

The Call of Aaron (Exodus Chapters 3 & 4)

PERSPECTIVE & INTERPRETATION

One of the things that fascinates me most about human beings is how if two or more people witness the same event, read the same book, or watch the same movie, there will be at least as many interpretations of what they perceive. I say “perceive” because the stimulus – the actions, words, or moving images – are the same for all observers. We perceive these stimuli with our five senses which then send electronic signals to our brains. To a relatively small extent, the information my eyes are able to perceive is different than the information another person sees. That can even be the case for one person under different circumstances. For example, if I took off my glasses and took out my contacts, people at a distance would look like a blur of colors – a different perception indeed. The main difference, however, comes when the information of our senses gets to our brains. That’s when interpretation comes into the picture (so to speak). Interpretation is the act of applying meaning to what one perceives.

INTERPRETING BALL

You can find a good example of this in an article in Psychology Today, called “10 Interpretations of the Same Animation Short – The story is in the eye of the beholder” by Dr. Siu-Lan Tan, professor of psychology at Kalamazoo College. After Dr. Tan posted an animated short called “Ball” on the internet, five of her friends told her what they thought the video was about – each giving her a different interpretation than the one she herself had. Because of this, Dr. Tan then conducted an experiment, showing the video to 130 different people and recording what they believed the animation was about. In her article, she included 10 interpretations that were strikingly different from one another. A five-year-old’s response was simply a concrete description of what she saw: “There is a man who is sleeping [on a bench]. Someone throws a ball at him [again and again] while he is sleeping. He then chases the ball [through a forest] and leaves his stick [cane] behind.” A 51-year-old trust attorney interpreted the video this way: “The old man on the bench was at first annoyed by the ball, but it serves as a catalyst to draw him toward something. In doing so, it induces the old man to remember and to have an internal memory of his youth. The ball was death gently guiding him to this end, and the little kid an angel, inviting him to come to heaven...” It doesn’t get more different than that. Dr. Tan concluded that human beings are not blank slates, each of us brings our own emotions, beliefs, and experience with us – which affect how we interpret what we perceive.

INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

The way we interpret scripture is affected by the same things. It is one of the reasons I believe the Bible represents the “living word” – meeting us where we are and giving God the opportunity to reveal the truth we need at any given moment. The words of the scripture I chose for last week’s message are no different this week, but I’d like to offer you a different interpretation. Last week we talked about Moses and the call he received from God through a burning bush. We explored the idea that perhaps some of the questions Moses asked God were motivated by his curiosity. I then suggested that Moses’ curiosity and questions were what made it possible for God to offer reassurance to Moses and the opportunity for more people to join in establishing God’s will. This week, we’ll be looking at the same scripture and expanding the scope to include chapter 4 of Exodus as well. We will again be looking at Moses’ questions and how they resulted in the inclusion of more people into God’s plan of salvation. This time however, we will be considering Moses’ other emotions and how God provided for him so Moses could fulfill his part of God’s plan despite his insecurity and self-doubt.

TWO WAYS

Have you ever felt two ways about something? Both excited and nervous? Thrilled and concerned? How about when someone has asked you to do something that you’ve never done before? Were you both honored to be chosen and worried that you wouldn’t be up to the challenge? Imagine that “someone” was God, and then you’ll begin to understand Moses’ state of mind when God said to him, “I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

WHO AM I?

Moses replied, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” This isn’t modesty; Moses’ question is a valid one. Who was Moses? First, he was a man of Hebrew heritage raised as an Egyptian royal. When he found himself caught between these two identities, he chose Hebrew – first killing an Egyptian slave master who was beating one of Moses’ kin, and later counseling peace between two fighting Israelites. This was met by one of the Israelites saying, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Moses clearly didn’t have any credibility among the Israelites, and then Pharaoh found out about what Moses had done and tried to have him killed. Moses couldn’t be Israelite or Egyptian it seemed. Talk about an identity crisis! Moses fled to Midian and there he married a daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian, and helped shepherd his flock. By the time Moses found the burning bush, he was 80 years old and had been gone from Egypt and the enslaved Israelites for 40 years. Even Moses’ name sounded like the Egyptian suffix meaning “son of”. But son of whom? It is no wonder why Moses asked God a question that began with, “Who am I?”

MOSES QUESTIONS, GOD ANSWERS

God didn’t address the issue of Moses’ identity. God simply said, “I will be with you.” This implies that anyone with God’s help could approach Pharaoh and order him to free the Israelites. The voice from the bush said to Moses, “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.”

Perhaps that seemed a little sketchy, because then Moses asked another question: **“Yes, okay, but who are you?”** God said to Moses, **“I AM who I AM.”** – which can also be translated **“I WILL BE who I WILL BE.”** – He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’” By this, God was saying, “I am upholding the covenant I established with your ancestors: ‘I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... In you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” God told Moses the full meaning of the holy name, “I AM the God who hears/sees suffering ... I AM the God who is acting to stop injustice ... I WILL BE the God who rescues ... I WILL BE the God who leads the Israelites to the Promised Land.” And for God to be these things, God chose to work through Moses.

Moses then asked, **“What if they don’t believe me?”** Fair enough, especially considering how long he’d been gone. The people he had known would have gone through almost two generations since he was last in Egypt. Who would even recognize him much less believe his wild tale of divine rescue? God responded by giving Moses two strange miraculous signs to show the Israelites. Moses could change his staff to a snake and back again, and he could change his hand from healthy to leprous and back again.

Then Moses revealed his self-doubt, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am **slow of speech and slow of tongue.**” Then the Lord said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.”

Finally, Moses took all of what God had offered him and threw it in God’s face, **“O my LORD, please send someone else.”** That’s when scripture tells us God got angry, and no wonder. In spite of this, God was committed to working with Moses, and provided for him in yet another way: “What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him.”

AARON’S CALL

The name of this sermon is “The Call of Aaron” – and you just heard it ... or at least evidence that it had happened. Did you miss it? That isn’t all that surprising; the implication is subtle, but it’s there. Listen closely: “What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you...He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you.” **God knew Aaron would help.** Was this because God is “all-knowing” or had God already spoken to Aaron who agreed to serve as Moses’ mouth? Considering all of the ways God met Moses’ questions with reassurance and help, it seems as though God anticipated each of Moses’ concerns and excuses – and the Aaron arrangement was no different.

The Sixth Street Bible study explored the life and ministry of Moses, and when we came to the part when God appointed Aaron to speak for him, I asked the members of the group this question, “How would it feel to be like Aaron, called by God to be Moses’ mouthpiece instead of being the one God called to lead the people out of Egypt?” For my part, I thought Aaron would be disappointed and maybe a little resentful, so I was surprised by the others’ answers to this question. Almost every member of the group said that they thought that it would be a joy and a relief to be the supporting character rather than the lead.

HIS HEART WILL BE GLAD

This response encouraged me to read the scripture again and I found Aaron’s response to his calling in the last phrase of Exodus 4:14. When God offered Aaron’s help and told Moses that he was at that moment coming out to meet him, scripture tells us that **“when he sees [Moses] his heart will be glad.”** Aaron wasn’t bitter or disappointed. He would be delighted when he saw Moses and could fulfill his own calling. I see Aaron’s delight as the ideal response to a call from God. He didn’t see his call as any less; it was equally important, only different and specifically designed for Aaron who would be more successful in convincing the Israelites to follow Moses. He had, after all, lived in Egypt all his life – including the 40 years of Moses’ absence. Considering how long Moses had been gone and the circumstances of his departure, Israel’s elders wouldn’t have given Moses the time of day, but Aaron was an insider and had credibility. If Aaron supported Moses and his mission, then the people of Israel would believe it was truly of God and follow Moses out of Egypt.

DELIGHT IN YOUR CALLING

You too play a critical role in the plan of God, and I encourage you to listen for God’s call and then delight in that calling. Your call from God is designed specifically for you and taps into your unique combination of gifts, position, knowledge, experience, talents, passions, and relationships. You also have unique limitations, but do not consider these as weaknesses. Rather, see them as evidence that we have been created to need each other to fully reveal God’s intention in our world. We are meant to fit together like puzzle pieces, and one person’s calling is no more valuable than anyone else’s. We should delight in fitting together because it is by design. We fit together – need each other – to make God’s will possible, not despite our differences but because of them.