

“I’ve Heard Their Cries”
Exodus 3:4-12

⁴When the Lord saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” Moses said, “I’m here.”

⁵Then the Lord said, “Don’t come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground.” ⁶He continued, “I am the God of your father, Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God, and Jacob’s God.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, “I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. ⁸I’ve come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that’s full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. ⁹Now the Israelites’ cries of injustice have reached me. I’ve seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them. ¹⁰So get going. I’m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹²God said, “I’ll be with you. And this will show you that I’m the one who sent you. After you bring the people out of Egypt, you will come back here and worship God on this mountain.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Maybe one of the greatest heroes we have ever known in our nation is Harriet Tubman. Tubman rescued over 70 enslaved people to freedom, going back again and again and again to risk her own life and freedom to save others. During the Civil War, she was a Scout and a Spy for the Union Army. And then, after the war, became deeply involved in the work of women's suffrage, proclaiming that all women should have the right to vote and have a voice. She truly lived an incredible life. And what's most incredible of all, is that Tubman was born not free, but an enslaved woman in Maryland. In her youth, Tubman developed both a deep longing for justice, and a deep faith in God. It was in 1849, after marrying a free black man named John Tubman, that Harriet heard God calling her to freedom. She knew God heard her prayers, and she also hear God speaking back, calling her to know freedom and life. She writes:

"When I think of all the groans and tears and prayers I've heard on plantations, and remember that God is a prayer-hearing God, I feel that [God's] time is drawing near. [God] gave me my strength, and [God] set the North Star in the heavens; [God] meant I should be free."¹

This was not the first time God heard the voices of those who are enslaved, mistreated, oppressed, and looked down upon. Throughout scripture, and human history, it seems this is who God pays the closest attention to of all. In Genesis, God appears twice to Hagar, an enslaved woman from Egypt, when her child Ishamel's life is in danger. The first time Hagar calls God, the God Who Sees Me. The second time, God directly tells her that the Lord hears the voices of her and her son calling out for help, life, and freedom.

¹ Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2004), 136.

Here in Exodus 3, God tells Moses,

“I’ve seen my people oppressed. I’ve heard their cries of injustice. I know their pain.”

These people, forgotten by the world, often whittled down to a number or statistic, are never ever forgotten by God. It seems God notices and sees and lifts up the enslaved, the poor, the alien, the marginalized most of all. From the widow of Zarepath that Elijah visits to the Ethiopian eunuch who meets with Philip, to Onesimus, an enslaved man of great faith in Philemon, God time and again hears, notices, loves, calls, and lifts up the lives, voices, and hearts of those the world mistreats, abandons, oppresses, and looks down upon.

And as we heard from the story of Harriet Tubman, this is not just how God acted millennia ago. Our God is a God of today. Our God does not say to Moses my name is “I was.” God says to Moses, my name is “I AM.” God continues to listen and hear and love and work for justice and life and freedom today.

So how do we as Christians respond?

One option is we can ignore this passage. We can act as if God hears only the voices of the powerful and wealthy and privileged. The church has done that for a very long time, and knows how to hear those voices well, and serve those voices that fit our wants and needs.

We can pretend that those voices crying out for help and justice are not there. The church has also done that well for a long time.

Or we can say we believe in a God who hears every voice. Even the uncomfortable ones. Even the ones crying out in pain. Maybe especially those voices. That God hears those and wants justice and life and freedom, even if that means we must change as people and as systems and the ways we've acted and loved and cared. And we can say, we are going to join with God. To hear those voices long silence. To notice those on the margins. And to love and serve and sacrifice as Christ has loved us.

Today is a day of celebration. It is Juneteenth. It is the day that the end of slavery was finally proclaimed to the last part of the slave states, Galveston, Texas. But we know that there is still much more work to do. We know there are still inequalities in our land. There is still too much violence. There are still neighbors working from sunup to sundown without a fair wage. We know there are still neighbors without safe housing. We know that our there are still children not being supported in schools. We know there are new neighbors coming from other lands, trying to learn a new language while raising families and doing the impossible. And we know that God hears them all, loves them, and is calling us to do the same. Amen.