

Devotions for Friday, May 8, 2020

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Our God Hears

From the Daily Lectionary: *1Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."*

Exodus 3:1-12

Pastor and writer Walter Wangerin, Jr. has written about the *Four Acts of Prayer*. Act one is , "we talk". Act two is "God listens". To pray is an act of faith, trusting that God will hear us and ultimately answer ("God talks" is the third act of prayer from Wangerin).

Behind the words of verse 7 above, "*I have observed the misery of my people ... I have heard their cry*" are the untold prayers of many speaking to God out of their suffering in Egypt. Each prayer an act of faith. Who can count the similar pleas for mercy and deliverance being uttered to God in our time. Prayers voiced from around the world. Facing a pathogen we cannot see, but one we know we might easily catch. Worries about the health of those we love, worries about our economic lives, worried for both our present and our future, we pray for deliverance.

What God did with Moses in the wilderness of Mt. Horeb is one of those experiences we know from the past that can strengthen our hope in the present. God heard the prayers of the Hebrew slaves, God acted and chose Moses as God's agent in response. And when Moses objected to the impossibility of the task, God promised a sign.

It is important for us to pay attention to the sign God offers. The sign will only be seen when the deed is done. *This shall be a sign for you ... you shall worship God on this mountain.*" God's offered sign will be observed only in retrospect. When the impossible has been made possible, when the threat against us has been overcome, when the crisis in which we find ourselves has passed, then looking back we will be able to say, "God delivered us."

Between the promise of a sign and its deliverance, Moses did not sit around fantasizing about a miraculous quick fix. He did not make up scenarios in which Pharaoh would easily give in to his demands. Moses had to step out and walk into a dangerous place, trusting that God keeps His promises. The slaves in Egypt had to listen to Moses and trust that God would set them free. Every act by every player in this story is an act of faith. The sign of God's trustworthiness is still to come, not yet visible.

We too, in all of life are called to live with that same trust in God, who keeps promises. God hears our prayers during this time of pandemic. God cares about the suffering of those afflicted with COVID-19. God cares about the economic upheaval that threatens the basic needs of so many around the world. God listens and will see us through. How we walk that road will be telling. Wangerin's fourth act of prayer is "we listen". Will we listen? We we take those individual acts of faith that enable us collectively to respond to God's caring for us and neighbor?

One day we will be past this pandemic. We will mourn those whose lives were lost. We will struggle to pick up the economic fragments of our lives as we rebuild our communities. But we will gather on our own Mt. Horeb, and there we will worship the LORD, giving thanks for our deliverance. Looking back on these days we will see God's providence in the steps we have taken together, with each other, as members of a community, giving thanks for what God has done for us, through us and with us.