

Many of you will remember the plastic bracelets that some people used to wear. They had four letters on them: WWJD. What Would Jesus Do. (In fact the nurse with whom I worked for years at Methodist Hospital wore one whenever I was on vacation. Only he said that the letters stood for What Would Joos Do. He used it to think through how to approach problems when I wasn't around to be asked.)

Nowadays, nobody really needs to know what I would do about anything. But the problem with the original meaning of the four letters is that knowing what Jesus would do in a given situation isn't as simple as the little wrist bands implied. What would Jesus do? Well, ultimately he would be crucified. And as he says in today's Gospel lesson, that's the road ahead for any who want to belong with him – take up your cross and follow.

But there's also another model for life presented in today's lectionary readings. WWMD: What Would Moses Do? Moses is, without question, the most important figure in the Tanakh – the Hebrew scriptures, which we call the Old Testament. We know more about Moses than any other person in the entire Bible except Jesus. And the heart of the journey starts in today's lesson from Exodus.

The earlier chapters of this book tell the story that every kid learns in Sunday School: how Pharaoh decreed that all Hebrew baby boys should be put to death; but the sister of Moses saved him by putting him in a waterproofed basket of reeds and setting him afloat in the Nile, where Pharaoh's daughter would find him and take him in to be raised in the royal household.

When this child, Moses, had grown into a young man, there came a day when he saw one of Pharaoh's soldiers beating a Hebrew slave. He became enraged and killed the soldier. But now he was a murderer, and couldn't remain in Pharaoh's house. He had to go on the run, ending up in the land of Midian, in the Arabian Peninsula. There he met an important citizen of the country, married his daughter, and was now making a new life caring for his father-in-law's sheep.

Which is why we find him today deep in the wilderness, where he had taken the flock. It was there that he caught sight of a thornbush - on fire, but not burning to ashes. And now Moses took the fateful step that would

change everything. Instead of going his way with the sheep, he turned from his path to investigate that odd phenomenon.

We should notice that God did not build this unusual bonfire right on his way where Moses would stumble over it, but off to the side, so that he would have to choose whether or not it was worth paying attention. It was when Moses turned aside to see the blazing bush that God spoke, to say that the ground on which he stood was holy, and he should remove his sandals. It was from that whirlwind of blazing holiness that this Hebrew shepherd was given his call from the Lord.

“Moses, I know you’re all involved in building a quiet new life in Midian, but it’s time to set that aside and return to Egypt to bring my people out of slavery. I am a God faithful to the promises I have made, and you are to be my agent for carrying the burden of that promise to my chosen people.”

It was an offer that Moses tried very hard to refuse, bringing up one objection after another, to explain why he was not the right man for the job. But God countered each of those points, insisting that Moses was the one who should be sent on this mission. So finally Moses played his Ace in the Hole. “But if I go to your people and say that God sent me to them, you know they’re going to want to hear just who this god is. What will I say is your name?”

This was not an innocent question about a simple fact like those one can find on Google. In that time, it was believed that to know the name of a god was to have power over that deity, to be able to force them to do as they are asked. But the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob replied out of the holy fire with the answer that ended such discussion: “I AM WHO I AM. Say that I AM has sent me to you.”

The four Hebrew letters that spell God’s name are *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, YHWH. As written out in the Tanakh they are not “pointed”, by which I mean these are only consonants, with no vowels. This means it is not pronounceable (unless, perhaps, you’re Welsh. I must add here that one of my pet peeves has to do with Biblical translators who add vowels in order to pronounce the unpronounceable - as Yahweh. If God had wanted

the letters spoken, God would have done so. Instead, God speaks the name as I AM WHO I AM.)

But this holy name is not merely a verb in the present tense. It also carries the future. I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE. The implication of this name of God is that we can't really know who God is until we're willing to sign up to be where God is, doing what God calls us to do. When Moses at last said 'yes' to the impossible invitation he had been given, turning his steps toward Egypt, he finally began to really learn God's name – ultimately a forty-year process.

And that holy name unfolds throughout everything that follows.

“This God who brings the oppressed out of slavery is called: I WILL DWELL WITH WHOM I WILL DWELL.”

“This God of holiness who insists that all other Gods be laid aside is called: I WILL BE WORSHIPPED AND I ALONE.”

“This God who forgives and heals when his people stumble is called: I WILL BE GRACIOUS TO WHOM I WILL BE GRACIOUS.”

This God who was and is and will be waits to meet us also. But that is not something that happens when we sit back and wait, focusing only on our day-to-day business, herding our sheep. Rather we need to pay attention, because at some time and place, a bush is set ablaze for our notice as well.

We need to listen for the call of the Holy One who speaks as much now as in the past. We need to decide when we will stop clinging to our ordinary goals and striving, to say 'yes' to God's adventure for us, that needs our effort, our energy, our heart's deep desire. For it is in our own sacrificial following that we will finally learn the true name of God, I AM WHO I AM for you; I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE, for you; in all time and all eternity.