

St. Andrew's Sermons  
The Rev. John D. Rohrs  
3 Lent; March 20, 2022

It's now the fourth week of war in Ukraine, and the stories and images are heartbreaking. Despite brave resistance, the Russian invasion continues, and the cries for help grow louder. President Zelensky's speech to Congress was remarkable; I can't remember another moment like that in my lifetime. In the midst of it all, I've had a number of people ask me variations of the same question: where is God? It's a question that always emerges in moments of violence and fear. How could this happen, and where is God when we need God most?

We all know that the answers to these questions always fall short. There's no reply that can ever do justice to that level of heartache. But it's still important to respond, and it turns out that our first reading today has a lot to say on the matter. It's a passage from Exodus about the call of Moses, the unlikely prophet who would lead his people out of slavery. But it's not really a story about Moses. It's a story about God – about who God is and what stirs God's heart. As much as any passage in Scripture, this story expresses where God stands in the face of suffering.

Moses is tending sheep near Mount Horeb when suddenly God appears in a flame of fire. God says, "I have observed the misery of my people; I have heard their cry." So that's the first thing we learn about God – God hears their cry and offers comfort and compassion. And that's not all. "I have come to deliver them from the Egyptians," God says, "to bring them to a land of milk and honey." This is a clear statement that God is a God of liberation. God condemns Pharaoh and proclaims a vision of justice and peace. But it comes with a caveat. God won't do this alone. God recruits a partner in this work, sending Moses to rally the people. The implication is that we are never bystanders in the pursuit of God's dream; we are participants in the unfolding of our own salvation.

And there's one more thing. At the end of the story, Moses asks for God's name, so that he can tell the people who is sending him. "I am who I am," God says, and that's important. God cannot be named, because when you name something you can define it and contain it; you can claim it as your own. But God is always bigger than we think. Even

when we are consumed by the crisis in front of us, God has the whole of creation in mind. God's dream extends to all people, friend and enemy alike.

This passage reminds us who God is and what stirs God's heart. First, God loves us and hears our cries. God comes to us in times of suffering and speaks a word of hope. God condemns injustice and proclaims liberation, and then invites us to join the pursuit of peace. Finally, God reminds us that we are only part of the whole, and that God's love is without bounds. This is what we know about God, and it is good news in the face of despair.

Someone asked me recently what good is prayer if God doesn't intercede? It's sort of similar to the question we started with, and likewise there are no easy answers. But a clergy friend of mine named Joe Hensley posted a beautiful reflection the other day. He called for his congregation to pray – for the people of Ukraine, for the people of Russia, for people everywhere who are hungry or afraid or oppressed. “We may not change things by praying,” he said; “but we might find ourselves changed, and that might begin to change the world.”

Perhaps that's the clearest answer to where God is in these moments – God is in our hearts and in our actions. God is in the hands and hearts of people all over the world who work for justice and freedom and peace. May God change us in all in these days, that we might each do our small part to change the world. Amen.