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Give What You Have

“Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to You?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ ‘A staff,’ he replied. The Lord said, ‘Throw it on the ground.’” (Exodus 4:1-3)

Changing one’s path or even routine is not always an easy task. We are creatures of habit and easily get stuck in the well known, comfortable and predictable ruts of life. From the time we get up in the morning, we have our routines to ensure we get out of the door on time. Some head to the shower the moment their feet touch the floor while others head to the kitchen to get coffee ready and make breakfast. Once out the door, the routines continue as to which road we take to work and which radio stations we listen to on the way in.

I doubt that Moses was any different. Forty years in the wilderness of tending sheep had more than likely given him his fair share of routines. The places he led the flock to for grazing and where he stopped to rest were more than likely all a part of a well known routine. Scripture records,

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1).

How many times had he traveled this familiar route? What he saw on this particular day would not have been that different either.

“... Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up’” (Exodus 3:2-3).

Burning bushes in the desert were not out of the routine of the day. Burning bushes that do not burn up—that is a different story. Moses broke out of his routine and went over

to check out this strange bush. From that point on, the old routines would never be the same again. As Moses came close to the bush, God spoke:

“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land . . . and now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So, now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:7-10).

Then the well known excuses begin to fly:

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11).

“Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” (Exodus 3:13).

“What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” (Exodus 4:1).

“O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

When I study that litany of excuses, I see a reoccurring theme: “I don’t have what it takes – I do not have the credentials to appear before Pharaoh – I don’t have any proof that you sent me or asked me to do this – I do not have the ability to speak – Send someone else.”

God listens to him for a while and then he asks, “*What is that in your hand?*” (*Exodus 4:2*). Moses responds, “*A staff.*” I can remember as a sixth-grader always being fascinated by what followed. God tells Moses to throw it down on the ground, where it became a snake. God says, “Pick it up, by the tail.” What is there not to like about this story as a sixth-grader? As the years rolled by, however, what followed this became even more fascinating to me. When all the excuses have been thrown out and Moses is willing to go to Pharaoh, consider this one last verse:

“So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand (Exodus 4:20).

“He took the staff of God.” The staff of Moses has become the staff of God. God owns it. That one small verse says volumes to me about the way God engages us for His service. He calls us to serve Him even as we offer every excuse in the book. “I don’t have the ability.” “I don’t have the credentials.” “I don’t have what it takes.” God in response says, “Then give me what you have.” For Moses, it was a stick.

For Nellie, it was stamps. Years ago, after suffering a debilitating stroke, Nellie spent hours cutting out stamps to redeem them for mission work around the world. Not a glamorous job, but how many untold people benefited from her selfless work?

For Sarah, it was her typewriter. Not the Sarah of the Old Testament. (I don’t remember there being a typewriter in her tent). Sarah of Cabot, Pennsylvania, had a typewriter. Sarah taught Latin in high school before retiring. As her body gave way, making it virtually impossible to carry out any meaningful activity, she became depressed. Then the

opportunity arose for her to use the typewriter to record her reflections on the history of the local area. Her articles would be printed in church newsletters and in the local paper.

People like Moses and Nellie and Sarah have a few things in common. They know what it is like to be in exile, cut off from life as they knew it. They also know what it is like when God comes along and says, “Give me what you have.” Just as Moses’ staff became God’s, so Nellie’s stamps became God’s stamps, and Sarah’s typewriter became God’s typewriter.

When it comes to serving God, He asks us to deal with the talents He has given each of us. There is not one person who is not in some way talented and gifted by God. I see that everything we have and everything we are is involved in the talents that God entrusts to our care. This would include every one of our possessions, our time, each minute of it, and each relationship we enjoy in life. This would also include our jobs and our hobbies. The Good News about Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on our behalf is included in this as well.

When you step back and look at it, everything in our life is a trust from God that He has placed into our care. There is coming a day, however, when we must give an account of how we have used those talents for the sake of the kingdom. This is illustrated in the parable Jesus told in Matthew 25: 24ff. In this parable, a man going away on a journey entrusts his property into the care of his servants. One receives five *talents*, which is worth over \$50,000 dollars in today’s economy. Another receives two *talents*, worth \$20,000 dollars, and the other receives one *talent*. While just one *talent*, still it was no small trust as it represents \$10,000 dollars. The owner expected them to invest these *talents* and do something with them. It was understood that when he returned, he would expect an accounting of what they had done with this great trust.

The first two invested and doubled what they had been given. The third buried it. He

was afraid to take a risk and so he played it safe. He was not unethical, just very cautious and wanting to take no chances. The owner applauded the efforts and gain of the first two. The owner was, however, quite upset with the third. He expected more. A closer look at the parable reveals that the master does not reward success as much as he acknowledges and rewards faithfulness. “Well done, good and faithful servant!” He had entrusted them with certain *talents* with the expectation that they would use them and invest them. The one who is found unfaithful is the one who, out

of fear of failure and fear of how his master would respond, plays it safe.

God hears the cries of his people today as He did in the time of Moses. He is calling people like you and me to respond to them on His behalf. He is not looking for us to offer excuses or to play it safe and hold back. He is asking us to offer Him what we have.

Prayer: Father, I offer you what I have. No excuses. What you have given me, I offer it all back to you. Use it to bring relief and comfort to those who cry out to you. I ask this in Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Challenge: A stick. A typewriter. Some stamps. What is it for you? What do you have that can be used by God to accomplish great things on behalf of His hurting and oppressed people?

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25

From the Book of Concord: “Therefore, let us learn the First Commandment well, so that we see that God will tolerate no presumption or trust in anything else; he makes no greater demand on us than a heartfelt trust in him for every good thing, so that we walk straight ahead on the right path, using all of God’s gifts exactly as a shoemaker uses a needle, awl, and thread for his work and afterward puts them aside, or as a traveler makes use of an inn, food, and lodging, but only for his physical needs. Let each person do the same in his or her walk of life according to God’s order, allowing none of these things to be a lord or an idol” (The Large Catechism, The First Commandment, p. 392.47).