

Exodus 3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

The Divine Name Revealed

¹³ 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?" ¹⁴ 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.'"

Luke 4 Now when Jesus^(a) learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" ² —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— ³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Melissa Miller Haley Ordination

May 25, 2021

Exodus 3:1-14 (Call of Moses); Luke 4: 1-26 (Samaritan Woman at the Well)

Location, Vocation, & Whom Will I Serve?

In my spiritual direction training at Richmond Hill, I learned about listening for God's call in the lives of individuals. The official word spiritual directors use for that is "discernment" and it has been quite a helpful skill in my other role as the Pastor at Ashland Presbyterian church where Melissa got to know me as her seminary internship supervisor. Union Presbyterian Seminary is the entity that uses the word "Supervisor" – I tend to prefer something more like companion, because I see my role with seminarians to be more about simply walking through a year of ministry with someone new to the ins and outs and ups and downs of living into the pastoral calling, a calling that has been ongoing for some time, which we affirm now with Melissa in this ordination celebration.

All that leads up to ordination - the training, the council conversations, alongside of much prayer and hard work – brings us to this day where we put together the whole story – the story of Melissa's calling in light of other call stories that we know and cherish in the church. I invited Melissa to choose scripture readings that are meaningful to her to shape today's reflection – and two of the readings she picked were biblical "call" stories. One is the story of Moses and the burning bush – a smack-you-over-the-head kind of "here's your sign" call story. And the second is a call story we might not recognize as such – where the Samaritan woman at the well sees herself more clearly after her conversation with Jesus, and then uses such knowledge to reach out and teach others.

So today I want to share with you some common threads about call stories. They tend to answer three questions. The first two are the “what’s happening to me” questions of Where am I? And Who am I? The shorthand for these two questions I learned at Richmond Hill were **location** and **vocation**. Any good call story is going to include a good deal of wrestling with how we got here and what we are supposed to do now. I’ll get to what the third question is in just a few minutes.

Let’s look at location first. Where am I? Have you ever stopped to really think about why you are where you are in this particular moment? Have you ever felt that convergence of the right things happening at just the right time too eerily to feel like anything else but a God-planned coincidence? Has God ever stopped you right in your tracks so that you must pause in that moment and remember to breathe?

For Moses, he’s in a place already known as the “mountain of God” and discovers in seeing the burning bush that he is on holy ground. It’s so powerful for him that he takes off his sandals and falls to the ground. That’s what we can call an “aha” moment. He knows exactly where he is. He is in the presence of the divine. A similar flip happens in the conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. It’s not called God’s well, but it is an ancestral well tied to the ones who knew God in the past. Jesus meets her at a crossroads of cultures tied together by two pressing needs – the physical need for water, and the spiritual need for connection. The conversation that they have speaks deeply to those needs. Place matters.

God is not bound by time and space – but we human beings certainly are, and we know it. Melissa talks in her call story about being bi-coastal – having distinctive times in her life being shaped by living in both California and Virginia. They are different places – shaped by the different people and different cultures she has known in each. And in her Christian life, she has

found herself a spiritual chameleon in multiple church settings. She knows how to worship in Lutheran, Baptist, AND Presbyterian. As someone who had to learn early in her life to move in and out of different family configurations, she quickly figured out how to navigate each of those worship environments with grace and with appreciation for the quirks of congregational life as presented in multiple denominations. I believe Melissa recognizes from her own journey that it is a gift to really know where you are grounded. And I would say that gift becomes a calling when you also feel that ground beneath you is your holy ground. God, our creator, knows that in creation, places matter, and then God goes one step further and makes places sacred in our own stories.

Which leads me to the second question – so who are you? *Who are you?* Who are you going to be in the world? We use that word “vocation” to talk about some jobs but not always all jobs. We say that someone has a vocation in the ministry, or law, or medicine. Maybe for teaching. But today I want you to imagine vocation as having a larger meaning. It’s really about who you are completely and wholly as a person – not only what you do – but it can certainly affect what you do.

In those scriptural stories about calling – when God gives some sort of indication that the lead of the story is being tapped for a purpose – that there’s something that person should be doing – usually the first question is “why me?” Moses didn’t feel good enough because of his temper, didn’t feel ready because of his inexperience, thought his voice would shake so bad that he would be hopeless as a prophetic speaker. And yet, he led God’s people out of slavery from the powerful Egyptian Empire. The Samaritan woman already had two strikes against her just with those descriptors in her story. She was an outsider among her Jewish peers and thought to be the wrong gender for leadership. Jesus even pointed out that her proclivity for collecting

husbands could be called into question by many. Jesus spoke to her anyway, and opened her heart to see him for who he was when sometimes even his closest disciples could not. The rest of that story goes that MANY Samaritans believed in Jesus because of her testimony. Because she told her story. Because she was a preacher and an evangelist. Why me? Well, why not you? God chooses whom God chooses – whether we think they are likely to get the job done or not. And God tends to be right in seeing through the rough exterior to the diamond within, even when we may fail to see such potential in ourselves.

In Melissa's call story, she talks about vocation too, as someone who tends to never be satisfied with only one job at a time. I suspect this ability to go from one kind of task to another will prepare her exceedingly well – both for ministry and for motherhood. Both require flexibility, compassion, and the ability to know one's limits. In the church, we frequently talk about spiritual gifts – but we rarely talk about our spiritual limitations. I think that's where we need each other the most. Melissa will be a more confident pastor and a calmer mother, the less she feels like she has to do it all on her own. I trust that this is a congregation that can handle what it means to minister alongside of their minister. It's the whole community gathered – as Paul talks about – that makes up the Body of Christ. With our eyes and ears, our hands and feet, we are called upon to bring our full selves, our hearts, our minds, our voices – and even our annoying habits and feelings of inadequacy that make us who we are.

Vocation isn't about doing it all. Vocation isn't even about being successful or right, nor is it about "getting the job." Vocation is about listening for what the Spirit directs us to do. That may include the academic and spiritual preparation for obtaining the ordained office of clergy, or it may be the small nudge to call that person who has been on your heart this week. Once you

know really know where God has placed you because you are already standing there, then you begin to pursue who God is calling you to be – with God’s help of course.

With God’s help. That brings me to the final question posed by the practice of spiritual discernment. Location and vocation are about discovering who you are and trying to figure out who we are as human beings goes on all the time. But ultimately the human story becomes a call story when the question flips the script and asks who God is. When Moses was SPEAKING TO GOD in the burning bush, he had the audacity to ask: What is your name? When the woman at the well was SPEAKING TO JESUS, she had the audacity to ask: Where do I get that living water? Both Moses and the Samaritan woman ask what may seem to us to be dangerous questions. Why push God for an answer? Why question the nature of Jesus?

I think it’s because we need to know – who is this God we will we serve? Who truly deserves our allegiance – God who sends us into the desert or Pharaoh who works us hard but gives us food for our families? Who truly has the power to gift us with eternal life? Is Jesus who he says he is? Those who are called by God ask deep questions – and expect God to answer them.

You as a congregation, and Melissa as a pastor seem to have an affinity for these kinds of questions. I hope you will continue on that journey with her as she, and as Pastor Ted before her, have probed scripture for its truest meaning, and refuse to be satisfied with anything less than that. In the little I have learned about you through the ordination council, I love that you don’t seem to be satisfied with surface answers, or denominational tropes. You want to know exactly who God is – so that you can follow the Spirit and direct your worship accordingly. I am confident that Melissa will do her best to reveal THAT God to you with her preaching and teaching, and with how she sets her own life to follow Christ.

Together you will face transitions ahead. Ted has heard the call to be on the move. God has also been known to send folks on their way to seek holy ground elsewhere. But Melissa's call is to be with you here, now, in this moment of your own discernment as a congregation. Because she has heard God's call to THIS location and THIS vocation, she is perfectly poised to help you answer the questions you might have about why this place is important right now, and to wonder together who God is calling you to become as a congregation. Keep asking God to show up, to be present, to let the living Christ lead the way forward for you. Then God will hallow this ground, where you can take off your church shoes and feel the sacredness beneath your feet. Amen.