

YOU ARE WHO YOU ARE (Father's Day – 2009)

Slayden Yarbrough

First Baptist Church, Boulder, CO

June 21, 2009

Text: Exodus 3:5-7; 10-14

Introduction: Preaching on special occasions is always a challenge for me. For example, today is Father's Day. What do I have to say to all who are fathers, or who may become fathers in the future? And, actually, I have moved beyond fatherhood to grand-fatherhood. Delightfully, I have discovered that the rules have changed – and for the better. Spoil the kid, then leave town.

Having said all of this, I thought that today I might look at the issue of how **anyone** of us learns about who we are and what we need to take into consideration as we make decisions and choices related to challenges before us.

I want to use as my model one of the most beloved figures in the Old Testament – **Moses**. Most of us know the basics of his story. The time is the 14th century B.C. The Hebrew people are in Egypt working on construction projects. We are told "There arose a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph." The Egyptians probably were being ruled by a people from the Aegean Sea area known as the Hyksos. They feared that should the Hebrews join with rebelling Egyptians or outside invaders, they might turn the tide in battle. So they increased the labors of the Hebrews but the Hebrews kept growing in numbers. Then they issued the order of infanticide for the male Jewish infants.

This is where Moses comes into the story. His parents are Amram and Jochebed from the tribe of Levi. When Moses is born, his sister, Miriam, hides him in the bulrushes along the Nile. An Egyptian princess discovers him, and Miriam offers to have a Hebrew mother care for him until he is old enough to be raised as the adopted son of the princess in the court of the Egyptians.

Moses grows into a young man. One day he sees an Egyptian soldier beating one of the Hebrew workers. When he thinks no one is looking he kills the Egyptian and buries him. Later, he tries to separate two Hebrews who are quarreling and one of them asks him if he plans to kill them like he did the Egyptian. His secret is out, he will become a wanted man by the Egyptians, and so he flees to an area across the Gulf of Suez in the Sinai peninsula area known as Midian

There he marries Zipporah, has a son Gershom, and settles into a life as a shepherd of the livestock of Jethro, his father-in-law. For him, that seemed to be the pattern for the rest of his life. But it's not.

- I. His life takes a dramatic turn. We are told of a burning bush from which the voice of an angel of the Lord calls to Moses. I have never had a burning bush experience, nor have I known anyone with anything close to this. But fire in the Scriptures is a symbol for the presence of God. And in the drama that follows Moses is called and is instructed to remove his sandals for he is on holy ground. The voice identifies himself as the "God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." In a real sense God is saying the Moses that "I am your God!"

We all come from someone. We build upon the **foundations** set by those who come before us. We do not appear out of nowhere. We are **modeled and shaped by our father and our father's fathers and mothers, and our mother and our mother's mothers and fathers.** In the narrative, it is important that Moses understands the connection that he has with the Hebrew people. **He is a descendent of Abraham, the father of the Hebrews. He is a descent of the two other patriarchs, Isaac and his son Jacob, who later would be known as Israel. He is a descendent of one of the twelve sons of Israel, Levi.**

One of the interesting aspects of this connection is the diversity represented in the patriarchs. Abraham is the "father" of the Hebrews, one who led his family to Canaan, after his father Terah

stopped and went no further than Haran on the journey from Mesopotamia. On the one hand Abraham was known for his **great faith in God**. On the other hand, he would **try and help out God**. The promise of a son exemplifies this. When Sarah, his wife, did not produce an heir, he **adopted Eliezar of Damascus**, his trusted servant, as his heir. This was a common practice in cases of childlessness during this time. Later, he has a son, **Ishmael, by Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar**. Finally, Sarah at a very old age gives birth to **Isaac**.

Abraham's faith is expressed when he is **willing to provide Isaac as a sacrifice**. His constancy is rewarded when a ram is discovered in a thicket.

Isaac is the valley between two mountain tops. His identity is related to his father and to his son. His name means **"laughter."** He is seen as the **possible sacrifice in the test of obedience for his father**. He is a **secondary figure in the struggle between the two twins, Esau and Jacob, for family leadership**.

Jacob is the trickster, the schemer, the conniver, who is always getting one up on his brother or his father-in-law or others. He eventually is **confronted with who he is and struggles with God**. His name is changed to **Israel, "God Rules."**

He has twelve sons, from which the basis for the twelve tribes of Israel rests. He shows favoritism for Rachel and her two sons. He swindles Esau out of the birthright as the first born, and with the help of his mother Rebekkah, he steals the Patriarchal blessing from his twin. Yet at the same time, as in the case of all of the Patriarchs, he still is used by God.

- II. It is Moses who is not only a descendent of the three Patriarchs. He is also the link to the future, as he is called to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and back to Canaan. The story of the burning bush dialogue is very interesting, because in it Moses is identified with his past, with the Patriarchal Fathers. **Notice that God identifies Himself as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."** But he also is the **link to the future of the nation**. And, his unique qualities are uncovered in a series of questions.

Moses initially responds to the challenge of going to Pharaoh and demanding the freedom of the Hebrews by asking what seems to be a very honest question. **"Who am I to go before Pharaoh with demands that the Hebrews be allowed to leave."** This is actually a very good question, and one that had to be answered in depth. He was a **wanted man** by the Egyptians for the murder of an Egyptian soldier. His **own people didn't seem to trust him**. He was seen as being hot-headed, a man with a volatile temper. He had **been gone** for about 40 years. And he was a **simple shepherd**, watching the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law.

Yet, he had training and experience in the task to which he was called. He learned **diplomacy, planning, organization, administration, and military strategies** in the court of the Egyptians. He learned to **delegate authority**. He **understood the desert** setting in terms of finding food and water. And he was a **descendent from not only the Patriarchs but also Levi**, a son of Israel. So the answer to the question **"Who am I?"** was really not very difficult.

Moses next question was **"Who are you?"** "What's your name, when the people ask me who sent me?" The response is **"Yahweh,"** which translates **"I am who I am."** Basically, the emphasis is **not on the personality** or the personal identity of God. Rather, it is upon the **activity of God**. God is known and understood through what he **does**, through his **working in the midst of his people**.

In my mind the whole sequence of questions focuses back upon Moses with the idea that "You are who you are," just as God is who He is.

God is saying to Moses, "You are who you are. You are Moses, who has all of this experience, training, and understanding. You are the one person who can get done what needs to be done in the deliverance of my people – and your people."

Moses will ask other questions in his attempt to avoid doing what he needs to do. He says that the people will not believe me. God says, "I'll give you a sign." Moses says "I am slow of speech." God reminds him that I made you, don't you think that I know your difficulties. Finally, Moses says "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." God responds that Aaron, the brother of Moses, will be his spokesman, or "prophet."

Conclusion: So, on this Father's Day, can we learn anything.

First, I would suggest that we recognize that who we are and what we do rests upon the shoulders of those who have come before us. We do not appear out of the clear blue. Our parents, our grandparents, our great grandparents, and so forth, all passed on something to the next generation. On this Father's Day, I think of my Dad, Roy Slayden Yarbrough. He had a fifth grade education and was a factory laborer most of his life. One of the qualities that he had was that he seldom was critical of others. I think that he understood that we all had some shortcomings but he seemed to look for the good and not the bad in people. I think that a little of that filtered down to me. At least I hope so.

My Mom, Hazel Pauline Watkins, had an 8th grade education and she always stressed to her three children to get an education. My sister had a college degree and was a thesis short of a Masters degree. My brother was educated in a non-traditional sense but learned how things worked remarkably well. And I was close to becoming a professional student, finally finishing with a PhD in church history.

Who we become usually is shaped by those who have come before us.

But like Moses, we need to realize that **we are who we are**. We all have talents, training, and experiences from which to draw. What we need to do is in some form or the other see the working of God and hear the voice of God in the world in which we live. I have never encountered a burning bush. But I do live in Denver and in Colorado. What can I do, what can I say?

I can spend lots of time pointing out my shortcomings, especially when it comes to doing something in the name of God. However, you and I really need to do the opposite. Figure out who we are, and then act accordingly. Some things I do well. Some things I do very poorly. I like to kid some of the people in the churches where I preach that all I am is a professional talker. My brother got all of the ability to understand how things work, and how to fix things, and how to experiment with the way things work. Me, I tell people what I think I know.

But I believe that God needs and can use all of us.

So, on this day, remember, "You are who you are!" And you will be known by what you do when people look back to remember you.

Also, maybe this church needs to be reminded of where you came from, where you are, and where you are headed. What is it that you can draw from the past that enables you to respond effectively to the present and to add to the foundation upon which the future will rest?

Also, the question to God of "Who are you?" is relevant. Who is our God? What do we know about Him because of his action, His working in our live? Who is it (not what is it) that we are offering to the community around us?

So, as we think about who we are, maybe we be illumined by the story of Moses and the burning bush!