

## Series: Advent

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Exodus 3:1-10

December 10-11,, 2011

### “When God Breaks the Silence”

Holland-About this time of year—cold, dreary, 1993

- and I was miserable
- ministry was hard—Holland had lost its luster
- one night I yelled-get me out of here!!!
- and then—a passage in Timothy spoke—“*thanks be to Christ Jesus who appointed me to ministry*”
- I do the calling and the releasing
- it was an Immanuel—God with me—moment
  
- have you ever had an Immanuel moment—one filled with mystery—yet real—that re-centered your life?
- Exodus 3 is one of them—and it has much to teach us

Ex 2:23-25 provides the CONTEXT for the story (read)

- Israel is in one of its darkest moments
- they have been reduced to commodity—measured by productivity
- slaves, in the grip of an imperial system that has become raw and ruthless in its exploitation
- for 430 years, the conditions have been unbearable
- life is full of scarcity and anxiety
- in order that this super power might thrive and do spectacular achievements
  
- *-it's been a total violation of life*
  
- worst of all-Israel's memory of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph have been all but obliterated
- their primary experience of God has been His absence
  
- *something needed to change!!*
- God saw the evil—He took notice—and He called a man
- it became a life changing *IMMANUEL MOMENT*—something we are looking at in the month of December
  
- two things have to happen—

### 1-BE READY FOR IMMANUEL MOMENTS

- moments when we find ourselves saying—God is WITH ME
- *Moses wasn't ready*
- he had been 40 years in the wilderness
- relegated from Egyptian royalty to taking care of sheep
- maybe to get out of his sense of self importance
- his immature, impulsive self
- be drained of the empire that was so much a part of him
- *it was a time "to have the house swept and the garbage taken out"*
  
- and as with most of us, experiences with God sometimes happen when we are doing something else
- the text tells us Moses was about his work-read vs. 1
  
  
- Moses was shepherding—about the menial and the mundane
- he was focused on his father in law's capital—suggesting that after 40 years he still had not come into any substantial means on his own
- and like many of us--too busy perhaps to notice where God is at work
- life had become narrowed down into something small, constricting-reduced to a sleepwalk
- Moses suffered what many suffer today—SADD
- spiritual attention deficit disorder
  
- but something was different this day—vs. 1 hints at this
- Moses went "behind the wilderness" to the "far side"
- beyond the familiar to where it was unsafe
- not realizing he was coming within proximity of God's mountain
  
- it's as if he strayed into divine space—where heavenly traffic is heavy
- God seems to have these in various parts of the earth—Bethel, Jerusalem, the Mt of Transfiguration, Mt Gilboa, Lone, WA
  
- it is the place where God's omnipresence becomes a more particular presence
- where the mundane, the ordinary, the unimpressive, suddenly turns into something extraordinary—a moment full of divine activity
- something, Someone shows up and jars us awake
- these can come to us in the form of an unexpected guest, a word from Scripture, an incident
- for Moses-it was a burning bush-read vss. 2-3
  
- God seems to like fire to attract, mark His activity, His presence—
- coming as a smoking fire pot, a pillar of fire, a fiery shape

- Heb. 12:29 declares our God is a consuming fire
- a light that transcends the darkness
- a warmth that displaces the cold
- a heat that burns the dross—*a fire that sets us on fire*

A-what does it take to notice burning bushes?

- so far—the story tells us this:

1-a COURAGE to move beyond the predictable—vs. 1

- live out on the edge—where God is at work
- our problem—most of us prefer to remain on our “cow paths”, where we know the language and do not need maps because we know the way by heart

2-an ATTENTIVENESS to turn aside when God just might be doing something to get our attention—vss. 2-3

- something is not adding up
- why do I keep dwelling on this?
- why am I uneasy in this conversation?
- why is there no peace?
- why does the Word keep coming back to this?
- *why does this bush keep burning?!!!!*
- it demands we slow down—as Moses did—enough to notice that God is up to something
- come to this realization that this world is far more crowded with God than we realize
- angels going up and down ladders

- as Barbara Brown Taylor puts it—

*“The earth is so thick with divine possibility that it is a wonder we can walk anywhere without cracking our shins on altars”*

B-what do these moments require?—read vss. 4-5

- when God’s particular presence is encountered—it is holy—calling for reverence
- I don’t think we know how to do this very well
- we’ve become too casual—treat God with way too familiarity
- unsure how to separate ourselves—*respect sacred space*
- we’ve not been taught about sacred space
- *we have not been taught to take off our shoes*
- it’s when we do this—God reveals something about Himself—read vss. 6-9

- in every encounter—God wants us to know—

1-He is OUR GOD-vs. 6

2-He is AWARE-vs. 7

- He carefully sees, He hears, He knows

3-He is ON A MISSION—to rescue and redeem-vss. 8-9

But it's one thing *to be ready* for Immanuel moments

- but as this story reveals—it is more—much more

### 2-BE READY FOR WHAT IMMANUEL MOMENTS REQUIRE

- for Moses—and for us—they become more than divine encounters
- they become commissionings, calls, reordering
- a time to step up and do something daring-read vs. 10
- it wasn't a request, a suggestion, a hope, an invitation
- Moses was drafted to be God's redemptive voice
- confront and defy the most powerful man on earth
- coordinate a rescue effort—lead a nation
- this has been God's pattern throughout history—to step in and call people to His divine purpose
- Abraham-who by consenting to go to the far side selected a family gene that would become dominant
- Samuel, Gideon, David, Isaiah, Mary, the 12, Paul-who all obeyed—and everything changed
- and He does it with us—calls us to be vital channels of God's Spirit, taking our giftedness to penetrate this world, proclaim the gospel, and live for Him

Our only part is to decide how to respond—since there is plenty to make them go away

A-we can ignore--figure we have had too much caffeine again

B-we can return our attention back to the sheep

C-we can run from it—like Jonah—and end up in the belly of a fish

D-we can argue with God—like Moses

- after all, the odds are stacked against him-read vs. 11
- Moses verbalizes what most of us think when we sense God calling
- he has distrusted himself for so long—convinced himself that he is damaged goods
- he is hesitant to step out—undertake anything more significant, formidable than the care of sheep

- ultimately-the conversation will turn out to be one long wrangle—each divine moment met with objection after objection
- Moses is argumentative, dilatory, indecisive, dragging his feet
- it's difficult to imagine a more unlikely candidate for an Immanuel moment

E-or we can believe God and surrender our lives and say *like Isaiah*—HERE AM I!

- *believing that it's not what we lose but what we gain*
  - if Moses was paying attention—
- 1- he would see that God was giving him a fresh start
  - 2- inviting him to dream a dream of departure, a dream beyond brick quotas, beyond exploitation and fear
  - 3- he would see himself standing before Egypt in all of its glory
    - its temples, its aggressive armies, its stable of gods and goddesses and declare them weak and puny
  - 4- he would point out that its most conspicuous monuments—its pyramids—are nothing more than glorified tombs in a culture of death
  - 5- he would see that the same fire that ignited the bush will reduce Egypt's arrogance to ash
    - for only God is mighty, invincible, eternal—who was, is, and will be
  - 6- he would begin to see hope for the first time
    - that God is taking his former passion and sense of justice and will now use it for His glory
    - He is liberating Moses from a mundane and rather domestic existence to become a man of action, an instrument in the hand of God
  - 7- he would see that he has nothing to fear-read vs. 12a

IMMANUEL--"I WILL CERTAINLY BE WITH YOU" (vs. 12a)

- near, next to, alongside, closer to us than our thoughts

## CONCLUSION

What burning bush might be out there in your life?

- something God is using to get your attention?

What might He be calling you to?

- are you listening?
- are you running away?
- let's take a moment to speak to Him