

Stop! Look! Listen!

Exodus 3:1-15

August 31, 2008

OK, folks! Take out your Day-timers, break out your Blackberries, open the pages of your calendars, and tell me what's going on! What's going on in your lives?

Football games and golf outings and soccer practices and exercise classes. Concerts and sales calls and counseling appointments and business lunches. Board meetings and staff meetings and Rotary and Kiwanis.

You've got to see the doctor and the dentist, the pharmacist and the vet, your hairstylist, your mechanic, your accountant, and your pet!

There are phone calls to make and e-mails to answer, bills to pay and errands to run, shopping for groceries and shopping for clothes, shopping for school supplies and just shopping to shop!

You've got to make the bed and make dinner and make tracks and make a difference.

You've got a funeral, a wedding, a birthday party, a reunion.

You've got plans to implement and goals to achieve, promotions to earn and a future to secure, dreams to dream and promises to keep and fences to mend and children to raise and a house to paint and a yard to mow and people to see and places to go and ...

Stop!

Stop. Put away the to-do lists and the date books. Get down off the fast track. Take a time-out from business as usual. Get off the bus. Get out of the car. Take a seat in the pew and stop!

Stop! Look! Listen! What do you see? What do you hear?

Do you hear the voice of God? Do you hear the voice of God speaking to you? Do you hear the voice of God calling to you?

Do you see God's glory? Do you see God's glory?

Moses was just minding his own business. Actually, he was just minding his father-in-law's business! He was out in the desert, near the mountain called Sinai, searching out good pasture for his father-in-law's goats and sheep. His father-in-law was Jethro, a priest who lived in the region of Midian. Moses had married one of Jethro's seven daughters, Zipporah, after rescuing her and her sisters from some bullying shepherds.

This Moses had had a most unusual childhood. He was born in Egypt to a Hebrew mother at a time when Hebrew baby boys were being systematically slaughtered. He was spared -- by the courageous efforts of his mother and the kindness of an Egyptian princess and the grace of God. He was raised as an Egyptian prince, but grew into adulthood acutely aware of his different heritage, anxious about the welfare of the people who shared his blood. He saw their oppression. He saw their suffering. He even witnessed the murder of a Hebrew by an Egyptian ... and he exacted revenge.

That was the turning point of his life, because there was no going back. The news of his act of vengeance got out and he ran from Egypt. Moses left Egypt -- for good -- and settled in the land of Midian. Soon, Egypt was only a distant memory, its enticements and terrors only remembered in his dreams. He had a new life, a new family, a new home, a safe and comfortable and untroubled and truly satisfying existence. His life -- tending the flocks, loving his wife, raising his children -- was flowing along, just flowing along toward a surely happy end, and then ... stop!

And then God made him stop. There was this bush, a bush engulfed in flames but not burning up, and Moses stopped to look.

Sometimes when we don't stop and look, God makes us stop. Probably not with a burning bush, but with something, something that disrupts our comfortable routines and upsets our plans and gets our attention and makes us look, makes us see -- everything -- in a new light.

So what did Moses see? Well, not much because he covered his eyes! But he caught a glimpse, just a glimpse, of God's glory, and it was almost more than he could bear.

Do you know what that's like? To see something, to catch a glimpse, to sense in some way the presence of the glory of God? A glory that makes you tremble? A glory that takes your breathe away? A glory that so fills you and excites you and overwhelms you that it is almost more than you can bear?

Can you feel it? Can you see it? Open your eyes! Open your mind! Open your heart! Pay attention! Stop and look and listen!

When Moses stopped, what did he hear? Did he hear God say, "I will be with you ... I will be with you as you continue moving along the path that you have chosen?"

Yes ... and no! God did promise to be with Moses, but on a different path! What Moses heard was not just "I am with you," but first, "I am sending you."

God had not forgotten the Hebrews. God saw their suffering and heard their anguished cries and God was determined to come to their rescue. God made Moses stop and look and listen. God stopped Moses in the midst of minding his own business to call him to start minding God's business!

And what is God's business? You tell me!

Saving people! God's business is saving people!

God is in the business of saving people from slavery, from oppression, from addiction, from despair, from aimlessness, from ignorance, from doubt, from fear, from poverty, from disease, from alienation, from death. God is in the business of saving people from sin and all its effects.

But that is only half of the story! Why is it that sometimes we only tell half the story? God's purpose is not just to deliver the Hebrew people out of their slavery, to bring them out of Egypt and then tell them they are on their own! God's purpose is to bring them out of slavery and into a rich and fertile land, to give them a new life, a new way of life, a life that is rich and full and good.

It is a matter not only of what God saves people from, but what God saves people for! When we tell the story of a God who saves us from our sins, we are telling only half the story. The gospel is the story of a God who saves us from sin and death, for peace, for justice, for a new way of life, for love.

God is in the business of saving people. God is still in the business of saving people! From slavery for freedom. From oppression for an equal sharing of resources and power and dignity. From addiction for self-discipline. From despair for hope. From aimlessness for purposefulness. From ignorance for an eagerness to know God. From doubt for faith. From fear for love. From poverty for a world where all have enough. From disease for bodies and minds that are whole and able. From alienation for caring community. From death for life.

And God is still in the business of stopping people like Moses in their tracks, stopping people --like you! -- in the midst of minding your own business to call you to start minding God's business.

Moses stopped and looked and listened, and finally, reluctantly, hesitantly, said "Yes" to God, and then God got to the business of saving his people! Moses didn't save his people, God did, but Moses was a tool in God's hand, an instrument of God's peace.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace! Lord, make us instruments of your peace!