

August 28, 2011: LISTEN UP AND PAY ATTENTION!

Exodus 1:8-2:10; Exodus 3:1-15

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My lack of knowledge about electronic technology can sometimes cause me undue anxiety. I read more into those little trouble prompts on my computer than might be necessary. My panic on study leave may have been intensified because I was in northern Minnesota, finishing a year's worth of sermon planning. When my laptop said "Corrupt power source," I panicked. Would I be able to finish, would I have access to my work, would the computer crash, could I even do the next task of my study leave? The tech adviser for the electric power coop in Moose Lake talked me down, convinced me all it took was a new (expensive) battery, and I was good to go.

I thought. I went through the set up protocol for the new battery and blithely spent the next day taking notes and planning stewardship for the coming year. As I neared the end of that day's work, I got the same trouble warning, so I ran the diagnostics again, to no avail. Since I hadn't run out of juice completely, I decided to risk transporting everything back home, run my back up, and bring the machine to my computer guru. It took faith that it was a manageable risk, but I was still felt pretty vulnerable. As it turned out, I could rely on the computer if it was plugged in. Furthermore, all I needed to do to get rid of that pesky warning, was to take the battery out, reinstall, run the diagnostics, and reboot. No need for panic, but a big lesson in power.

Which is what made this experience the metaphor that will not die, a sermon illustration about being plugged in to reliable power, about power systems that do not energize, about the dangers of reliance on personal power. Maybe it was more visceral to me. It felt like an illustration of living in perilous times, near burnt out, and what it takes to check our priorities, to unplug and reboot. Where do we get the juice to keep going?

This story about Moses and the burning bush is so iconic for our faith and the way we worship, I thought this metaphor might apply. If only I could figure out what kind of story it is. It has been read in so many ways—and maybe that's its virtue, that it *can* be read in different ways for different times. But what *is* it about? For some, it's about naming God, who says to Moses, "I Am Who I Am (I Will Be Who I Will Be) (Jehovah) . . . is my name forever." But there's more to this story than God claiming a name.

Is it this about "Pay attention; I've got a job for you," the call to vocation? Moses, a murderer on the lam, is the guy who abruptly left a career in the Egyptian court. Now a wilderness shepherd, he's just building his life with a growing family. His conversation with a bush (if you can believe a conversation with a bush is possible!) is the impetus for another abrupt change in lifestyle. His new career path requires an entirely different relationship with both the people know him only as a self-righteous murderer, someone who thinks he's God. Pay attention (God says): your life has a different purpose.

Or maybe this is about “Pay attention, there is more holiness around than you think,” a story of reverence, of discovering the holy in our mundane lives. The Celtic Christians would mention thin places at this point, teaching about signs all around us of God’s presence. Today, in this gorgeous setting (surely one of the most beautiful places on earth!), we realize it’s not always a bush-on-fire trying to get our attention, urging us to turn aside in reverence, to stop for just one moment in our rush to accomplish the day. This morning, the music of Clear Creek could be the sound of celestial choirs. The immense trees that surround and envelop us are as beautiful as the walls of any pilgrimage cathedral in Europe. [*Stop now, let the sense of reverence wash over you, listen for the choir of creation.*] And if this is the case, what is to keep us from noticing the places of worship in our own back yards? It’s not such a leap for people who think that pouring a little water over someone claims them for God. For people who eat a morsel of bread and drink a sip of grape juice as if in the presence of Jesus himself, believing it to be the nourishment that enables us to go out and to be *him* in the world around us. Pay attention to the holiness surrounding you in the mundane world.

Maybe this story is about “Pay attention; corrupt power source,” about learning our radical reliance on God. Were my laptop battery adventures a modern-day parallel to Moses’ experience? Surely, my experience with my computer’s power was more about trust than it was about knowledge, just as Moses, the guy who talks to bushes, discovered that his call to liberate his people is less about his own power than it is about trusting the One True Source of Power (I Am Who I Am). It took some conscious decision-making on my part to believe that, even if the battery wasn’t charging, I was still plugged into the outlet. If I was plugged in, that was all I needed in terms of power. I would not be able to disconnect from the power source and work, because the old battery couldn’t bear the power drain. Kind of a metaphor for spiritual practices. We can’t disconnect from our power source. Even working on battery power, we’ve got to continually recharge, or we’ll only have juice for a little while, and then we’ll crash, and our work will be lost and inaccessible. We cannot just rely on ourselves.

So maybe it’s not a story that can be read three different ways. Maybe it’s a story that needs all three meanings—about being “plugged in” to our Source of Power, I Am Who I Am. Maybe that direct connection to the power of God is the same as reverence, is the same as God’s call of purpose in our lives. What if we treated our jobs and roles in family and church and community with as much reverence as was asked of Moses, was he stands in front of that bush-that-was-not-consumed? Yeah, before Moses would go back to Egypt, he negotiated and argued with God about his perceived lack of credentials. But he did go. He did treat that call with reverence. He did stay connected to the power of I Am Who I Am.

What do we do when we get that prompt warning us that we’re about to lose power? Do we even notice it? Pay attention! The holy is in the mundane, God calls us to purpose. Pay attention, but stay connected.

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