

Sisters and brothers, who am I? What is important to me?

What would I like to be like?

The answers to these questions can be manifold. They depend on how I see myself, who I'd like to be, which role models I have and what I am striving for.

The answer to these questions changes as the years go by. I see myself in a different light today than I did 20 or 30 years ago – which is surely a good thing.

Who am I? ...is a matter of identity. But it can also be a question asked by fear.

...when I feel lost, when expectations are too high and I feel I can't reach up to them.

Who am I?

In the Bible the question of identity is met by answers of relationship.

One answer is the text which we have just heard from the book of Exodus chapter three. Right in the middle of the story Moses asks the question which the sermon began with: "Who am I? ...that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

What made Moses ask this question?

It all starts on a normal day with its usual tasks and demands: school... work...

Nothing special. Just an ordinary day. But all of a sudden everything changes...

After he'd killed an Egyptian, Moses found refuge in Midian. He started a new life. He found a wife and a job. Now he has his daily routine. He tends the sheep. Nothing special about that. But then: in the middle of everyday life, he meets the extraordinary. A bush is burning, but not destroyed by the fire.

Moses is curious, wants to know more. "I must turn aside and look at this great light, and see why the bush is not burned up."

It is this step made of curiosity that belongs to every person's life. A step towards growth & maturity that we can only do by leaving something old behind, by turning aside and even taking the risk of being alone.

Many people don't manage to find the purpose of their lives because they don't dare to risk this one step out of the ordinary and try something new. Fear holds them in its grip. They find themselves stuck in despair and resignation and even forget that it would only take one step to the side to make all the difference...

In the midst of everyday life Moses leaves behind the well-known path and tries something new. When he sets out he has no idea where this is going to end. It is on the most normal of all days that Moses' attention is drawn to the unusual – and he meets God.

There is no need of especially beautiful worship services, no need of a big ritual or priests to mediate – but simply this surprising encounter out of the blue. And it happens to a man who is not at all without blame: Moses, the murderer, meets God – as simple as that.

God calls him: Moses. Moses. And Moses responds: Here I am.

Moses can sense that something is different that day.

He crosses a boundary. Not on purpose. He doesn't even know there is a boundary. He has no idea that his ordinary place is holy ground. And why should he? Nothing out there indicates that the place is sacred.

It is simply the presence of God that changes the ordinary into the holy. Meeting God makes people change – sometimes for a moment, and sometimes for a lifetime. Meeting God can urge us to step out of the ordinary, can leave us completely startled and lead us to take off our shoes...

And then God introduces himself.

He is not an all together new God. He's always been there, even long before Moses was born. Moses feels a deep sense of fear. All of a sudden everything is fearfully different. What on earth does God want to do with me? he may ask himself.

And God takes his time. He tells Moses what the encounter is all about. God has seen enough to understand that now he's got to do something. People are abused and oppressed, living in slavery and suffering from injustice. That is disturbing to God. It touches him. He won't take that any longer. He's heard the people cry, he's seen their need... He did it then, and he does it now.

What God sees, takes away his peace of mind. What he hears sets him in motion. He comes down to earth, descends into humanity.

God casts off the role of a spectator and lets human destinies touch him. He has not only seen the misery of the people in Egypt and heard their cries, he knows all that they are suffering from...

In the Hebrew Bible the word "to know" is not used to mark something intellectual, but to express a deed of love, care and attention. It describes sympathy and the commitment to save: "I have come down to deliver them... and to bring them out... to a good and broad land... flowing with milk and honey."

In order to do all this God needs Moses.

And Moses is worried to death.

Who am I? Moses asks. And we may add: „God, that is a job too big for me. I can't reach up to it and I am terrified of doing it.”

To know in advance what big task is awaiting us, can make us fear even more and ask: Who am I? Why me? And who are you, God?

God is not a God far away, somewhere above... God has come down – then in Egypt and much later in the child in the manger. And he is down on earth today – he is with all who weep and cry and wail, and with all who do something about it, who help others and stand on the side of the victims. God is with all who care and support and share.

Who am I? Why me? says Moses – and God responds: „I will be with you.“

Is there anything more assuring and more comforting than God's promise "I will be with you"?

Before Moses Jacob heard it, too: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go; ...I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. " (Gen 28:15). Such promises are meant to guide Jacob and Moses on all their ways – wherever they go.

And they are worth being shared with all of us today: God's word for Jacob and Moses and many others, is also a promise to us – no matter where we stand, who we are, and whatever happens: I am with you. I am your God, I am at your side so that you can do your part and walk your path.

Who am I?

When Moses asks this question of identity... and whenever we do it, too – God responds with his answer of relationship.

God simply says: “I want to be with you.”

God is there for us; present.

There is not nothing.

Sometimes this may not seem enough – especially in times of crises: when we can't think straight, when tears cloud our view and we have nothing left to say...It is then that it is absolutely essential to remember God's voice saying: I am with you!

This promise stays forever. It leads through the Bible like a red thread, and spoken in Jesus terms it comes to us as the famous “I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28:20)

That's all. Will it do?

The Bible often answers our questions of who we are and what purpose we have in life by telling such stories:

that is how faith begins,

how lives are made new.

It takes a bit of curiosity and a small detour off the ordinary to discover that when God speaks to us, we are given new life and a mission to fulfil.

“I need you. Stand at the side of the suffering! – and I will be with you! I am with you on your way to a good and broad land – no matter how much desert there will be in between. I am here!”

And as Moses did then, we are invited now to say: Here I am!

God's answer to the question: Who am I? is: I am here. And you are not alone.

Amen.