

MESSAGE NOTES

God's Questions

What is that in your hand?

Exodus 4:1-17 (NIV)

¹ Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?"

² Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

³ The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground."

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. ⁴ Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. ⁵ "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you."

⁶ Then the Lord said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.

⁷ "Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

⁸ Then the Lord said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. ⁹ But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

¹⁰ Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

¹³ But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else."

¹⁴ Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. ¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. ¹⁷ But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it."

- **God's accompanying presence**

- "I AM" Exodus 3:14
- I AM and I "will be" = God's reply to Moses' objections

- **Moses' Repeated protests and objections: the role of fear and self-doubt in our lives**

"It is no wonder that the narrative that follows shows Moses voicing a series of serious doubts and resistances to the summons, for he has been summoned to do a remarkably dangerous deed. There is, moreover, substantive reason for such resistance, especially in the case of Moses. The call [is] a summons for him to return to the dangerous, conflictual arena of Egypt where his own identity is at risk and where he must frontally challenge the enormous imperial power of the status quo." -Walter Brueggemann

- **Creation and Calling**

- Notice the rhythm of the dialogue, the call-and-response between God and Moses.

"So [it is] with the human world; God does not create human ciphers, a pool of cheap labor to whom jobs can be assigned at will. Each human being called into existence by him exists as a distinct part of a great interlocking web of identities. Each is a unique point in this great net. To be is to be where you are, who you are, and what you are— a person with a certain genetic composition, a certain social status, a certain set of capabilities. From the moment of birth (even from before that) onwards, you will be at each moment that particular bundle of conditioning and possibilities. And to talk about God as your creator means to recognize at each moment that it is his desire for you to be, and to be the person you are. It means he is calling you by your name, at each and every moment, wanting you to be you.

-Rowan Williams, *"A Ray of Darkness: Sermons and Reflections"*

- **Shared calling and community: "He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you."**

- **How are you listening to God's question to you: "What is that in your hand?"**