

Being Called to Journey

Exodus 3:1-12

February 12, 2017

Recently I read an article claiming that today's culture could be referred to as expert quitters. This claim had me thinking quite a bit about my own life. Like discovering that my Dad came by every job I had as a teenager (without me knowing) and talking to my boss to make sure I was working hard and not goofing off. Or the time when I was 14 and my Dad got me a summer job at a factory in Burlington and when I got home after my 1st day I told him I was not going back to which he replied, "Boy yes you are." It's probably not hard for you to figure out who was right.

I know these lessons are at least part of the reason I really don't like to see people quit, or give up. I'm not sure any of us thinks of ourselves as quitters. Yet when I think of the numerous instances where something becomes hard, or someone's feelings get hurt causing them to "get their ball and go home," I can't help but wonder if this author is right. People try a job, but they find the work difficult and demanding, so they walk away. Some start diets and discover they are expected to exercise their body and their common sense, so they quit. Others begin a fitness program and maintain the schedule for a few weeks; when they realize that fitness is a lifetime goal, they quit.

There are even stories of people attending church, and when something the preacher says displeases them, they quit. When they discover that the Christian Faith requires effort, they quit. It could be said that instead of working to make things better, quitting becomes the preferred choice.

Is there a chance that this author is correct in his assessment of today's culture? If he is, I would like to know why quitting has become such a preferable option. Especially when you consider that we are most easily drawn to stories of those who persevere. Those who choose not to give up, not to quit, especially when all the cards are stacked against them. We pull for those people, over and against the quitter. This, I believe, is the reason speeches like Coach Jim Valvano's 1993 ESPY speech "Don't Give Up, Don't Ever Give Up" resonate so deeply and stay with us the rest of our lives. While him saying "Don't Give Up, Don't Ever Give Up, was a powerful moment, there are other inspirational moments in that speech. One happened early on when Coach Valvano said, "I always have to think about

what's important in life... Things like, Where you started, where you are and where you're going to be." Maybe Coach Valvano knew the Exodus story by heart because it seems those three things, where you started, where you are and where you are going mirror Moses' story.

Where You Started

So where did Moses start? Well in the early years of his life Moses had it pretty good...raised in Egypt in the house of Pharaoh...given responsibility and a place of privilege. That place of privilege unraveled for him when he killed a man for beating a Hebrew slave. As a fugitive, Moses became a man on the run. He ended up way east of Egypt in a land called Midian. Ironically things worked out pretty good for him there, too. He married the daughter of Jethro and then went to work for his father-in-law tending his herd of sheep. It was a rather ordinary life, but it was a safe life.

Where You Are

Then we have the second of Coach Valvano's three things: **WHERE YOU ARE**, which seems to fit today's scripture rather nicely. In this scripture we find one of the great moments in the Biblical narrative and it happened on an otherwise normal day when Moses was tending sheep for Jethro. Somewhere on the side of Mt. Horeb, Moses saw a bush that was aflame but not consumed. It was on fire, but it didn't burn up. As he moved closer to inspect this phenomenon, the voice of God spoke to him and told him to take off his shoes since he was standing on holy ground.

God reminded him of the people of Israel who had been left behind in Egypt as slaves, and then told Moses to go back to Egypt and deliver them out of bondage. Moses didn't much care for God's idea. After all, he was a wanted man...a fugitive...and going back to Egypt had no appeal. On top of that, Moses reminded God of all the reasons why he should not lead- his poor speech...his lack of authority...and on and on. God acknowledged all of that, explained what he [God] would do and then simply said, 'I will be with you.' This promise of God should never be viewed as simple though, because this has been the promise of God from the start, and no matter how many times God's people fall down or complain or screw up, God remains with them. You see, this Exodus story is really a story of God's faithfulness. A faithfulness that did not begin nor end with Moses on Mt. Horeb. God's faithfulness, despite what God's people do in response, is recorded for us in

the great stories of the faith, like this story of the Call of Moses. All of Scripture bears witness to this faithfulness.

Where You Want To Be

This conversation between Moses and God brings us to Coach Valvano's third step: **WHERE YOU WANT TO BE**. Of the three steps, this is the hardest. It requires effort, it looks to the future without any sort of timetable for achievement. Take Moses and the Hebrew people for instance, answering God's call was also the start of a 40 year journey of twists and turns and even dead ends. You remember the story of the plagues on the Egyptians...the Red Sea crossing... the Golden Calf...the wandering years in the desert...the daily manna...and finally the move into the Promised Land.

It all began when Moses heard his name...and sensed that God was calling him to something very different than what he had planned for himself. As Eugene Peterson says, answering this call requires "a realization that what God wants from you and what you want from God are not going to be achieved by doing the same old things, thinking the same old thoughts." Deciding that you want to be where God is leading always precedes your arrival at that destination, and make no mistake, the path between answering the call and arriving is never fully known until the destination has actually been reached.

This new unknown place can be terrifying, exhilarating, even paralyzing. It is even possible to feel all three of these at the same time, or countless other emotions. The thing is, I believe each and every day you have a choice; you can either choose life or you can choose death. Where Moses wanted to choose death for himself, [speech problems, no authority, etc.], God chose life for him [I will protect you, I will be with you always].

Now we should not for one minute think this was an easy choice for Moses. The text tells us as much. Moses' questioning of God, questioning of himself should not go unnoticed. This was an extremely hard choice for Moses. We see this in the five objections he raises in response to God's call:

1. "Who am I?"
2. "Who are you?"
3. "What if they do not believe me?"
4. "I stutter."

5. “Why not send someone else?”

Yet throughout this encounter God continues answering Moses respectfully and lovingly, offering a promise of personal Presence and an ever-sustaining glimpse into who God is – nameless, formless, liberator, sustainer. It was this promise to be with him that made all the rest possible. Moses believed and trusted that God would indeed do what God promised...to lead him daily... and to be with him no matter what. Moses knew he was being called to journey and he trusted God to remain with him every step.

Is this not what we are all called to do? Moses had no aspirations beyond Midian...no dreams of anything different than where he was and what he was doing. He was satisfied with the status quo. We all get that way from time to time...don't we? For some reason, God always and forever seems to be calling his people, including us, to change whenever change is needed. God seems to always be calling his people, including us, to new places and new ways of choosing life.

In his article, *Expeditions into What is Possible*, Lawrence Peers asked those who lead churches: “How often do we prefer the familiar and the safe? How much do we prefer to remain with what is, with no inclination to move toward what is possible? How often as leaders of faith communities do we stay on the edge of our own Red Sea waiting for some miracle to occur before we even budge? We need practical directions as we embark on our own expeditions into what is possible, not just for the congregations we lead but also for ourselves as leaders. In fact, for us to effect deep change—that is, change that is not just...on the surface but change that is...transformative—we need to re-author our leadership. In so doing, we are not merely agents of change but, like Moses, we are changed.” (Congregations, Summer 2010, p.29)

Leading change is not just doing something different. Anyone can do something different. Everyone gets enamored by novelty. Moses did not just lead his people out of Egypt. He led them to a new understanding of who they were and of what was possible. I think this is the work of pastors... helping people to see what is possible...with God's help. And make no mistake, leading is hard work...and it is intensely personal. Some may even choose not to lead, but for dreamers like myself, running away from helping people see what is possible was never a real option. The thing is, I tried to deny it. Tried to run away from it, but similar to God being

patient with Moses' questions, God was ever so patient with me and the path I took to get here. I know without a shadow of a doubt that God calls us to journey toward a fulfilled life, and our pursuit of this could be called a long obedience in the same direction.

As I close today, it seems only fitting to do in the words of Coach Jim Valvano:

“How do you go from where you are to where you want to be? I think you have to have an enthusiasm for life. You have to have a dream, a goal. You have to be willing to work for it.

I urge all of you, all of you, to enjoy your life, the precious moments you have. To spend each day with some laughter and some thought, to get your emotions going. To be enthusiastic every day... to keep your dreams alive in spite of problems whatever you have. You have the ability to be able to work hard for your dreams to come true, to become a reality.”

You see, its speeches like those... It's stories of people who answer God's call to journey... It's stories of people who make the decision to choose life, not death that resonate till the end of time.

Quitting is not the answer, nor should it be a defining characteristic of our culture.

God is with us, calling us to journey, calling us to choose life.

Amen!