

*A sermon given on Sunday, August 28, 2011
at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio,
by the Reverend Gary Mitchener*

In the Name of the Unnamable God. Amen.

Because of the Hurricane, Trinity Church Wall Street in New York cancelled all services today. The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is having church. The Greater Morning Star Pentecostal Church in Harlem is having church, but not Trinity Wall Street. Whether that is a wise decision or not, that had to be a difficult CALL on somebody's part.

This morning I invite you to reflect with me on what does it take for US to step up to the plate, take up OUR cross and say "YES" to OUR call, God's call to you and me?

In our lesson from the book of Exodus, Moses is just minding his business tending his flock when God CALLS him: calls him to lead his people out of Egypt. Now the ancient rabbis saw here a play on words, a pun, because the word "Egypt" means a narrow space, a constricted place, a condition of the soul in which we feel trapped, stuck.

Don't we all have times when we feel stuck in Egypt, stuck in a narrow place? Stuck in a job perhaps? Sure, we should be grateful to have ANY job at all these days. But as for the long hours we spend at work, instead of our work overFLOWING from who we really ARE as persons, aren't there times—if we're honest--when we actually feel stuck, as if WE were slaves in Egypt, stuck, too busy just trying to "make a living" to have any time for really living a LIFE.

Or maybe some of us (or someone close to us) feels trapped in a marriage or in a relationship where it seems you have less and less to SAY to each other about what's going on INSIDE, about the things that really make your heart 'SING.'

I sometimes feel stuck in a narrow place, just running round-and-round in the same old circle of not having a clue what I want to BE when I grow up—which would be okay if I were a sophomore in high school, but I'm an old man, for God's sake!

Only YOU know the details of your own stuckness. But we aren't we ALL, in a sense, "slaves in Egypt."

So here's Moses coming up with excuses why saying "yes" to God's CALL to lead his people out of Egypt is NOT what he's ready to do. Finally he says, "But what if I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'uhm...what is his NAME?' What shall I say?"

In other words, how do I sum it all up in a label? How do I put it in a neat little box that I can wrap my mind around, and therefore have some control over?

And God said, "EHYEH ASHER EHYEH"

'I am who I AM,'

'I am who I WILL BE,'

'I am who I'm in the very process of BECOMING.'

How many ink pens have been broken, how much ink spilt, how many volumes of scholarly books have been written trying to explain that one sentence!

What if the only name "large enough" for God were NO name at all? What if the only adequate name for God were not a NOUN--Father, Mother, Higher Power-- nor even an ADJECTIVE--dynamic, fluid, ever-evolving. What if God is a VERB? What if God is BEing ITSELF, BEcoming, ALL that **IS**. What if God is UNNAMEABLE?

And what if this Unnameable God has made a PROMISE to His people (which includes you and me), a promise to lead US out of Egypt, out of NARROWNESS into SPACIOUSNESS? And what if this same Unnameable God promises always to be WITH us: no matter what it takes, through thick and thin, even in the midst of what feels to us as UNCERTAINTY, even in the middle of a hurricane, He will be WITH us—unequivocally, unconditionally WITH us? And what if that promise (which we know in our very bones to be true) is what—even NOW--is leading us out of Egypt, leading us out of narrowness into a SPACIOUS land, a GOOD and BROAD land, indeed the PROMISED land, as it were, "FLOWING with milk and honey."

The word "exodus" means a journey. I want to close with a poem by Mary Oliver entitled "The Journey." For me this poem expresses what that journey looks like in our own individual lives: a journey of stepping up to the plate and saying "YES" to our CALL, our God-given call, which is to become REAL, to become who we ARE with no more pretending.

“The Journey”

One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began,
Though the voices around you
Kept shouting
Their bad advise—
Though the whole house
Began to tremble
And you felt the old tug
At your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
Though the wind pried
With its stiff fingers
At the very foundations,
Though their melancholy
Was terrible.
It was already late
Enough, and a wild night,
And the road full of fallen
Branches and stones.
But little by little,
As you left their voices behind,
The stars began to burn
Through the sheets of clouds,
And there was a new voice
Which you slowly
Recognized as your own,
That kept you company
As you strode deeper and deeper
Into the world, determined to do
The only thing you could do—
Determined to save
The only life you could save.