

Two Questions to Start

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Exodus 3:1-14; Psalm 8

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them.”

There are all sorts of theories postulated as to why so many of us – Americans and citizens of the globe – took ourselves outside in the middle of a work day and with protective glasses or pinhole viewers looked up at the heavens to gaze at the moon and the sun. It was an eclipse, of course. Something that doesn’t happen every day. Once in a blue moon, dare we say. And that may be the biggest reason for why we were out there – just to say we witnessed something that seldom happens ... seldom even within a lifetime. But I’m guessing there’s more to it than that. We human creatures have always been heaven gazers. “Look at the moon,” we say when the harvest orb sits above the horizon appearing twice its size. Or making our way to Siesta Beach and waiting for the sun to slip below the horizon. That happens every day and yet there’s something about us that wants to see it happen. Or a shooting star. Or the appearance of Jupiter or Saturn or Mars. Something about the heavens that draws our gaze.

Maybe it’s the enormity of it. The endless universe which apparently is still expanding. The fact that our little sun is one of 200 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy alone and the Milky Way is only one of between 100 and 200 billion galaxies. That’s a big universe. And maybe it is its vastness that gets us out of our pinhole brains enough to consider what might be behind the enormity. Something that big must have something significant behind it or within it or before it or at the end of it. And it is this

experience of transcendence that quickens what we might call the spirit inside us. It maybe what we mean when we call ourselves spiritual – this quickening inside us when we consider our role in the vastness of the universe. We can understand why the Psalmist asks his question: “When I look at your heavens ... what are human beings that you are mindful of them?” Spirituality is when we ask this question, right? When we try to connect the dots in the sky with this dot on the earth.

What are human beings that you are mindful of them?

It’s the first question that Moses has for God when he has his spiritual, transcendent moment. Moses isn’t looking into the light of the sky, he is looking at the light of this bush that doesn’t seem to want to stop burning. Talk about something that doesn’t happen very often. And in his gaze he hears something. He hears the voice of the universe speaking to him. To him. And the voice comes with a call. Somehow the voice of the ages calls him. Names him and calls him and tells him that he is the one who needs to save his people. Deliver the Israelites from the bondage of slavery. Moses has been trying to mind his own business but the voice tells him that there is other business to mind. And Moses asks the psalmist’s question: Who am I? In the vastness of the universe and in the enormity of this call – who am I? What business do I have in confronting Pharaoh and rescuing God’s people? Good question.

It’s like the man that went to the psychiatrist complaining of an inferiority complex. So the psychiatrist decided to run a few tests on the man. And a couple weeks later that man came back and the psychiatrist said to him, “I’ve got some good news and some bad news. The good news is that the test results came back negative. No signs of anything having to do with an inferiority complex. That’s the good news. The bad news is you really are inferior.”

Who am I? Moses asks. Because maybe I really am inferior. Maybe the task is too big and I am too small.

And so in response, do you know what God doesn’t say? God doesn’t say, “Well I checked your SAT scores and you’re in the 94th percentile.” Or “I was very impressed with your resume.” Or “I hacked into your bank account and see you have quite a balance.” God doesn’t say these things. This is not who Moses is. No, the only answer God has for Moses when he asks, “Who am I?” is – “I will be with you.” You are who you are because I am with you. You are who you are because I breathed life into you. You are who you are because I knit you together in your mother’s womb. You are who you are because I made you a little lower than

“...the truth is you’re a child of God and God’s got some work to do. And the promise is the I AM is with you.”

the angels. You are who you are because you are connected to the stars and the fire that burns inside you. “Who am I?” Moses asks. And God says, “I will be with you.”

“OK,” says Moses after asking his first question, “OK, well then who are you?” And God says, “I am who I am.” God says, “I am who I am because that is as much as you are going to understand. I am who I am because the rest is mystery and holiness too great for you to take in. I am who I am because the universe with its 200 billion galaxies times each galaxy’s 200 billion stars is not big enough

to contain me. I am who I am because that the rest would be like pouring the cosmos through a pinhole. I am who I am and suffice it to say I am with you and this voice that you are hearing inside your head – that voice that you wonder is coming somewhere from beyond the stars – well best you do something about it – because this is what makes puts you close to the rank of the angels. When you hear the voice from the stars or the voice from the fire or the voice in your dream or the voice in your conscience best you ask, “Who am I?” because I’ll tell you – I am with you. And best you ask, Well, who are you? And I’ll say I am who I am – and let’s get on with it. Let’s get on with the purposes of the universe. Oh I get it, sayeth the Lord, there’s a lot you don’t know, there’s a lot that is uncertain,

there’s a lot that is frightening before you – but I am with you and best you get going.

In Stephen Ambrose’s wonderful chronicle, *Undaunted Courage*, he writes of the moment when Meriwether Lewis and his companions on the Lewis and Clark expedition reach the point beyond which no white man has ever gone. They are on the Missouri river just beyond Fort Mandan and they are entering into completely uncharted territory. Ambrose describes it this way:

“Lewis was now stepping into the unknown ... into the heart of darkness. Deserts, mountains,

