

Some would call him a misfit. He came from two entirely different worlds; and caught between them, he lived as if his feet never really touched the ground, giving him the needed traction to fully engage either world. Fleeing from both worlds, he met a woman, fell in love and settled in to begin putting down roots and becoming a part of a real family. And then, wouldn't you know it? It all seemed ready to fly apart. An "opportunity" of a new job opened up, threatening to tear him from home for the rest of his life. And yet, there it was: One called "God," expecting him to pull up his newly spreading roots and plunge right in the middle of the two worlds that had torn at him his whole life—his birth mother's world, desperate with want and need, and his adoptive mother's world, living off the blood and tears of those it dominated.

His name is *moshe* ("one who draws out" of water) or Mose ("child, son," "one who is born"). Placed alone in the water as a tiny three-month-old and drawn out of the water, claimed and raised by Pharaoh's daughter, he was nourished with his slave mother's milk and stories as a small child, as he grew up in the splendor of the palace of her oppressor. Finally forced to flee into the mountains to escape the hostility of both of his mothers' people, you get something of a feel for the tormented life he had endured when it comes time for him to give a name to his newborn son. "Call him 'Alien,' he told the midwife, "for I have lived in an alien land."

Usually, we read the story of Exodus 3, focusing on the burning bush and its identification of God as the great "I Am." We hardly notice Moses' vigorous protests—and rightfully so. The focus of the passage is upon the unfathomable mystery and promise of the God who comes in delivering love. Focusing today upon Moses and his difficulty suiting up for the task at hand, however, might just help those of us who in all honesty find ourselves more like Moses, struggling with the enormity of the needs that confront us, than with the Marvel comic book super hero, who leaps tall buildings in a single bounce.

Not once, not twice, not thrice, but five times, Moses protests to God the challenge is too much. Beginning with "who am I" that you should call me to such a task, he moves on to "who are you" that you would do such a thing? Moses' self doubt shakes down to a basic "do you have any idea of just how inadequate I am? Do you have any idea of what a mess I left behind when I fled both the hostility of the Egyptians and the Hebrews? Do you have any idea of Pharaoh's massive power? Don't you know how poor my speech is? How inadequate I am for the job?"

Confronted with the needs of our day, we are gripped by fear. Is Moses' reaction not our experience as well? Are we not gripped with fears and inadequacies before the issues of our day? Today's "As you go" paragraph in our Order of Service reflects an article Victoria Medaglia called to my attention this week. Moving from its shocking title, "There Are More Slaves Today Than at Any Time in Human History," the article documents the work of Harvard University's Benjamin Skinner, who took leave of academia to travel around the world to get a close-up look at some of the estimated 27,000 million people living in slavery today. Informed by his own experience, Skinner moves beyond a litany of numbers to speak of individual lives—the 10-year-old girl he was offered in Port au Prince, Haiti, a short 3 hour flight from home, for \$50; a young woman with Down syndrome and slashes on her arms where she had tried to commit suicide, who was offered to him in Bucharest Romania, in exchange for a used car; the man working in a quarry in Northern India, who represented the third generation of his family working off a 62 cent debt taken out years previously by his grandfather; and the single individual who is trafficked into the U.S. every 30 minutes and the 14,000-17,000 a year to work in the sex trade, agricultural fields and sweat shops for no pay beyond subsistence.

The numbers and the depth of the suffering are such that here and in response to so many other equally pressing issues we are prone to cover our eyes and ears. Skinner warns that the seemingly compassionate response of buying up the slaves in order to release them is not the way to go. "Do not buy a human life," he was warned. Not even for release. "If you were to buy all 300,000 child slaves in Haiti [today], next year, you'd have 600,000" [www.alternet.org/story/142171]. He goes on to relate the seemingly compassionate effort of churches to raise money for the release of slaves in Sudan—an effort that saw \$3 million being innocently placed in the hands of rebels resisting the ongoing peace process in that country.

Perhaps like me, you grew up in a church that championed missions. Nothing shaped my faith and my life any more than my church's call to compassionate concern for people all over the world. Although my commitment to evangelizing people from other religions has changed over the years, my appreciation for the strong emphasis on a compassionate, loving God who called me to focus my own life in loving concern and action has only grown stronger with the passing of time. Although I give a wide berth on many issues over which the Christian faith wrestles, one foundational commitment on which I cannot give ground is the affirmation that God's love in Christ calls us to express that love in the care of the least of God's children.

And yet, I have to admit that sometimes my heart grows weary. Sometimes I wonder how much we are called upon to care, to hurt, to do, especially when so many times our best efforts seem to make no headway at all.

Some years ago, Sister Mary Catherine, a classmate of Larry's in the doctoral program at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, introduced me to a poem that spoke volumes at the time, phrases of which have stayed with me through the years. Thanks to the wonders of the internet, I recently reclaimed it in whole. Listen to the words of French poet, pastor and social activist Michael Quoist, and see if your experience does not resonate with his as well.

Lord, why did you tell me to love all people?

I have tried, but I come back to you frightened.

Lord, I was so peaceful at home, I was so comfortably settled.

I was sheltered from the wind and rain; I would have stayed unsullied in my ivory tower.

But, Lord you have discovered a breach in my defenses.

You have forced me to open the door of my heart.

The first came in, Lord. There was, after all, a bit of space in my heart.

I welcomed them. I would have cared for them as my very own little lambs, my flock.

You would have been pleased, Lord; I would have served and honored you in a proper and respectable way.

Until then, it was sensible.

But the next ones, Lord, the others – I had not seen them, they were hidden behind the first ones.

There were more of them. They were wretched; they overpowered me without warning.

We had to crowd in; I had to find room for them in my heart.

Now they have come from all over in successive ways, pushing one another, jostling one another.

They have come from all over town, from all parts of the country, of the world; they are numberless, inexhaustible.

They don't come alone any longer but in groups, bound to one another.

They come bending under heavy loads, loads of injustice, of resentment and hate, of suffering and sin.

They drag the world behind them, with everything rusted, twisted, badly adjusted.

Lord, they hurt me! They are in the way, they are all over me.

They are too hungry; they are consuming me!

I can't do anything any more; as they come, they push the door of my heart, and the door opens wider.

Ah, Lord! My door is wide open!

I can't stand it anymore! It's too much! It's no kind of life!

What about my job? My family? My peace? My liberty? And me?

Ah, Lord, I have lost everything; I don't belong to myself any longer;

There's no room for me at home.

And then in his prayer, Quoist hears God respond with these words:

Don't worry, God says, you have gained all.

While others came into your heart,

I, your God, I slipped in among them.

[Quoist, Prayers, 1963]

Like Moses, we feel overwhelmed by the needs we encounter coming from so many directions in our world, and the obstacles and dangers that may beset us in seeking to address them are real. As with Moses, the response of the one who calls us is not an easy reassurance that we have all the personal gifts, all the skills, all the answers already in our possession. As with Moses, we are given the reassurance "I will go with you," and like him, only as we pick up our walking stick and get to work do we begin to discover the resources we need for the job.

There is a Cherokee Legend about an old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside each of us," the old man said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought for a moment and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" to which the old man responded, "The one you feed."

Like Moses, the complexity and difficulties in our efforts to bring deliverance to God's people may seem overwhelming. The question for us, however, is whether we will simply withdraw into our fears and inadequacies and stay home or will we draw upon the strength that God gives for the journey and, in the parting words of Moses' father-in-law, "Go in peace?"