, and his boss tells him to do something and he simply replies, "I would prefer not to." Wouldn't you love to do that some time? Your boss says, "I need this done by 4:00 o'clock," and you reply, "Frankly sir, I would prefer not to." That would go over well, wouldn't it?

Poor Bartleby was soon out of a job and out on the street, his only response being, "I would prefer not to."

Perhaps you have dreamed that God would knock on your door or appear in a burning bush in your yard and say, "*There is some serious work to be done for the kingdom of God and you're just the person for the job. Come on, I'll tell you about it on the way. Let's go!*" Or maybe your life seems so full, busy, and stressful, even if or perhaps especially if you're *retired*, that you would just as soon *not* have God approach you with some monumental task to help the Lord's work of delivering people from sin and oppression. Moses certainly fits in the latter category.

God says, "*I've heard, I've seen, something's got to be done, go get 'em Moses.*" Moses' response is not, "*Lead me, Lord, I will follow,*" it's not, "*I'm in the Lord's Army,*" it is, "*I would prefer not to.*" Actually it was, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*"

God doesn't respond to Moses' objection by stating Moses' credentials for the task. God doesn't say, "*But Moses, you're so talented, so brilliant, a leader of men, you have a Phd in crisis management with a minor in tactical maneuvers with large groups of unruly people.*" God says nothing about Moses' worthiness or his qualifications all God says is, "*I will be with you.*" Is the fact that God assures Moses of constant Divine companionship enough? Would it be enough for you?

Moses is still very noncommittal and he wonders out loud, *"If I come,"* (that sounds forceful doesn't it) *"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?"* God maybe starting to get a tad restless with Moses' lack of enthusiasm says, "I am who I am." That is still not enough and Moses continues with several more excuses about why he can't do what God wants him to do – people won't believe me, I don't have any authority, I've never been eloquent or a good speaker, until out of excuses he says, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Moses rather than being some lofty figure we can't identify ends up sounding very human. "Who am I to do this job? Who are you to ask me to do it? What if people don't believe me? I'm not gifted enough. Please excuse me, I would prefer not to."

What does this have to do with us today? Perhaps God has not called you personally to end the conflict in the Middle East, to negotiate with North Korea, or to straighten out the mess in the Darfur region of Africa where so many people are enslaved and oppressed. However, the God who delivers wants to be in relationship with us and has expectations for that relationship and our relationships with others (The Ten Commandments). While we may not be called to a task as monumental and with such great implications as Moses – there are jobs to be done, many needs to be met, challenges to be overcome, lives to be touched, and God wants us to be a part of God's plan to bring hope and deliverance.

Sometimes it can be a tad intimidating to think that Almighty God is at work in the world every day and that God wants to work through us and if we don't answer God's call then those things that only we can do on any given day, those encounters in the ordinary routine of life that are unique to us, then there is work for the Lord that will not be done. Because every person is unique God works uniquely through each person. God reaches the world through God's Spirit moving in the lives of people. We can be thankful our tasks are smaller than the job God had for Moses, but we need to be faithful in the tasks God assigns us.

With God's help, just as God promised, Moses is able to deliver the people out of Egypt and brings them to God's mountain where the Lord then shares the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments describing how people are to properly relate to God: no other gods before me, no idols, use my name correctly, take a rest every week and remember who I am. The next six commandments are about how to have healthy human relationships in a wonderful community: honor your parents, no

murdering, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, no coveting anything that belongs to anyone else.

Who would like to live in a world where none of those things took place? Sign me up. Well, that is kind of the idea.

Christians believe in a God who delivers, we have been liberated from oppression. "God saved us. He has brought us out of slavery.

He has made the most expensive purchase in history.

And the price? The life of his Son! But there is no invoice. It's free!

If God has given so generously to us shouldn't we give generously to him?

Not because we have to, but because we want to?" (Andrew Knowles)

God promises to be with us as we seek to do what God wants and needs to be done. The God who delivers works through people like us who are open to encountering God in unexpected and even ordinary places and who will trust God to be with us in the midst of our challenges.

Prayer:

Consoling God, be a source of serenity for me when struggles and difficulties threaten to overwhelm me.

God of hope, assure me of your unconditional love when I doubt myself or question the worth of my life.

Truth-bringing God, encourage me to embrace you during those times when I get lost in the lies of my weakness.

Compassionate God, hold me to your heart when I feel helpless in the face of the world's pain.

Light-filled God, keep me ever close to you during those moments when bleakness surrounds my life.

Comforting God, shelter me under your wings when I am engulfed in sadness and overcome with distress.

God of peace, you are the center of my life, a strong refuge of peace in the whirlwind of my pain. I look to you for strength and a constant assurance of hope.

God who delivers, deliver me from all my fears and excuses, and help me to be part of your plan to deliver others that they may know your consolation and the promise of your good future.

Blessing: Let us go from this time of worship with shoes on our feet but with barefoot souls knowing that everywhere we go with God is Holy Ground.