

## **Somebody**

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

October 23, 2011

*There has never been a prophet in Israel like Moses; the Lord spoke with him face to face. No other prophet has ever done miracles and wonders like those that the Lord sent Moses to perform against the king of Egypt ... No other prophet has been able to do the great and terrifying things that Moses did in the sight of all Israel ...*

Wow! What an epitaph to the life of Moses! Moses was somebody. Somebody who mattered. Somebody who made a difference.

His life left an indelible imprint on the life and history of his people. Abraham may have been their father, but Moses was their liberator. Moses was the one who stood up to their oppressors and led them out of the land where they were slaves and made them a nation. Moses was the one who made them the Lord's nation, the Lord's people, a people governed by laws that defined their unique relationship and responsibility to their God. Moses is the one still celebrated by his people more than three thousand years later and remembered even by people not his own as the prototypical liberator.

Moses was somebody! Wouldn't you like to be somebody?

*There has never been a minister of the gospel like Tim Ensworth, no other minister who so opens the minds and hearts of people to see who God is and to awaken in them a burning desire to live the rest of their lives in communion with God ...*

No. Let's not go there ...

But I do want to be somebody. I do want my life to matter. I do want to make a difference in somebody's life in some small way. Don't you? Otherwise, what is this all for?

Moses was somebody. His life did make a difference. His life mattered. So how did it happen? What can we learn from his story?

You know well the story of Moses' birth, how his mother placed him a waterproofed reed basket and set him floating in the grasses at the edge of the Nile, how he was discovered, pulled from the water, and raised by an Egyptian princess. He grew up a prince of Egypt, by blood a Hebrew, but by dress and education and social standing a member of the Egyptian royal family.

What was his life like then? Did it matter? It surely mattered to his adoptive mother, the one who saved him and loved him as her own, but what did his life mean otherwise? What did it mean to him?

Do you suppose he felt fortunate for his life of ease and comfort and privilege, glad to be spared the life of a slave? Or do you think he might have felt some uneasiness, even some vague guilt, because he had been handed the kind of opportunity and luxury the rest of his people were denied?

Do you think he felt like somebody? But whatever he was, he knew he had become it through no achievement of his own. And what was he doing? Not much more than enjoying his pampered royal life, because the Egyptians would hardly let a Hebrew assume a position of any real responsibility or authority.

Moses went out, as a young man, to visit his people, and he saw their suffering. As a young man, he saw the suffering of his people and his heart was moved. He even witnessed the killing of one of the Hebrews by an Egyptian overseer, and when he thought no one was looking, he took vengeance and killed that Egyptian himself!

But someone was looking, and Moses found out that he was found out. So he ran. Moses, the fugitive, ran from Egypt and didn't stop running until he came to Midian, a land far far away from those who sought him, a land far far away from any who knew him. He settled in Midian, where he married a wife, raised a family, and looked after the flocks of his new father-in-law.

That was his life, his new life, his new anonymous and unambitious and unthreatened life. Was he somebody? Did his life matter? Was he making a difference? Was Moses making good and wise use of all God had given him, good and wise use of the life God had made for him?

Did he still remember the groaning and weeping of his people, or did time and distance and the daily routine of his new life in Midian fade those memories from his mind? Except in his dreams?

Moses left Egypt and came to Midian as a young man, and, years and years later, Moses was still herding goats in Midian as an old man. This would have been his life, the sum total of his life, except the Lord accosted him in the desert. By my calculations, by the time the Lord spoke to Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses had lived two-thirds of the life he would live. So, if you will live eighty or ninety years, you can expect to hear from God at about sixty!

The Lord got Moses' attention with a bush consumed in flames, and then the Lord spoke to him:

*I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you may lead my people out of his country ...*

And Moses answered:

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

That's how Moses felt about himself: "I am nobody ..."

Was he right? Well, he had a home, that wasn't really his home. He lived among people, who weren't really his people. He had a job, that wasn't really his job. He was a Hebrew among the Egyptians, and an Egyptian among the Midianites. He was not doing much more with his life than passing the time, quietly living out his days. And the more the Lord asked, the more Moses objected: I can't lead. I can't speak. I don't even know who you are. No one will believe me. No one will listen to me. No one will follow me. I am nobody!

But the Lord chose him. The Lord sent him. The Lord didn't send nobody, the Lord sent Moses. The Lord sent somebody.

And as the rest of the story, the rest of Moses' life, unfolds, we can see just who and what that somebody is! We see Moses put to good use the strength of spirit and heart for justice the Lord had given him. We see Moses put to good use the courage and tenacity and stubbornness and passion the Lord had given him. We see Moses put to good use, with the help of friends and counselors, the leadership abilities the Lord had given him.

Once Moses does say "Yes" to God's call, he most certainly was somebody, and his life mattered. His life did make a difference. And his life, as a whole, was a success. Or was it?

Moses did lead the people out of Egypt, but not without much suffering and turmoil and doubt. He led the people, but they were more often than not, not ready to follow. They made him angry, and his anger made God angry.

Moses led them out, but he didn't lead them in. It was left to another to complete the journey into the land of promise. He caught a glimpse of the land for which they left Egypt, but he never entered it, nor did any of the people who had left Egypt with him. They all died along the way in the desert. It would be

their children and their children's children who would finally settle the land that would become their homeland, the homeland of the nation of Israel.

So did Moses succeed or did he fail? Did he win or did he lose? Did he complete his mission or not?

Or do you understand, hearing the whole of the story, that that's the wrong question? It's not a question of personal achievement, but of God's purpose. It's not about being somebody, but about being somebody the Lord can use.

The Lord heard the cries of his people and set about setting them free and making them his own, and the Lord asked Moses to lead them out. He didn't ask Moses to be their king, but to be their servant, to be his servant, to do the job, part of the job he, the Lord, had in mind.

It would be left to others to finish the job -- to Joshua and Samuel, to David and Solomon, to Elijah and Isaiah and Amos, to Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary, and to Jesus. It would be left to Jesus to finish the job of setting God's people free!

But Moses was somebody, somebody who could do his part of the job, by making good and wise use of the abilities and opportunities God had given him. Moses was somebody -- there has never been a prophet in Israel like Moses! -- because he was, at last, at the last, a good and faithful steward of God's good gifts.

We are stewards of God's good gifts. We are stewards of our abilities, our passions, our perceptions, our talents.

But let's be clear! It's not about making the most of what we have. It's not about realizing our potential or being all we can be. It's not about achievement. It's not about success. It's about service, about serving God's purpose that is so much bigger and wider than me. It's about answering God's call to do ... something.

You can do something, where you are, with what you have. And I'll tell you exactly what that something is! This is what the Lord has in mind for you. The Lord is calling you to be a liberator, to set his people free, to set them free from whatever binds them or enslaves them or belittles them, to set them free for the life God intends for them, to set them free to be his, to belong to him.

You see, Moses is not the only one God calls to set his people free! God is sending you to the "king of Egypt," to stand up against everything that gets in the way of the peace and well-being of his people, to stand up against cruelty and

brokenness and injustice and loneliness, to stand up against sin in all its forms and effects.

But ... I am nobody!

No, you are somebody, somebody God can use, somebody God wants to use, to set someone free!