

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Things would have gone very differently in our Old Testament reading if Moses had an iPhone. You see, He would have been out, tending the flock and all of a sudden his phone would ring- Moses keeps his phone on vibrate- he'd pull it out of his pocket and see who was calling- Yahweh- and instead of picking it up he would think to himself, I don't really think I've got time for this right now...we'll just let God leave a message and I'll call him back later. Besides, the conversations are usually awkward and confusing anyway. And that would have been it- Moses probably would never have called back- things are simpler when you just let God leave a message.

But, lucky for us, God has other means of communication and in this case, he takes a bizarre image of a bush, burning and yet not consumed- human catnip- who is not going to go over and check out a random burning bush in the middle of a world that is otherwise ordinary, otherwise without surprise, just another day. Moses certainly takes the bait, and he might regret that decision, because he's not destined to spend his time in the fields with the flock, there is much more work for him to do.

A life in the fields is simple- you have a job to do- keep the flock safe, it's not complicated. It's not filled with difficult relationships with people or a God that asks more than you are willing to give- sure, there are predators in the field, and you must be careful, but these predators are nothing compared with other enemies of the world, a wolf may look like a lamb compared to how the world wants to devour us, heart and soul. So yes, Moses was minding the flock, but he just couldn't stay away from this random miracle- he walks closer and God knows then, that he's got him just where he wants him.

This interaction between God and Moses is fascinating to me, and I've changed my mind about Moses- I used to think he was just being a coward, making excuses about how he could never be the one that God needed him to be- a false humility to get out of an impossibly difficult task. I kind of thought Moses was a bit of a whiner. But, I think I'm changing my mind a little about Moses' hesitancy. He says to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And really Moses is right, if you look at his resume, he's not really your top choice- mediocre references and a speech impediment- Moses is not the cream of the crop. I look at this text, see Moses making his excuses and realize that he is trying to do what a lot of us do, myself included- say No to God. And in this broken world we're living in, I desperately want to say no, to get angry at God for not making things more fair, more righteous, more transformative. After all, isn't that what we all signed up for?

I'm jealous of Moses- I too would walk closer to something like that, something out of place, bizarre and holy at the same time. I get angry at God sometimes because I too want to see something concrete, a curious miracle in the middle of this world where children starve on mountains in Iraq, where unarmed boys are shot in the streets because of the color of their skin, a place where girls are stolen and violated to prove a point, a world where nothing seems sacred- not life, not anything.

Not only do I want to see something Holy, I want to say what Moses said- No, God- look-I can't do this, I can't be who you want me to be and do what you ask, because really it's all just too much-there is too much suffering in this world- but please, can I just take off my shoes and stand here on holy ground for a few minutes? Please, because the world feel so desecrated by destructive hate and ignorant righteousness.

To be able to just to stand still in the presence of God- that right there is miraculous. So where is our burning bush, where is our extraordinary in the middle of ordinary despair, ordinary hate, ordinary sadness? I don't know about you, but I hunger for something sacred-I too, would walk right toward that burning bush if it meant a few moments with God. The author, Ann Weems, grieving the death of her son, wrote a collection of Psalms, named Psalms of Lament. In it, she too craves God's action, craves a God who intercedes in a more literal fashion- she writes:

Where is your righteous anger? Where is your powerful hand? Why are your enemies allowed to desecrate your creation and slaughter your children? O God of Mercy, I am on my knees! I beg you to bring peace out of this chaos

Divide the Red Sea once more and save your people. Come from your heaven and scoop up the little ones and hold them against the terrors of this world.

Like the author, there are times we all cry out for God to do more. So, I've changed my mind about Moses- he is not a coward, he in fact has every right to ask God questions, to try and get out of a responsibility that may not only be ridiculously difficult, but may get him killed in the process. And he is grieving his own life, because he knows that after this, things will never be the same.

So, there you have it-Biblical proof that it is sometimes natural to want say no to God, to make an excuse, to give God a little rational insight-because God is many things, but rational is not one of them.

And here, in this text from Exodus- the rational and the irrational are consumed together- God, burning with desire for justice and freedom of God's people, and Moses- curious, but doubtful that he has what it takes to get the job done. How Moses must have wished for God to say, "You know what, now that you mention it-you're right, you're probably not the best choice-forget what you saw here, I'll go on and find someone a little more exceptional."

No, instead God gives Moses one more thing beyond the glowing spectacle of the burning bush, God gives the name Yahweh- I am who I am-which may sound somewhat like a Dr. Seuss narrative, but is a pointing toward God's insistence that Moses will not be in this alone- that God is giving him a name, and I don't think it's just for Moses to tell others, but God is telling Moses specifically- I am who I am, so that you can be who you need to be for my people. You are not alone in this, I am not just a kitschy miracle in the woods, I AM the God who will be with you, be present with you as you work to bring freedom and justice to the world. The burning bush is not the point, it was just an advertisement for what lies ahead.

Jesus, too in the Gospel text, is trying to tell Peter that his worldly existence is also, not the point-not the end all be all of this whole affair. Just as Moses can't see beyond the burning bush, Peter can't see beyond Jesus' earthly ministry and humanity. Peter, like Moses says No to God, more specifically he says "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." And, this time, Jesus isn't as sweet as God is to Moses. No reassurance, just rebuttal- "Get behind me Satan"- He might as well have slapped Peter in the face- Can't you imagine Peter, shrinking down, wondering what he said that could have possibly made Jesus so upset.

But Jesus, per usual, isn't done being harsh- he goes on, "those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." There God goes again, merging the impossible with the possible, losing one thing to gain another. It's not so much confusing as it is frustrating. We know what God wants for the most part, we just have a hard time merging that with what we want-human nature and God's providence are often in conflict, vying for our attention.

Humanity and divinity have always been strange bedfellows. In fact, every year on August 6th we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration, the moment on the mountaintop when Christ is glorified to his pure divine form-right in front of the disciples, Peter, James and John. The transfiguration is a moment when Christ's Divinity and Humanity unite in radiant form. And it so happens that the Feast Day, when we celebrate this miraculous moment falls on the same day as the anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima.

Two transformative events in our history, one by glory and one by destruction. One survivor of the Bombing of Hiroshima, at the time 21 year old *Eiko Taoka* remembers this as she was standing inside a bus: "I had been holding my son in my arms, the young woman in front of me said, 'I will be getting off here. Please take this seat.' We were just changing places when there was a strange smell and sound. It suddenly became dark and before I knew it, I had jumped outside.... I held [my son] firmly and looked down on him. He had been standing by the window and I think fragments of glass had pierced his head. His face was a mess because of the blood flowing from his head. But he looked at my face and smiled. His smile has remained glued in my memory. He did not comprehend what had happened."

One small moment in the middle of a great turn in history when we learned what power we had assimilated, we had indeed that day, transfigured our humanity into something that it had never been before, and something was done that could never be undone. Our human transfiguration on that day, remembered this year on the same day as Christ's transfiguration is striking, in that we did not understand either events- we didn't understand our own power for destruction just as the disciples didn't understand God's own power for transformation and salvation.

Both events were blinding-one in the human need for control and the other for God's desire to show us that all of this world, every bitter, dirty, gorgeous, humiliating piece of this world belongs to God – I am who I am- even though you are who you are- God, through the transfiguration of Christ, said yes to a us, a people who are stubbornly addicted to using whatever means necessary to say No- be it through words or violence.

My prayer is that we may be like that little boy in Hiroshima, that even in the middle of chaos and destruction, we can look up to our beloved and smile- not knowing anything, yet understanding everything because of God's love. This is not going to be easy, and if you want to say No like Moses and Peter, then trust me-I don't blame you- it seems an impossible task, loving each other, doing God's will to bring justice and love to a world that would rather just destroy everything in sight, despite the consequences. Saying No, truly make sense. And yet, the Moses story does not end in that dusty field with a divine magic trick,-he tries his best to get out of it- but, we know how his story goes- the story of freedom is not always beautiful, not always easy, but it is one that must be told. Let us look for miracles despite the world's cynicism. They may not look like bushes burning in the wilderness, they may simply look like people who, despite the urge to say no, roll up their sleeves and accept the incredible task of saying yes to God. Amen.