

Well, here we are at the end of August about to enter into September, that month of new beginnings and renewed activity. The days are still warm though the evenings give hints of the autumn soon to follow.

We are in the midst of the last weekend of summer. People are getting in last days of holidays before the kids all start school on Tuesday. It is the Canadian “thing” to value July and August as very precious and to fret about the period of time soon to follow.

People tell us that Canadians are among the most weather focused people in the world. TV channels specializing in weather forecasts and discussions on weather patterns are immensely popular with audiences growing in number each year.

Can you think of one thing we face over which we have less control? The channels and newspapers often disagree about the weather in spite of all the weather satellites and reporting stations around the world. Still we sit and watch the weather, as if it somehow is the key to all we do in our lives.

I grew up on a grain farm in southern Manitoba. I remember only too well the anxious looking to the horizons for cloud formations which might mean the destruction of the crop – too little rain, too much rain; too much wind, the probability of hail. When our cows rushed into the barnyard on a seemingly beautiful day, we knew there was a storm brewing. The cows were more accurate than the local radio station.

The bottom line has always been the same – we have to be prepared to face whatever the weather might be and still get on with the key activities in our life. The uncertainty of the weather must not control our lives. We need to be resilient and approach whatever is before us with the certainty of being able to overcome most of what faces us day by day.

This morning’s reading continues the story of the call of Moses to a leadership roll in the exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt and their journey into the freedom of a new land. You recall how last week we read of Moses fleeing Egypt after killing a soldier who was excessively brutal to a Hebrew slave. He went into exile with the people of Midian. He had married and was working with his father-in-law Jethro, who was a sheep herd owner and also the priest to his people in their worship life.

Moses had become content with his life away from the busyness of Egypt. I am sure he wondered how his mother was doing as well as his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron. However, life was good and peaceful for Moses. Naturally, he assumed it would be thus for the rest of his life.

However, he had forgotten that the God of Israel may have other plans for him. One day, according to the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, Moses was herding his sheep and noticed in the distance a bush on fire. Moving closer, he noted that the bush was on fire but not consumed by it.

Intrigued, Moses came closer and then was suddenly struck with the thought he was not alone out here in the fields. Suddenly, Moses was sure God was calling out to him. The voice said “Moses, Moses!” Moses, intrigued and not wanting to just run off, replied “Here am I.”

It is interesting that God starts the conversation by reminding Moses that he is in the presence of the Creator God and should shown more respect by taking off his shoes. Then he tells Moses who he is – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now Moses is intrigued and is now afraid to look up at all.

God then speaks to Moses of the suffering God has witnessed in Egypt. His people Israel are enslaved and crying out for help. Moses is only too well aware of all this as he had escaped from Egypt himself only a few years before. God indicates that he is determined to help the Hebrews in their plight; he has heard their cries of anguish and he has every intention to help them.

So far so good Moses must have thought. Finally, God has heard the Hebrews’ cry and plans to do something about it. One might even say it is about time! So, Moses is pleased by what he hears. But why tell all this to me? I am not even in Egypt where the current pharaoh hates me!

Then God drops the news Moses is not prepared to hear. I have chosen you Moses to be my spokesperson and you will persuade the Egyptians to release the Hebrews. You will lead them to the promised land of freedom. Can you not hear Moses’ panic? Not me Lord! Who am I to do this deed? Never mind, says God, I will be with you. When you have led the people out of bondage, and brought them into the desert, bring them to worship me on this very mountain.

If I do go, Moses said, who am I to say to the Hebrews has sent me to them for this purpose? In other words, how do you expect me to convince the Israelites that God has really spoken to me? Moses knew that in his day a name, whether of man, angel or deity, sets forth the character of its bearer. If God’s plan is for Moses to present to the Hebrew elders and to impress them the plan as God’s revelation and not Moses’ own idea, he must be able to give the name of God, a new name that goes with this new revelation of future release from Egypt.

So we have here the mystery of God’s name. What shall I call you; what is your name, asks Moses. Although God’s name is too sacred to be pronounced, we begin to see here from this narrative what kind of a God this was who revealed himself to Moses.

The Interpreter’s Bible indicates the following: God was a mysterious power, in whose presence one took off their shoes and shielded their eyes. He had a dwelling place on the mountain, in fire and nature. He knew all that was happening among men and women. He hated injustice, helped the oppressed to freedom and punished the tyrant. He could endow men with seemingly miraculous powers. He needed the help and cooperation of men to carry out his ends. He knew the heart of man, so as to choose the right man as his

minister or spokesman. He was the God of the fathers, even though perhaps known by them under a different name. He was omnipotent in directing the course of history through men and women and directing the course of nature towards his own end. This citation reads like something similar to our own conception of God does it not?

Then God gives Moses this now famous phrase: I AM WHO I AM. In other words, he alone is and has always been. This uniqueness I AM is the fact, the certainty of history for us to hold onto in life. All you need to know is that I AM, the one who has been here since the beginning of time.

Moses protested God's call to him to lead the exodus. Lord, my speaking ability is very poor. That's all right Moses, your brother Aaron can speak for you in your name. How will I persuade the Egyptians to let my people go? I will give you the signs needed for the job says God. If they do not believe the first signs, they will in time have no course but to believe my later signs.

Moses, confronted by God, found all his protests of no consequence to God who had already chosen Moses for the task. Don't worry too much, for I will be with you throughout your confrontation with the Hebrew leaders. I will be with you in your discussions with pharaoh himself.

God asked Moses to believe in who God is and follow his commands. Remember, it is important to have zeal in what you do. Do not waver. In time the might of my hand will be known throughout Egypt by Egyptians and Israelites alike. They will know that you have me with you and that you will prevail. You will lead my people out of bondage and into a new land.

Here was Moses, scared of the task God had called him to complete, unable to find any excuse that God would buy. I have chosen you Moses and you will prevail as I am beside you. Now, prepare to leave for Egypt that my will may be done. Unless you go, the Hebrews will remain in bondage and servitude in an alien land. This was very tough stuff for Moses to hear. What could he do but respond positively to God in spite of his reservations and his fears for his own personal safety.

The task for Moses was to become filled with the sense of the importance of what God was doing for him and his people. Moses began to face his task with zeal and determination. There was no turning back.

Our next passage of scripture is from the Gospel According to Matthew. Jesus had just announced his determination to go to Jerusalem and face whatever was his destiny. Peter, ever ready to say his mind in his usual strong way, said to Jesus: "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." (Mat. 16, verse 22) Jesus spun around and called Peter Satan and demanded he get behind Jesus. Peter was stunned by this reaction. He only meant to protect Jesus and the group from certain harm in Jerusalem.

Jesus then said “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life will lose it, and whosoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Mat. 16: 24,25)

The message of Jesus to Peter and the disciples was not that different from the message God delivered to Moses. Hanging back or running away will not solve anything. In fact, it will make it worse. Follow my way and my request for your action and participation. Then, you will discover life in all its abundance.

The remainder of Moses life was very difficult, with many bumps and hard decisions. He often felt alone as he made excuses to God for the unfaithfulness of the Hebrews in spite of Moses’ exhortations of needed obedience to God. Somehow, with God’s help Moses had persuaded the pharaoh to release the slaves. By far the more difficult task for Moses lay with working with the Hebrews who had been released from slavery. Moses worked so hard to bring the Hebrews to an understanding of God’s faithfulness. He reminded them that they should be ashamed of their poor, often grudging response to their loving God. Somehow, he had to help them become a people of thanksgiving rather than a people for whom grumbling came so naturally.

Jesus was trying to get the disciples to realize that safety and comfort were not the fruits of what Jesus demanded of them. He promised to always be with them but did not promise an easy life where everyone liked them and responded eagerly to their words.

Moses, we know, moved forward in response to God and to do as he had been commanded. Consider the adventure he would have missed if he politely declined God’s call to service. Peter and the disciples rallied to their destined tasks after the Holy Spirit fell upon them and accomplished so much in an almost impossible location and time.

Response to God is important. Our response to God should be undergirded with zeal and joy. We never know where God’s will lead us, but we can be sure it will be an adventure and far beyond what we perceive we are capable of performing.

God is alive and working with us and within us that we might know God and respond in grateful thanksgiving and praise. The greatest response we can give is to dedicate our life to his service and to the service of our fellow men and women.

Thanks be to God for his never ending zeal, his limitless love and his everlasting steadfastness to us.

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