

“Who do you Think is Calling?”

2 Timothy 1:8-14

Exodus 3:10-14 & 4:1-15

Even when Gloria Gaynor was a child, she wanted to sing. After all, her father played in nightclubs and her brothers sang in a gospel group. Still, as one of the two youngest children in the house, she was always considered too young to go out and sing with everybody else. They didn't know that in her heart of hearts she wanted to sing until she found a gig at a night club in Newark when she was eighteen. It wasn't until she was thirty that she got her first bit of success in 1973.ⁱ Her career was gaining in momentum, her name was becoming better known when in 1978 she tripped and fell backwards on stage during a performance. For a little while, she was paralyzed from the waist down and needed spinal surgery. Her finances took a serious hit and she almost lost her record contract. But then, still wearing a neck brace, Gloria Gaynor recorded, “I Will Survive.” Though, “it took all the strength [she] had not to fall apart,” she certainly survived and she certainly shot to the top of the charts.ⁱⁱ

Caught up in the fame and the success, as so many do, she also got caught up in the world of drugs and alcohol. One day in 1982, she said, “[I] literally felt the Holy Spirit grab me by the collar, stand me on my feet and say, ‘that’s enough.’” She remembered her brothers’ voices singing those gospel songs and she felt that call to re-focus her life. She started recording some gospel music along with her other disco songs. She realized that, with her fame, she was in a position to share what she had learned of God’s love and comfort and grace on a wider stage. She said she realized that her calling was an invitation to play, “to folks outside of Christian circles and it’s just something I have to do. It’s absolutely a calling.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It looks like Gloria Gaynor ended up right where she needed to be doing just what she needed to be doing. Peering into her life from the outside makes it seem so simple and

straightforward, but I would guess that if you sat her down and asked her about it, it seemed like a wild, uncertain storm to her!

Take Moses, we know he had a huge, important calling from God so it can feel...almost inevitable that he would come forward and lead the people out of Egypt. Our passage comes right after Moses fled from Egypt, guilty of a crime, hiding and staying away at all costs. Then, he looked and saw the burning bush. It's a burning bush – how could he not stop and look? God has a job for Moses. Where should you go? The last place on earth you want to be. Who should you go to? A pharaoh who feels spurned by you and a people who may well reject you.

Is it any wonder that Moses – not once, but five times – tells God, “you’ve got the wrong guy”? This is a lot of moxy, right? I mean, who does he think is calling that he should quibble? First, he wants to make sure God knows that the Israelites won't believe that God would talk to Moses. Moses doesn't even know God's name. That excuse does not fly with God.

So, okay. Moses tries the more direct approach. He says straight out that they won't believe me or listen to me. Perhaps this is a real concern. Moses was raised in the palace. He doesn't necessarily understand his people or their struggles. But God offers him not one, but three miracles to show that he is not some lying prophet, not some pretender to truth who is there to deceive them. Who could see a staff become a snake and back and not think this guy is at least worth hearing out? Who could watch a hand go leprous and healthy and not think – ‘wait, what's going on here?’ And let's not get started on the Nile water becoming blood – spoiler alert.

But Moses' endless list of excuses is not at all at an end. Now, surely, God needs to be reminded that Moses is, “slow of speech.” Maybe he has a stutter or some other kind of speech impediment. He's self-conscious when he talks or maybe people assume his different manner of speaking is a curse of some kind? We'll never know, but God does seem to be getting a bit

impatient at this point. Who does he think is calling him? God makes the mouth and tongue; God gives us the power of speech. Can't God, then, call on us to use it? Still, God is reassuring: "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." Really, it's a good calling. God will be with you. What else could you ask for?

It turns out – nothing. Moses can't think of any other real excuses. He just says – please don't let it be me. Think of everything Moses was able to say and do later – the challenges to Pharaoh, the parting of the Red Sea, helping care and provide for the people across the wilderness. He doesn't even have a clue how major this calling will be, but he is scared. Here he is at his most vulnerable and, I think maybe, most relatable to us. How many times have we known what we were supposed to do and we just had a million reasons to say, "no, thank you." Then, at one point, our most honest prayer becomes, "just, please send someone else."

So God is mad. But it's interesting, God isn't the kind of mad that wants to punish Moses or make him feel bad about his doubts. God isn't the kind of mad that says, "forget you! I'll find somebody else who appreciates me!" God says – you have a brother and he can help you. It could have been you on your own, but since you are too afraid, you can go with your brother. He loves you and he's already looking for you to help you out. Who do you think is calling? I will make a way.

And isn't that the good news? Isn't that what we read over and over in the scriptures? Isn't that what we yearn for deep in our hearts when we feel lost or confused or overwhelmed? We can't see how it all fits together, we don't know how our little part fits into the whole, but we know that God calls us all to enter the story of grace and redemption and forgiveness. Like it says in 2 Timothy, we are saved and called with a holy calling. We could stop right there and immediately run into all the reasons we aren't good enough, all the ways that we fall short,

everything that makes somebody else better than us to do the job. But the letter continues that this holy calling isn't about saving us, "according to our works but according to God's own purpose and grace." We can get so stuck on whether or not we're up to the task, that we totally forget about God's power, purpose, and grace. It is God's love and mercy and hope that flow through us in our calling. It is Christ's hands of comfort and care that help us lift one another up. It is the Spirit's leading that brings us forward into paths and landscapes we would never imagine on our own.

When Gloria started singing, she didn't know the gospel was in her future. When Moses agreed to confront pharaoh, he did not have a clue about what was ahead of him. When Paul started out persecuting Christians, do you think he ever imagined being imprisoned for standing alongside them and preaching Christ? So it is with us. We are called by God – not once, but again and again. Sometimes we have a clear view of the road ahead and sometimes we can only see dimly ahead of us. Yet, in our faith we learn that God placed a light of life within each of us that can transform the world around us. We can share that light every day and trust that God is guarding it and nurturing it. Indeed, it is the Spirit dwelling within us that shows us all the ways that we can shine. So, my friends, listen for the one who calls each one of us and look for the light glowing in every heart. Amen.

ⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gloria_Gaynor

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https://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/Gloria_Gaynor__The_disco_diva_steps_into_the_gospel_arena/66388/p1/

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.