

Exod. 3:1-6

Hearing God's Call

The Rev. Patrick S. Cheng*
Metropolitan Community Church of New Haven
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Good morning! It's great to be back at MCC New Haven today. It's hard to believe that Labor Day is almost here and that summer is almost over. Last night, I saw on the website for the *Yale Daily News* that the class of 2009 started to arrive in New Haven on Friday. As a member of the Yale class of 1990, I'm starting to feel pretty old. And I'm sure that IKEA, my favorite New Haven destination (other than MCC New Haven, of course!), is doing pretty brisk business these days. I guess I'll have to check it out in person later today, and maybe get some Swedish meatballs while I'm at it!

As we turn our attention to the fall and the new school and work year, it seems appropriate that today's scripture passage focuses on hearing God's call for our lives. In that reading, Moses encounters God at the burning bush. Moses is minding his own business, leading the sheep of his father-in-law on Mount Horeb (also known as Mount Sinai), when he comes across the great sight of blazing fire in the midst of a bush. Although the bush is burning, it is not consumed. Moses is obviously curious about this, and turns aside to look at it.

"Moses, Moses," God calls out to him from the bush. "Here I am," Moses responds. God tells Moses to stop and remove the sandals from his feet, for this is holy ground. God reveals Godself to Moses, and Moses hides his face, because he is afraid to look at God.

Fast forward -- in the next chapter of Exodus, God tells Moses that he is to lead the Israelites out of slavery from the land of Egypt. Not only is Moses afraid, but he actually resists. "I am slow of speech and slow of tongue," he tells God. Also, as you may remember, Moses had killed an Egyptian and was a fugitive from the law. But ultimately, Moses -- a fugitive and a person who was slow of speech and tongue -- was the one chosen to deliver his people out of Egypt and to receive the Law on Mount Sinai from God. It's amazing where God can take you when you hear God's call, isn't it?

How does God call out to you in your life? What is your reaction when you encounter God? Do you hide your face, like Moses did? Are you afraid? Do you resist?

People often ask me how I went from being a lawyer to a minister. At the risk of talking too much about myself, I thought it would be appropriate to share a bit of my journey and calling with you this morning.

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Several years ago, I was practicing as a lawyer on Wall Street. I had a good life. I was making great money and doing high-powered work. But deep inside, I hated my job. I dreaded going to work each day -- I felt like it lacked meaning and that I didn't know what I stood for anymore.

One summer, I came across an announcement for an intensive class in Biblical Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University. It was a whole semester of Hebrew crammed into a few weeks during the height of the hot, humid New York City summer. The class met every weeknight, over one hundred blocks north of where Michael and I lived, and it required total dedication.

Now I would venture to guess that, for most of you, the idea of doing a summer intensive class in Biblical Hebrew is not exactly your idea of fun. But, for me, that class was my burning bush. "Patrick, Patrick," the announcement was calling out to me. For some unexplained reason, I was totally and completely drawn to the class, even though I had never taken any formal class in biblical studies before, let alone a class in an ancient biblical language.

I loved the class, and I fell in love with Union. That Hebrew class led to more classes, which eventually led to a degree in theology and my ordination as an MCC minister. Looking back, it seems like everything made all the sense in the world, but in fact things were not easy at all. My partner Michael and I had to make a lot of sacrifices, financially and emotionally. Many of our friends and family thought that I had lost my mind. Even I wondered whether I was doing the right thing. I had my doubts. It was chaotic and scary.

Today, things have come full circle, but with a twist. I am again practicing law during the week, but now as a lawyer for a church denomination. I find my day job challenging and meaningful. However, my job also allows me to pursue my love for theology, preaching, and ministering at night and on weekends. It's not quite on the same scale as receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, but I do feel like I'm bringing my people -- that is, LGBT folk and, in particular, queer Asian people of faith -- out of the wilderness places in their lives.

God's call doesn't have to be expressly religious or spiritual, either. It just happened to take this form for me. I believe that there are as many calls as there are people in this world. Michael's calling, for example, is acting and the theater. For many years after college, Michael worked exclusively in the business world, and was very successful at it. He was a senior executive at his job, and he managed a huge budget and staff. But that wasn't what he loved to do.

A few years ago, Michael decided that he wanted to pursue acting. He took a class in theater at the City University of New York. That was his burning bush. He auditioned for a part in a student production and was cast. One play led to another, and his acting career has since blossomed. He's been in a wide range of productions, from

Shakespeare to the avant garde, and even an independent film. Again, it hasn't been an easy path – there is a lot of rejection and challenges in being an actor in New York City, but I believe Michael's calling is what sustains him.

And, I'm delighted to announce, Michael will be making his directorial debut next weekend with a play that he conceived, cast, and directed. It's called *Stars in My Eyes*, and it's part of the Fashion PlayFest, a new theater festival in Manhattan. The production is based upon the poetry of a gay poet from the 1960s, Edward Field, that celebrates the golden age of Hollywood. Michael has loved this poetry for two decades, and he is now bringing this new creation into the world. It's very exciting.

Beyond our day-to-day jobs and passions, however, I believe that we LGBT people of faith have a special calling in the world. I believe we are called by God to spread our love around – radically, courageously, and promiscuously – and to be sexual healers, mystics, and ministers to the world. In fact, I believe that our sexualities are our very own burning bushes. (OK, pun intended, especially for the lesbians here!)

As queer people of faith, we are called to listen closely to where God is calling us with our sexualities, no matter how scary it might seem. Like Moses, we are called by God to lead our people out of bondage – or maybe into bondage, if that's your thing – and towards freedom and liberation with respect to our bodies and spirits. If we don't speak up about this calling, who will?

Seriously, there are lots of amazing LGBT people in this world who are passionate about the intersections of spirituality and sexuality. Some are involved with the Body Electric School, which offers classes in erotic massage, BDSM, and sacred intimacy, with a particular focus on healing and spirituality. Others are involved with communities such as Easton Mountain in upstate New York, which is a retreat center that is run by a wonderful group of gay men who live and work there as volunteers who are committed to a ministry of hospitality to queer people. Still others, like Dr. Annie Sprinkle, a radical feminist sexologist, have taught workshops to numerous people on sacred sexuality from a variety of spiritual traditions.

There are queer spiritual writers, teachers, artists, sacred intimates, coaches, and practitioners of meditation and tantra, and the list goes on and on. If you don't know much about the world of erotic spirituality, I would encourage you to see this as a potential burning bush for yourself. It might feel a little bit scary or frightening to you at first, but that's exactly how Moses felt when he encountered God in today's reading.

As my faith has deepened, I have become increasingly involved in this amazing world of queer embodied spirituality. I am convinced that this is a calling that we have as queer Christians, as people who profess that God has come to the world in human form. Not only *can* we talk about spirituality and sexuality in the same breath, but we **MUST** talk about the two simultaneously if we truly believe in the Incarnation and that the Word has become flesh.

So how is God calling out to you? What is your burning bush? What excites you, and what scares you? What have you been hiding your face from? Perhaps you've been wanting to join the music ministry or the drum circle. Perhaps you've been thinking about applying for the MCC Lay Ministry Council. Or perhaps you've been wanting to get involved with the church leadership during this transition period. Listen what God is saying to you.

As we move into Labor Day and another cycle of the school and work year, I encourage you to face the fires that are blazing within your body, mind, and soul – and, yes, your sexuality. God is calling out to you from surprising places. How will you respond?

Amen.