

Called Out

Go. Do. Be. As an adult, we are called to become a productive member of society. Find a job, have a career. A career, an occupation. Many of us painstakingly choose the career we want to pursue. However, for others the career chooses them. It seeks them out, it calls them forth. Actively pursuing them, hoping they heed the call. The Israelite people had a similar experience.

The Israelite people were chosen by God to carry out the divine plan. The chosen people of God did not recognize or acknowledge the presence of God in their midst despite the many wonders God had performed on their behalf. The God of the Israelite people is the same God whose presence is still with God's people today.

Before we get to today's scripture here's a little backstory. At the start of Exodus, we see the Israelite people in the land of Egypt. The Israelite people have been chosen by God to be God's own people. God had promised to multiply Abraham and make him a father of many nations.

As a sign of God's covenantal promise, the people of Israel multiply and grow exceedingly strong in the land of Egypt. Twisted by Egypt's fear and oppression, this promise becomes a curse and not a blessing for the people. The presence of the Israelite people is perceived as a threat to Egypt's Pharaoh.

Exodus 1:14, we are told Pharaoh "made their lives bitter with hard service

in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor.” The people's enslavement, under the Egyptian ruler, had been predicted, long before, to Abraham when God had called him forth. If we look back at when Abraham is first called we'll recall Genesis 15:13, where Abraham is lulled into a deep sleep. It is in this sleep that Abraham is told that his offspring (children) will be enslaved in a foreign land.

The enslavement of the Israelites had been foretold to Abraham with the assurance of deliverance and prosperity. We must remember that the Israelite people have been chosen by God for a distinct purpose. Although the people are unaware of God's presence, God is with the Israelite people. God knows the suffering the Israelites endure under the harsh conditions of their enslavement.

Here in today's text we see that God is calling to the people of Israel from the land of their enslavement. Just as God had called forth Abraham according to God's purpose, God calls forth Moses to be the deliverer of the chosen people of God. Moses is spared from Pharaoh's attempt to control the increasing population of the Israelite people. God's call to Moses from the burning bush was God commissioning Moses as a savior, a deliverer of God's chosen people.

Exodus 3: 7-8a God proclaims, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt, I have heard their cry on the account of their taskmaster. Indeed, I know their suffering and I have come to deliver them from the

Egyptians.” We hear in this passage that God has heard the people’s cry and has plans to rescue them from their misery. The people do not know, they are unaware that God is working on their behalf.

Exodus 33:16, Moses inquires of God “For how shall it be known that I (Moses) have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

The distinction of God's people, is the presence of God, in their midst. When we say that something or someone is distinct we are saying that it is set apart, distinguishable from the others around it. The people of God are a distinct people. When we identify ourselves as Christians, we are identifying ourselves as people of God. As such we should be a distinguishable people.

Moses implores of God, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here.” How often do we go it alone without the presence of God as we go about our daily lives, or fail to seek guidance when making important decisions? How often do we ignore the signs and wonders God has placed before us, even as we seek to serve God? The Israelite people failed to recognize God's presence and found themselves wandering in the wilderness.

Today we too wander in the wilderness. We are lost among the weeds of technology and social media, within the thorns of politics, caught up in the bushes of work and family life. We are lost. It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the people of God from the secularized world. Moses questioned how the others would know that he had found favor with God.

We seek favor with our friends, families and co-workers and then God, (that is) if we seek God at all. How will the people know that we are God's very own if God does not go with us? God performed great and mighty deeds in the deliverance of the chosen people of Israel. Moses knew that the presence of God set the people apart with distinction. Some today, even some who would say that they are one of God's very own, question whether or not God still performs such great and mighty deeds.

For me the original exodus story holds many truths for. The people of Israel are enslaved in a foreign land for years before being brought out of their bondage. In the midst of their suffering they cannot see God working in their situation. The people of Israel cry out for deliverance from their bondage but do not hear a response. There is not awareness that God is with them and actively working on their deliverance, all they know is their suffering. However, there is an end to their suffering; God does indeed hear their cries, and deliverance is on the way.

God sends the Israelites, Moses, as a messenger and deliverer. The plagues against Egypt are not only a display of God's power and might but show God's willingness to fight for the chosen people of God.

In my own life, I am held captive by my own thoughts and anxieties. The feelings of fear and doubt are my bondage, they keep me from moving forward and taking risk. However, 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us that "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power." A spirit, God's presence in my life.

Like the Israelites, I call out to God and wait for an answer, a sign that God hears me. I often wonder if God hears my cries or my prayers. I miss God's response in the little things or I'll notice what God has done for someone else and wonder why God has not answered me.

There are times when the answer is no and I cannot understand why. The no's are part of the plan that God has for my life. The no's make way for the yes's. Just as God sent Moses to the people of Israel, God has sent me the Holy Spirit, to guide and instruct me out of my own bondage.

The people of Israel are set free from their bondage, as am I. However, it is hard to let go of something that has become familiar, even if it is not good for you. The people do not trust that God is going to lead their lives despite the numerous times God provides for them. Letting go and trusting God to be the driver of my

life has been a struggle. It is our nature to want to be in control of every aspect of our lives. As a Christian, having trust in God is paramount to our daily living. If allowed God will direct me in the way to go. It is when I do not trust in God that I find myself wandering aimlessly, like the Israelites in the wilderness.

In our scripture reading for today Moses is speaking with God. God is preparing to take God's people to the land which God had promised them. To the land flowing with milk and honey. No longer will the people of God wander through the wilderness. Once again Moses is interceding on behalf of the people. Moses asks that God not send them away from the place where they had wandered for so long without God's presence in their midst.

If we seek God and ask God to be our guide, to go with us, God will be in our midst. Although we are not always aware of the presence of God, God's presence is never far from us. We cannot always see the path through the thicket of the wilderness but if we trust our appointed tour guide, who is Jesus the Christ we are never truly lost. For in him we have a savior, a deliverer to bring us through.

To God be the Glory.

Amen