

## **I am nobody**

Exodus 3:1-15

August 31, 2014

I am nobody ...

Have you ever said it? Have you ever felt it?

Sometimes, it's a sigh of despair: I am nobody. I feel like my life doesn't amount to anything. I feel like if I just disappeared off the face of the earth, I wouldn't be missed, at least not for long. I feel like I don't really make a difference, don't contribute anything of lasting value to this world. Sure, I go through the motions, my days are full of activity, but what does it mean? What does it matter? I feel like I don't matter. I am nobody.

Even if you don't ever think or say, "I am nobody," you have to admit, don't you, that you spend a considerable amount of time and effort, and money, every day trying to prove that you are somebody? We look for ways to validate ourselves, to win praise, to gain approval, some of us, blatantly drawing attention to ourselves, "Look at me! Look at me!" and others of us, more subtle, but craving the affirmation just as much, "Please, notice me ..."

It is sad, even tragic, the lengths to which some will go to lift themselves out of the despair of feeling like nothing. I read this week some of the backstory to the "American jihadis," two young men, citizens of the United States who ended up fighting and dying in Afghanistan and Iraq on the side of Muslim militants. Their lives were going nowhere, long strings of dead ends and failures. They felt like nobodies, but a martyr, dying heroically for a cause, that is somebody!

I am nobody ... Sometimes it's a sigh of despair, and sometimes it's a cry of frustration or anger. They don't notice me. They don't appreciate me. They ignore me. I am nobody to them!

Rob Shindler may have felt that way. After he finished the long and hard work of writing the manuscript of his book, "Hot Dogs and Hamburgers," (the book we are reading together this fall as part of the UCC One Read project) he submitted it to one hundred and fifty publishers. And got no replies.

It can be true in almost any job. You don't feel valued. You don't feel appreciated. You give your best, but who notices? Who cares? I am nobody to them.

Sometimes it's a sigh of despair, sometimes a cry of frustration, and sometimes a shrug. Who, me? You want me to do what? I am nobody. Sometimes it's a way of avoiding responsibility, a way of excusing inaction, a way of remaining comfortably on the sidelines. Sometimes, in certain situations, we might prefer to be nobody.

*I am nobody. How can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*

That's what Moses said. He was happy to be nobody, if it meant he didn't have to go to Egypt. Actually, I think that when Moses said, "I am nobody," it was a sigh and a cry and a shrug.

I am nobody. I was somebody once, a long time ago, a prince in Egypt, a young man with a promising future, on the cusp of real power, but now, this is what I do: I herd sheep and goats for my father-in-law. Who am I? What do I amount to? What have I done? What do I have? I am nobody.

I am nobody to them. Nobody to the rulers of Egypt who were once my peers. Nobody to the Egyptian people who once looked up to me, admired me, feared me. Nobody to my own people, the Hebrews, who have written me off as a betrayer and a murderer. Why would the king of Egypt ever listen to me? Why would the Israelites ever listen to me? I am nobody to them.

But mostly it was a shrug, a contented shrug. Moses was happy being nobody -- caring for his father-in-law's animals, loving his wife, watching his children and grandchildren grow up. Moses enjoyed an easy life, an undemanding life, a risk-free life, a happily anonymous life in the wilderness being nobody ... while in Egypt his people, his kinsmen, suffered terribly!

"I am nobody," we say, going about our business, living our happy, self-contained, self-contented lives ... while God's people suffer!

That's what Moses said: "I am nobody." Do you know who this is? This is Moses! It is remarkable, truly remarkable, that the Hebrew Bible remembers Moses this way. Moses is the most important figure in the Hebrew tradition. He is to Jews much like Jesus is to Christians -- deliverer, lawgiver, teacher, leader, judge, prophet, priest. Their deliverer, their leader, the founder of their faith says, "I am nobody." So what's the response? Are they going to let that disavowal stand? How does the tradition answer Moses? How does God answer Moses?

This is how neither the tradition nor God answers Moses: not by contradicting him! God doesn't say, "Now, Moses, don't sell yourself short. You do matter. You really are somebody. You can do it."

And the Bible doesn't go on to say that even though Moses says he's nobody, we all know that isn't true. We all know that Moses really was a great man, one of the greatest of men, a true hero of the faith.

No, this is God's answer: "I will be with you." And this is God's answer. When Moses said, "I am nobody," God answered, "I am."

God says, "I am."

What does my life mean? Why does it matter? I feel like I don't matter. I am nobody.

So be it! But I am. Stop contemplating your own navel and look up! Look up at almighty God!

They don't notice me. They don't appreciate me. They ignore me. I am nobody to them.

That may be true, but I am. Who cares what they think?

How can I go? How can I do it? I am nobody.

Sure you are! But I am. And I will be with you.

It kinda puts things into perspective, doesn't it? That's what it's about: putting things into perspective, putting our lives, our struggle for purpose and meaning, our need to matter, our questions of identity, all into perspective.

God is. That says enough. God is.

What is my life for? God is.

Does what I do matter? God is.

Do I matter? Am I somebody? God is.

That's what worship is about: putting things into perspective. When we turn toward God, when we offer the living God our adoration and praise, whatever troubles we may have shrink. And whatever pride we may have shrinks. We shrink!

In the presence of the living God, I am nobody. But God is, and I am in God's presence. In God's presence ... I am.

And do you think God would ask nobody to go to Egypt?