

Bible Readings

Exodus 3: 1 - 15

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "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 surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of 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 place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers 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."^[a] And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord,^[b] the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Matthew 16: 21 - 28

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance^[f] to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life^[g] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Sermon

"Yet it was not consumed."

When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah and carried away the people captive, the prophet Jeremiah sent a letter the exiles in Babylon. In it he wrote:

For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. Jeremiah ch 29:10 - 12

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

God had a plan for Moses; he'd grown up in the royal palaces of Egypt. He was the adopted son of the pharaoh's daughter. I think most people know that he was born into a Hebrew family in Egypt at a time when the pharaoh had order that all Hebrew baby boys were to be killed. His

mother hid him in a basket floating on the river. Pharaoh's daughter found him and adopted him. A big change came when he was forty years old, he was out watching the Hebrew slaves working and saw an Egyptian abusing one of the slaves. He stepped in and ended up killing the Egyptian. So he had to leave Egypt and fled to Midian, where he married a priest's daughter and looked after the priest's sheep.

Then, when he was eighty years old, he was out with the sheep one day and he saw a bush on fire. As he watched, he saw that although the bush was full of flame, it wasn't burning up. It wasn't getting smaller and turning to ash. Then a voice calls out to him from the bush. It tells him to take his sandals off and that this is the voice of the God of his ancestors.

God tells Moses that He has seen the Hebrew's suffering and heard their prayers for rescue. The time has come for God to rescue His people and Moses is the person who's to make it happen. All he has to do is go to Egypt and tell old pharaoh, Let my people go.

Moses thinks for a minute and says, actually that's not going to work. I can't go to Egypt. He says, I can't go, you've picked the wrong person.

In verse 11 it says, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?

How does God respond, what does He say.?

He doesn't say, you know I think you're right, you're the wrong person, I've made a terrible mistake.

No, if you look at verse 12 He says,

I will be with you.

Moses still isn't convinced. He says in verse 14, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

The Egyptians had lots of gods. If Moses turns up in Egypt and starts telling people that God has sent him, they're going to say, yeah, which one?

And again, God says, who am I? I am who I am. Look at verse 14,

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this

to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.'

We could spend weeks thinking about these two verses, where it says in verse 15, The LORD, the God of your fathers, the word lord is in capital letters. That's because the Hebrew word being translated isn't the word for lord, which is Adonai, but rather it is God's name. The tradition is that God's name is too holy to be pronounced by human lips. When the ancient scribes wrote it down they just used the letters YHWH which used to be rendered as Jehovah in English. I think we're safe saying Jehovah because that's almost certainly not how the name is pronounced. But when you're reading the bible and you see the word lord in capital letters, that represents God's special, holy name. So, God's answer to Moses is basically, I'm not just a god, I am The God.

Moses still isn't convinced. We're moving on past our reading now, but at the start of chapter four he says, they still won't believe me. So, God gives him two signs to show them. First God tells him to throw his shepherd's staff onto the ground, he does and it becomes a snake, when he picks it up again it turns back into a staff. Then he puts his hand into his shirt, when he pulls it out it's infected with a disease. He puts it back in his shirt, this time when he pulls it out it's back to normal

Those are convincing signs, and Moses is starting to get desperate; he's running out of excuses. His last bid to get out of having to face up to the pharaoh is to say he'd be the wrong person to argue the case with the Egyptians because he's no good at public speaking. When God answers that it's okay because He'll be with Moses and will tell him what to say, Moses just gives up and begs God to send someone else. At which point God runs out of patience and tells if he's that worried he can take his brother with him for support, but he's going. That's final and the discussion is over.

So, the question is, is God calling us to some task? Is there something He wants me to do, has He got something planned for you to do for Him? I never thought I'd be leading services. I had a list of excuses why I wasn't the right person for this kind of thing. But here I am.

Paul writing to the church in Corinth says, God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, God's weakness is stronger than any human strength. And sometimes God's plans can seem very foolish.

1 Corinthians 1:25

One of my favourite examples of God telling people to do what looks foolish is the story of Gideon.

Judges chapters 6 and 7

This was after the time of Moses, and the Israelites are living in the promised land, but they've been overrun by a neighbouring tribe, the Midianites. The Midianites are cruel and ruthless; the Israelites are living in terror of them. Gideon is working with his wheat harvest, he's separating grain from the stalks, but he's doing it while hiding in a hole in the ground so that the Midianites can't find his grain. An angel turns up and tells Gideon that God has chosen him to lead the army that drives the invaders from Israel. Gideon says, no you've made a mistake, you've got the wrong man. He says that his clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and he's the weakest member of the weakest clan. But the angel persists and eventually Gideon manages to raise an army to fight the Midianites. He sends word out that the time has come to fight for their freedom, and thirty-two thousand men answer his call to arms. God looks at Gideon's army and says thirty-two thousand soldiers that's too many. You need to send some of them home. You can imagine Gideon's response; he's struggled to get these men and now he has to send some away. Who ever heard of an army being too strong to win a battle. Anyway, he tells the army that any of them who are scared and want to go home can go home. Twenty-two thousand of them get up and go home. Still, he's got ten thousand soldiers left, not as good as thirty-two but still a reasonable size. But God said, that's still too many. So, he sends them to the river to drink, and depending on how they drank they were separated into two groups. One group had nine thousand and seven hundred men, the other had three hundred. You can imagine Gideon nervously asking God which group he gets to keep. God tells him, you can keep the three hundred.

He had thirty-two thousand, now he's only got three hundred. But it gets worse. Going into battle you'd normally have bows and arrows, swords, spears, and chariots. Gideon arms his men with trumpets.

The Midianites have an army of thousands of fully armed men; Gideon has little more than a regimental brass band.

This is God's foolishness, and of course Gideon wins. Just after midnight Gideon's men blow their trumpets and wave torches in the air. The Midianites panic, in the confusion the fight each then run for their lives.

What God asked Gideon to do sounded ridiculous, sounded foolish. But God was in charge and He had a plan.

If God asks us to do something that seems ridiculous, that seems foolish, we need to remember that He is in control and He has a plan. As Jeremiah said

¹¹ For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.