

The God who enables

Exodus 4:10-17

When I was at college studying for the ministry, I had a class mate who felt the call to pastoral ministry but suffered from a stutter. His first few attempts at public speaking were rather painful to watch and we wondered whether he could go on. But he was a diligent student who worked hard and eventually overcame his impediment. Since then he has pastored three congregations and is currently a lecturer at the college. He is an example I think of what Paul meant when he said we have the knowledge in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God. (2 Cor. 4:7)

That is what this next part of the encounter at the burning bush in Exodus is all about; human weakness, the Lord's enabling and then being willing and able to serve. Those then are the three points to this sermon. Let's begin with

1. Our Weakness.

In this passage we come to the end of Moses meeting with the Lord at the burning bush. It was here that YHWH revealed his name to Moses and gave him his commission. He was to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let his people go.

Moses left Egypt as a wanted man and a fugitive. The thought of ever having to return didn't appeal to him at all and has already come up with several objections such as; "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" "Who are you? Who shall I say sent me?" and "What if they don't listen to me or believe me? God patiently answered all Moses questions and promised to go with him but Moses was still reluctant and the remaining two questions show us Moses was digging his heels in.

He said, "Please Lord I have never been eloquent neither recently nor in time past, nor since you have spoken to your servant for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

Perhaps he was the kind that gets tongue tied when nervous or under pressure. The word slow in the Hebrew can also be translated as heavy. The Greek Septuagint translation of this verse says Moses stammered and stuttered. Others have said it was because after 40 years away from Egypt he lost the ability to speak the Egyptian language fluently.

Having an audience with Egypt's ruler was high level diplomacy and Moses was just a shepherd out at Midian. He doubted he was up to the job. In any case people can have long memories and what if someone recognised him as the traitor who bashed and killed an Egyptian slave driver. No Moses wasn't going.

But it was all just excuses. Moses could speak as his conversation with the Lord at the burning bush demonstrates and God did say that he would tell Moses exactly what to say and He had promised (ch.3:18) that they would listen to Moses. Furthermore, those who remembered him as a fugitive and were on the lookout for him had all died (4:19)

God had called Moses and would provide. He just needed to trust and obey God.

We know that Paul was criticised because of his lack of eloquence in 2 Cor.10:10. But it didn't stop Paul once he set out on his mission. In 2 Cor. 11:6 his response was I might be unskilled in speaking but not so in knowledge. When it comes to passing on God's word, the content of the message is more important than the man and his abilities. In 1 Corinthians 4:7 God's servants are described as we are earthen vessels containing a treasure from God and it is the word and Spirit of God, rather than the man delivering it which has power to transform.

And so the Lord said to Moses, "Who has made man's mouth? Who make him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind?" Moses had been given his abilities and disabilities by God and Moses with his physical strength, persistent character and heavy speech was exactly the person whom God would use to address Pharaoh and lead the Israelites.

So rather than complain about what we think is lacking or say we are no good we are encouraged to have the attitude that we just use our strengths and weaknesses to the glory of God. Think of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Before going away on a long journey the master gave his servants a sum of money to invest according to their abilities one 5 another 2 and the third 1 talent. When he returned he commended those who used whatever talents they had whether they were many or few profitably. The one who buried his talent in the sand was cast into outer darkness because he failed to use what the master had given to him at all.

Don't let your perceived weaknesses stop you from serving the Lord.

But Moses dug his heels in. He didn't want to go. "Please Lord send the message by whomever you will" In other words, "send anyone! Just don't send me!"

Well here we come to the underlying problem. All the other issues had been dealt with. It wasn't really that Moses was a poor public speaker, too shy, or might not gain the respect of his fellow countrymen. All of these would be overcome. The real problem was combination of a lack of trust in God and a refusal to obey the Lord.

When it says that the anger of the Lord burned against Moses you could be excused for fearing the worst for Moses at that point. God had given him every encouragement but still Moses failed to trust him. Why should God bother with a man like that?

That brings me to the second thing,

2. The patience and enabling of the LORD.

Though God was righteously angry with Moses he was also very patient with him as we see in the next verse. Help was on the way. Moses' brother Aaron had already left Egypt and was on his way to see Moses! He would go with Moses to Pharaoh and speak for him. Whatever God said to Moses was to be relayed to Aaron who would speak to Pharaoh and the people. In the same way Moses spoke for God Aaron spoke for Moses.

The Lord also reminded Moses of the staff he was leaning on. That staff was a sign to him that God would be with him and work his signs and wonders through Moses.

Nevertheless Moses reluctance to do the will of God reminds us that there was only ever one person fit to be God's mediator and one person who obeyed God perfectly. Later as Moses and the Israelites were making their way to the Promised Land the Lord told Moses "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you. I will put my words in his mouth and he shall say all that I command him." (Deuteronomy 18:18). Later, on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached his second sermon, he named Jesus Christ as the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18:13 . In Acts 3:22 Peter quotes Moses proclaiming Jesus as the Servant God had sent to bless his people.

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was like his brothers yet was without sin in Hebrews 2:17 & 4:15. Like Moses Jesus came to free us from slavery and set us on the way to our promised land.

Unlike Moses Jesus didn't come with excuses but was always ready and willing to do God's will. In the garden of Gethsemane when he sweated and agonised over the prospect of death by crucifixion he submitted to the Father's will saying, "Not my will but your will be done" He didn't say Lord send someone else or this is unjust you've got to find another way. He knew that there was no other way for a perfectly holy and just God to wash away our sin. Satan's power of accusation against us could only be destroyed by the only one who had the power and ability to be our sin bearer.

Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are reminded of that; that Christ bore our sins on the cross that we might be reconciled to God.

That brings me to the third thing

3. Made willing to serve

If Jesus is our Saviour then can we not also serve him as our Lord? Yes! With God's help Moses overcame his reluctance and fear and went as God had told him to go. Moses became an effective leader of God's people. The staff that he took with him was a constant reminder; a sign that God was with Him.

We too can serve the Lord with confidence knowing that God will be with us as we trust in him.

There is a well-known story of a missionary couple who went through a struggle with God's call on them in the 18th century. Hans Egede a Norwegian pastor felt the call to bring the gospel to Greenland. But his wife Gertrude however wasn't so sure. She was 45, not physically strong and had four children at home with the youngest barely a year old. Gertrude felt the same way Moses did when God called him. "Lord send some one else! Her mother told Hans Egede that if they went he ruin himself and his family by going through with such a crazy idea.

Well what else can the man and woman of faith do but bring the matter before the Lord in prayer. So that's what they did and God's spirit worked in Gertrude's heart and she together with her husband embraced the call to take the gospel to Greenland. In 1722 they founded a colony and named it Godthåb which in time became the capital city of Greenland and is

known as known as Nuuk today. Egede's desire was to reach the Eskimos but had little success partly because of the language had few words with which to explain the gospel with and partly because of opposition due to pagan beliefs. That changed in 1733 when a smallpox epidemic swept the island. Hans and his wife poured themselves heart and soul into caring for dying Greenlanders. One said, "You have been kinder to us than we have been to one another," Gertrude so exhausted herself in the effort that she died a short time later. Hans returned to Denmark in 1736.

His son Paul, raised among the Eskimos, took over the work, mastered the language, completed a translation of the Bible in the native language, and saw many conversions. His father delighted to see his son reap where he had sown.

The Egedes discerned God's calling on them and were willing to follow that call. They also had a genuine love for the people they worked amongst and as the record shows the Lord did the rest and worked the miracle of conversion in that nation.

We all have our own calling for the Lord. For most of us it is to work and serve him where ever we are. At the moment for us it here in Wanganui and in whatever our occupation is and with whatever strengths and weaknesses. If his spirit is in us and we are willing God will use them for his glory.

What talent do you have? A good intellect? A strong and agile body? A calm and wise spirit? Perhaps you are a practical person who is good at caring for children or maybe you have the ability to make money. Whatever gift you have you are called to use it for God's glory

What are your weaknesses? God can use these to his glory as well. Such as the man born blind in John chapter 9 The disciples thought he was born blind because of sin but Jesus corrected them and said he was born blind so that God's glory might be displayed in him. (9:3)

This is true for every child of God . We were made to glorify God. Like Moses and Aaron are not all good at the same thing. In fact we may feel that we are deficient in one area or another. But that doesn't mean we can't serve God and help build his church. The Lord said to Moses, "go and I even I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to say. "

God is with us too therefore it is possible for us to do his will whatever his will for you might be. Remember that he is the great I am, the holy sufficient eternal God who is always there always with us. And remember that he is faithful to his promises and his people. He is YHWH the covenant God of grace . He may not give us the words to say immediately as he did the prophets and apostles in the days of ongoing revelation. But he has given us Jesus every believer strong or weak is able to say Jesus saves! It is that clear message from the Bible, Jesus saves that God has used through all kinds of characters with a great variety of gifts and talents strengths and weaknesses to build his church.

Amen