

Exodus 3:1-15

Psalm 105

Matthew 16:21-28

Fractured

In a sentence

We cannot (re-)construct ourselves, but find wholeness in God's construction of Godself

“Who am I?” asks Moses. Who am I to do what you have asked?

Moses was many things. He had Hebrew roots but was probably raised as something like an Egyptian prince. He was a known murderer who now hides in the hills. He was married to Zipporah, who was neither Hebrew nor Egyptian, and now watched over his father-in-law's flock. It is this multi-fractured Moses who asks, “Who am I?” as counter God's request.

We are all fractured like this, perhaps increasingly so in late modern society.

The fundamental fracture in our lives is natural: the knowledge and experience of death. Death tears at us and through us. If I was a child or a parent, a spouse or a friend, death forces the “Who am I?” question upon us: Who am I? What am I now that she, he is gone?

Alongside this natural fracturing of our identity are myriad social, political and historical ones. At a national level right now, we are wrestling with the re-discovery of what it means to have a colonial history. The question of how to respond to this discovery has driven a wedge between us – between the post-colonial peoples and the indigenes of the land, as well as within both of those communities themselves. If, a couple of generations ago, mainstream Australian society knew what “Australian” meant, that is now under renegotiation, whatever the outcome of the approaching referendum.

The church has experienced a massive fracturing of identity since the 1950s. If once it was the engine of much of what happened in society – or at least partner in that action – the church is now often simply overlooked or perceived to be an obstacle. “Who are we?” is a question hidden within a lot of talk in small congregations and shrinking denominations. We ourselves at MtE have something of this question in our minds as we begin to find what it means to have sold our historic property and now to be sharing this one.

And there are myriad fractures in social and economic experience which are similarly shaking our sense of human identity. The deeply anti-social possibilities of social media come to mind, or the impact of telephones and cars on the integrity of local communities, or the raging debates about race and gender.

That Moses' question is over 3000 years old reminds us that, in fact, the fracturing of identity is scarcely new. The “times” – where we find ourselves – are less the problem than we ourselves. The looking glass is cracked, and its angled shards now fracture the image of God in our own image. But it has always been so.

We are here today, as always, seeking an answer to that irrepressible and urgent question: Who am I? Who are we? We ask this because the answer tells us “what to do”. If I am a parent, I know that I should care for the kids; if I am a consumer, I know that I should buy and consume; if I am a leader, I know that I should lead.

Moses, of course, has a working theory on who he is, something out of the mix of being Hebrew, Egyptian, murderer, fugitive, husband, son-in-law, shepherd, and the rest. Not being dead yet requires such a theory if we are to be at all – if we are to do some next thing. But the encounter with God casts his working self into question. “Who am I to do what you ask, God? How do my many parts *become* that one person?”

Left hanging, this question would be enough to let Moses off the hook. He could, like many of us do, just bob around on a sea of possible identities, never taking one up or living into it – just bobbing, up and down.

But Moses dares to press the matter by asking God, “And who are *you*? Who would I say sent me?”

God has already been identified in the story as “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”. This might be heard as similar to Moses’ own fractured self-identification: I am what I have been – prince, fugitive, shepherd. But now God recasts this identity by giving the divine name: “Yahweh” (“Jehovah” in the old money). The Hebrew here is typically translated as “I am” or “I am who I am” – “Tell them, I Am sent you”. Yet this is too static. “I am” is the old God: I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. “I am” is the God of the fractured past out of which uncertain Moses has arisen, with his “Who am I?”.

But Hebrew grammar – not to say, the very nature of how this God interacts with God’s people – requires that the translation be more open: “I will be who I will be”. This is more than grammatical correctness. The Moses who is constructed as a pastiche of unreconciled human fragments is met by the God who claims to be utterly self-determining. The Hebrew Moses whose Egyptian name was the first fracture in his identity is drawn towards wholeness as that name is spoken now by the undivided God: “Moses, Moses, come and be made whole”.

It is God’s self-determination which overcomes the divisions in Moses, God’s open nature as “I will be what I will be,” which integrates the divided heart.

While Moses is trapped in – or trapped between – the clamour of many identity-voices, one voice addresses him as a whole and draws his many parts together. This is the God not only of the Hebrew Moses but of the Egyptian; not only of the shepherd but of the murderer, not only of who Moses was but of who Moses will be.

And so it is for us. The divided national heart, the unmoored church and congregation, the multiply-intersectioned soul, the dissipated spirit, the unresolved yesterdays that keep us from reconciliation within ourselves and with each other today and tomorrow – these are met with the call to rest in God’s own resolve: “I will be what I will be”

Moses is called to be more than the sum of his parts or, perhaps more evocatively, he is called to be *less* than the sum of his parts. He is no longer to be all things in competition with each other, consuming him in their contrast and conflict. He is called to be one thing – *God’s* “thing”. So now, though he will still burn, he will not be consumed with the work of making himself. Moses is no longer to exhaust himself in the construction of a soul out of pieces which don’t fit together, as if each piece mattered as much as the other. God’s call is to leave this drive aside, and to live. Recalling Jesus’ call to take up the cross – Moses, with each of us, is called to lose his life in order to save it.

With me, God says, you are to be what you will become. Because I will be, says God, so will you be.

My being is the gift of your life. So *live*.
