A (Reluctant) Man and a Mission (Exod. 3:1–4:17)

Questions and Suggestions for Discussion

Attentiveness
1. Noting the strange bush, Moses turns aside and pays attention. He could have walked right past and missed God altogether, but he decided that his work could wait and thus, to use Barbara Brown Taylor’s words, he found this altar in the world.
   - What might it mean for us to pay attention to what is happening in our daily lives?
   - Are there potential altars in our world, moments where we might meet God?
   - What does our text tell us about where God is to be found?
   - What can we do to make sure that we don’t miss those altars?

Reverence
2. Moses is told to take off his shoes because he is on holy ground. Once he realises whom he is dealing with, he hides his face, knowing that no-one can see God and live.
   - What, in today’s context, does it mean to be reverent before God? How do we express such a reverent attitude?
   - Is there a place for reverence in our lives?
   - What, in the light of the developing conversation between Moses and God, does reverence not mean?

Divine Suffering
3. The text suggests that God has intimate knowledge of the Israelites’ suffering. Rather than being safe and secure in his heavenly abode, unaffected by the troubles of the world, God experiences the people’s suffering fully in his own divine being.
   - What does it mean for God to experience our suffering fully? What does that tell us about God?
   - What difference does it make that God has intimate knowledge of our suffering?

Argument and Questioning
4. Moses has a prolonged conversation with God and is, as Terence Fretheim suggests, taken seriously by him. Indeed, Fretheim points out that God is open to argument and challenge on Moses’ part and willing ‘to consider seriously what the human partner has to say’.
   - Do you believe that Fretheim is right about this?
   - Does it make any difference if we challenge God? What does our story suggest?
   - Is there any value in challenging God, or in us being able or encouraged to do so?
• Is it true, as again Fretheim says, that 'human questioning leads to further divine revelation'? What does that mean? What difference does that make to our faith and to how we approach God?

**Signs and Faith**
5. ‘This will be the sign, when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’ In hindsight, Moses would know that God had been with him.

• Is that kind of sign any good?
• Have you experienced similar signs in your own life? How did you experience your journey from that moment on? How did you manage to hold on to the sign in times when the outcome was far from promising? In hindsight, would you say that the sign has made a difference to your journey? If so, in what sense?

**Yahweh**
6. Whereas English translations talk about ‘the LORd’, the Hebrew makes it clear that God has a personal name.

• Fretheim therefore suggests that the use of ‘LORd’ is problematic. Would you agree? What might be the problems with that title?
• What does the notion that God has a personal name, which he is willing to reveal, say about God and about the kind of relationship we can have with him?

**Limitations**
7. Moses apparently had a speech impediment. However, God doesn’t sort out Moses’ speech difficulties but uses him anyway. As Fretheim notes, God can work through people with limitations.

• What do you make of the notion of God working through people with limitations – (a) in terms of your own vocation and ministry; (b) in terms of encouraging and supporting the vocation and ministry of others; and (c) perhaps also in terms of working with people whose limitations might cause you problems?

**Vocation**
8. There’s no way out for Moses. Goldingay, commenting on Moses’ vocation, notes that this presupposes a master–servant relationship: ‘When a master summons a servant to go and do something, it is not designed to be a way for the servant to find fulfilment, nor something the servant has an option about’.

• What do you make of this statement, not only in the light of your own vocation, but also in terms of seeking to encourage and support the vocation of others in today’s context?