

Cashmere Worship, Sunday 30th August 2020
Living out our Salvation – Responding to the Call

Text: Exodus 3: 1-15

Introduction:

How old is too old? The US Presidential election this year has raised up this issue!

This is one journalists take on this:

'The presidential battle for the White House typically includes criticizing your opponent's policy ideas and even exposing any closeted skeletons -- but this year, the debate has gotten more personal with questions about age and mental health being raised.

Depending on who wins the election in November, a record will be broken: 77-year-old Joe Biden could be the oldest candidate to win a first-term presidency or 74-year-old Donald Trump, already the oldest president, could become the oldest second-term president.

But physicians with expertise on the aging brain urge voters not to be overly focused on age alone.

"It's very important to focus on experience, on who the person is and policy issues rather than age," said Dr. Gary Small, professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences and the Parlow-Solomon professor on aging at [University of California, Los Angeles' David Geffen School of Medicine](#).

"A lot of people assume that an older brain is not as good a brain, but that is not necessarily true. We know that as people age, they actually become wiser. They have more experience to solve problems. They have less anxiety. When we're younger, we tend to be more concerned about peer pressure. We're about managing for the future. When you get older, you solve a lot of problems in your life, and there's a sense of having been there and done that," Small said. "You develop mental resilience, which is an important asset of an older person."

Jacqueline Howard, CNN

July 23, 2020

God already knew this! He called Moses to a *huge* religious, political and social justice campaign, requiring of him enormous energy, resilience and wisdom at the age of 80 (Exodus 7:7). I love that God did this – I think it gives a key message to us, that, no matter what age we are, God can and does call us to action and mission.

This is so relevant on this Sunday as we

- Continue to examine what it means to live out our salvation following on from sermons on Reconciled Relationships and Christians Against Poverty, today we reflect on responding to God's call to us going into the future.
- Look forward to our AGM after church today, where we will engage in some shared visioning around what we see as God's call to us going into the future.

There are some great principles in the story of God's call of Mosees that we can apply to our lives individually and corporately as a church!

First, this passage does indeed speak of the way God calls us at each stage of our lives! Think about how Moses got this far....

- called out of certain death as first-born child condemned to die by Pharaoh. With great faith and hope, his Mother placed him in that basket in the river and he is spectacularly not only rescued but finds himself a place at the heart of the royal family!
- Then there are 2 periods, so different in nature, where God's call on his life is largely preparation.
 - o Until the age of 40 he was socialized into the ways of Egypt. There are at least two things that are very significant about this. Firstly, he gained insight, knowledge of, and was comfortable in, the Egyptian political and social arena. This was to be vital to the task God called him to when he was 80 – God needed someone who knew the system and was confident in it.
Secondly, there was a rising sense of indignation about the way his Jewish people were being treated as slaves in Egypt. That ultimately lead to his impetuous killing of an Egyptian soldier.
 - o For the next 40 years, 40 – 80, Moses led a completely different life, a quieter, humbler life, a shepherding life. There was purpose in this. The impetuous, spoilt, proud 40-year-old Moses was not ready to either hear God's call nor humbly respond to God's leading.
 - o At the age of 80 we encounter such a different Moses; older, wiser, humble and ready for the task God had for him.

Reflecting on this, the question are:

- What is God doing in our lives right now?
- What needed work is occurring?
- What is he preparing us for?
- What is he calling us to?

The **Second** major point is to recognise holy ground when it rises up before us! Moses stumbled upon the burning bush when going about his normal daily work. Yet he was able to recognise what was happening and respond well. Removing shoes and hiding his face was a recognised response to a holy place or moment! The application here is that we too need to recognise God moments in our lives when they arise and respond accordingly! Sometimes this will come as an unexpected interruption to daily routine! Other times it will either come to us *or* be consolidated in us by way of quiet time spent in prayer and retreat. Both are important contexts where God does commonly seek to get our attention.

Thirdly, we need to know who it is who calls! Moses was most concerned about this. He pressed God for more information around his identity! God comes back with this marvelous retort "I am who I am". This is so loaded. Unpacking it helps us to connect with the deep significance of any call to work for this God. In here there are truths like -

- o "I am" carries the idea of ultimate reality; 'glory' is a word that describes this. What is ultimately the most real thing? It is God.
- o "I am who I am" carries the idea of eternal reality. It reflects the Revelation 1:8; 21:6 and 22:13 passages that refer to God as Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the classical Greek alphabet. This God was there in the beginning and will be there in the end; this is the God who has the big picture, the overview, of all things. He knows where we fit and calls us to take our place!
- o "I am who I am" also has an element of obscurity about it. It is like meeting a person who gives you a veiled response to your enquiries about who they are! The big word to describe this aspect of God is 'inscrutable', meaning unable to be fully understood. So, in this response to

the request for a name, God communicates the truth that we human beings will never fully comprehend this God, beyond our ability to comprehend, understand or 'put in a box'. With God there will always be an element of mystery. Therefore, in responding to God's call there will always be an element of faith required! It will not be a matter of 'let me have all the facts and I will get back to you', but rather 'I don't fully understand it all, but in faith I say yes to your call!'"

- And "I am who I am" is alternatively translated "I will be who I will be". This is fascinating. It describes a willful and active God. Certainly, commentators say the name God gives implies in the Hebrew action rather than something static. This is a God who wills 'shalom' in heaven and on earth, is actively working on it and calling others to get involved!

Fourthly, know the task. This passage communicates on a micro-scale the big narrative of scripture we talked about at the family service a few weeks back.

The world was created good!

Through our rebellion, sin has created havoc!

There is a time of restoration of all things coming!

In the meantime, we are called to work with God towards restoration.

This is mirrored in the story:

Created good = the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers and the settling of the Jews in Egypt as favoured citizens.

Rebellion, sin brokenness = the descent into slavery at the hands of oppressive Egyptian rulers.

Restoration = the vision of a new place of milk and honey, a good and broad land (free land).

The call to work on this with God = the call to Moses.

This call to Moses is replicated in some way appropriate to each context, appropriate to each set of giftings and passions, in every age and every group of people and in every individual life! Our task is to listen, to hear and to respond.

Fifthly and finally, know that we do not do this alone.

And here's the thing: Moses was old enough, wise enough and humble enough to know he could not do this without help. The help comes from two places.

1. God comes across here as very involved and determined to stay involved: "I have seen your affliction, heard your cry, know your suffering" (vv.7 & 9)

I will work with you to repair this *but* know this: "I will be with you" (v.12) and in this story, time and again the Israelites experienced God's presence with them so graphically illustrated in the wandering in the desert by the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, which never left their place in front of the people.

2. Others are enlisted. Specifically, Aaron to compliment Moses in his areas of weakness. But more than this, there is repeated reference here to those who had gone before, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob....

To use the words of Isaac Newton in 1675, when he said "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." This heritage of the faithful is inspiring and empowering. In 2009 I was in Jerusalem and visited the Wailing Wall, the remnant of Herod's temple. As I touched that ancient wall I had an overwhelming feeling that I was connecting with the great crowd of witnesses who had come before me: it was a spiritual moment, it was an inspirational moment, it was an empowering moment.

Conclusion

So we too in 2020 stand in this line of called people. O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, may we hear your call and respond with lives of joyful discipleship.