Signs for Moses

This past weekend I visited my brothers in Tennessee. My oldest brother was hired at an entry level position with the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1963 and worked his way up to shift engineer, an impressive feat for someone with no college degree. He has an innate ability to cobble together useful things from a motley collection of scrap metal which he has in abundance. His prized possession is a log splitter made out of parts scavenged from various pieces of equipment littering the farm on which he lives. What I would take to a salvage dealer he can turn into operating machinery. Necessity is the mother of invention and living 20 miles from civilization can encourage you to use what is readily available rather than traveling to town for store bought parts. In our study of Exodus chapter 4 we see God using what is readily available to accomplish his will and demonstrate his power.

The chapter begins with Moses continuing to make excuses so he could avoid going back to Egypt. He first asked what he should do if the Israelites did not believe that he had met God. Whether knowingly or not, Moses was asking God to provide evidence that he could take with him. God responds with the question “What is that in your hand?”. Moses replied, “A staff”. The KJV uses the word rod and Psalm 23 refers to both rod and staff which were used by shepherds. In Moses’ hand it the staff was a very ordinary tool used daily as he tended sheep. At God’s command the staff became a living snake causing Moses to run from it (my mother was convinced that there is but 1 kind of snake and that is the poisonous snake). In a remarkable show of trust, Moses obeyed God’s instruction and lifted the snake by the tail after which the snake reverted to a staff. God then performed a second miracle by turning Moses’ hand leprous then restoring it. He then told Moses that if the Israelites did not believe the first 2 signs that Moses was to pour water from the Nile on dry ground and it would become blood.

Moses then offered his next excuse, that he was not eloquent in his speech. God responded that it was He who gave man the ability to see, speak and hear, effectively telling Moses that He had supplied him with adequate skills. Moses then revealed what he tried to hide with excuses, he did not want to go and asked God to send someone else. God knew this in advance of course and had already summoned Aaron to join Moses. He told Moses that he would put the proper words in Aaron mouth so Moses would be the brains and Aaron would be the spokesperson. Unfortunately, our society seems to value style over substance. We often elect charismatic leaders who give a good speech (that someone else wrote) but lack good judgment.

After his meeting with God, Moses with the blessing of his father in law started his trip back to Egypt with his wife and 2 sons taking with him his staff which he referred to as the staff of God. Verse 24 contains the startling statement seemingly out of the blue “The Lord met Moses and was about to kill him”. Verse 25 provides us with the reason, Moses had failed to observe God’s strict requirement of circumcision for one of his sons. He would hardly be qualified to lead Israel if he was not obedient to God. Some speculate that Zipporah had recently given birth to their second son. She satisfied the requirement by performing the operation herself although her anger possibly revealed her abhorrence of the practice and may indicate that Moses was trying to please her rather than obeying God.

The chapter ends with the reunion of Moses and Aaron who met with the elders of the Israelites who believed them after seeing the signs God provided.

This chapter demonstrates that ***avail***ability is more important than ability. God can use our limited abilities for His glory but only if we are willing to serve him. Several years ago, a group from our church went to East Tennessee on a mission trip to re-shingle the roof of a rural church. When we saw the roof, we were alarmed at its height and the steep pitch. Rick West, our associate pastor at the time, started our work day with a prayer that we would be able to work *beyond* our ability. While we had a couple of experienced roofers, most of us were roofing novices yet we were able to do the job. God took this motley crew of unskilled workers, protected us and guided the project to completion. God used us because that was what he had to work with.

God can also use our ordinary skills. Bill Martin has used his cooking talents (and monster grill) to spread the gospel message all over the state. Holy Smokes! John Byars has used his plumbing skills on numerous mission projects. What talent do you have that God can use? When God calls us, it is easy to make excuses but it can be rewarding when we allow Him to lead us.