

Text: Exodus 3:1-15
Date: May 9, 2010
Title: The End of LOST: “Why Am I Here?”
Theme: To embrace our purpose, we have to believe that God has a plan and that God wants us to take part.

Last week, good response to this sermon series
Some said, “I want to start watching” – sorry, there’s only two weeks left –
but you can get it on DVD or on abc.com / hulu.com
I’ve posted links to an episode that demonstrates this weekend’s themes

In my introduction last week, I told you that LOST is a story about people
whose plane crashes on an island
But it’s not just a story about that, about what happens to them
It’s about what they BELIEVE about what’s happened to them – how they
understand the WHY of their situation
So in that sense, it’s a faith story

Because, isn’t that what faith is, in large part - our effort to understand
why?

Our desire to know the One we believe holds the answers to our question
why – our desire to make sense of the world around us and see our
place in it?

I’ve been reading a book recently – a classic work from the 1950’s by Prof.
Paul Tillich called *The Courage to Be*

In his book he put his finger on the main problem of American society –
surrounded by material prosperity, productivity, all kinds of diversions,
we wrestle with a fundamental problem: “What does this all mean?”
And our greatest fear is: “What if it doesn’t mean anything?”

In sixty years, I’m afraid that problem has just grown and intensified
So “Why am I here?” is maybe the most important question we can ask

The Losties’ search for meaning gets introduced early on in the series, just
five episodes in – we hear someone ask the question “Why did this
happen to us? Why are we here?”¹

Different characters come at the question different ways, but the two
characters who epitomize two competing philosophies/ideas are
these two: Jack and Locke

Let's begin with Jack, b/c I mentioned him last week

Jack is played by Matthew Fox

I told you that Jack is a doctor, but in reality he's not just any doctor – he's a top-notch spinal surgeon

He's the best, and he knows it

Jack is a 'fixer' - there are very few things in his life he can't fix, that he can't control

Jack is confident in his knowledge and understanding of everything

In fact, he's not just confident, he's downright arrogant²

<<Early on in the series, he flashes back to a patient who was injured in a car crash: she's in terrible shape, and he's absolutely convinced she won't walk again

He tells her fiancé that flat-out – no chance, she'll be wheelchair-bound for life – forget about the honeymoon, forget about dancing at the wedding, it's not happening

And he says it in a way that absolutely crushes this poor man

But then he sees the woman in the O.R. – Sarah's her name – and she wants to talk to him – just to say she knows she won't be able to walk again, and that it's ok.

And now Jack is struck by her resignation, and takes it as a challenge. And out of the blue, he just says, "I'm going to fix you." The OR goes silent. No one believes it. But they're not going to argue with one of the greatest surgeons in the world.³>>

See, Jack believes in himself, he relies only on himself. What he can do, what he knows. If he doesn't know it, it doesn't exist, it can't be real.

Then there's Locke. Locke's full name is John Locke, he's named for the famous English Enlightenment philosopher.

Played by Terry O'Quinn, one of the most charismatic actors I've seen on TV in a long time. When Locke is in a scene, you notice him.

Locke is set up from the beginning as a foil to Jack. One episode about Locke and Jack in Season 2 is called "Man of Science, Man of Faith," and that's exactly what they are.

Locke is a man of faith – although admittedly not a Christian faith – who represents another style of leadership, with different aims, different goals, and often the two are at odds with each other over the right course of action in any given situation. Jack and Locke nearly kill each other at several points in the series.⁴

Locke is of the school of thought that says, “everything happens for a reason.”

<<But he didn’t always believe that. It was the island that made him a believer.

Locke was not a well child growing up, he had a lot of physical problems
He was born to a teenage mother and spent most of his childhood in foster care

As a teen, he was targeted by bullies for his fascination with science
As an adult, he longed for a relationship with his father, in fact, he hired an investigator to locate his Dad

Locke visited him and learned his father was on dialysis
Their relationship grew and eventually Locke offered Dad his kidney

But it turned out his father was nothing more than a con man
After he got the kidney, he was gone – Locke was devastated

Later, a young man approached him, concerned that Locke’s father was conning his mother

Locke, still angry, contacted his father and threatened to expose him

As a result, his father attacked him and pushed him out a window – he fell eight stories and ended up a paraplegic>>

He got on the plane in a wheelchair

But after the crash, he found that he could walk

Suddenly, for Locke, there was meaning in this crash – it was a miracle

The island had given him his life back – his health, his strength

Locke is convinced that there’s a reason they’re on the island – that it’s destiny, fate, that it was meant to be

He has faith, not necessarily in God, but in the island as a place where wonders happen – he’s willing to take chances, to take risks, to take leaps of faith in order to carry out his ‘mission’

Jack is only interested in one thing: getting off the island.

Putting the whole thing behind him.

Over and over, the two butt heads over leadership and over meaning.

The two different answers to the question “Why am I here?” – Jack’s vision that embraces only self and Locke’s vision that embraces something larger – have resulted in two different approaches to life

One, represented by Jack, is materialist – I only believe what I can see

The other, represented by Locke, is spiritual – willing to embrace a larger reality

Today’s scripture points to that larger reality, and the way it intersects our individual lives

It is probably familiar to many of you – Moses at the burning bush

If you know Moses’ story, you know was born to Israelites when they were enslaved in Egypt, that he was floated in a basket down the Nile to save him from the edict that all male Hebrew infants should die, and that he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter, who found him

When we encounter him here he’s fled Egypt to a land called Midian, where he lived as a shepherd tending his father-in-law’s flocks

You know, at first, he was enraged by the way the Egyptians treated his people

He fled, in fact, because he had killed one of the slave drivers

Moses had thought he’d settled the question “why am I here?” with the answer, “to live a quiet, peaceful life”

He didn’t feel he owed any debt to his people, even though he could still feel that anger, even though he knew his people were still slaves

And then one day, he saw something from the corner of his eye

A bush, burning at the edge of the wilderness

“And though it was blazing, it was not consumed”

When he turned to see what was happening, God called to him from the bush: “Moses, Moses.”

And then God proceeded to tell him what God wanted with him: “I want you to lead my people to freedom.”

See, Moses wanted nothing more than to be left alone.

To solve his own problems. To live his own life. That’s what he wanted.

His sense of purpose was limited to what he could see. What he knew.

Not unlike Jack. Except what Moses knew wasn’t scalpels and surgery. It was sheep and grass.

But God called him. And all of a sudden his answer to the question “why am I here?” was very different.

It was a process he went through to find his purpose – he went through it in short order, to be sure – but there was a process. And there are four things I see in this passage that are needed if we’re going to get a handle on our purpose – on why we’re here. They’re very simple.

First, we need to believe that God exists. Without God in the picture, we may find our sense of purpose either to be:

- 1) very limited (like Moses’ quiet life) or
- 2) completely overblown (limited only by our own egos – which can be huge – this is part of Jack’s problem, he’s got a God-complex – acknowledging something larger makes him smaller)

God sets limits and guidelines around human authority, even while we are empowered to do what seems impossible.

Acknowledging God keeps us humble and in check on the one hand, but finding your purpose in God also means you will do amazing things, empowered by the Creator of the universe on the other.

I choose to work with God, and to be slapped down for my arrogance from time to time. I deserve it. It’s healthy.

The second and third points are related: we need to believe that God cares about humanity and that God has a plan to help us.

You see both points in a single verse of Moses’ story: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...”

(Exodus 3:7-8)

God sees, and God acts.

The Bible paints God as transcendent, yes, mysterious, yes – beyond anything we can think or imagine – but at the same time this God is also interested in what happens in people’s lives

That’s the message of the incarnation – of Jesus’ coming, of God taking on flesh. God gets personally involved in our world. In our lives.

That means we should too – that we should look beyond our own selves, our own lives.

If you want to know, “why am I here?” Maybe the way to start answering that question is to start thinking about the things that really make your

heart hurt. Is it sick children? AIDS patients? Illiteracy?
Mistreatment of immigrants? Wounded war veterans?
Maybe those are precisely the things that God hopes will define your
purpose – because God has a plan to fix what’s wrong in this world,
what hurts in this world

But the thing is, and that brings me to the last point – God calls on us to get
involved with the plan

God uses people – God uses you and me – to fulfill God’s purposes

**God exists, God cares, and God has a plan, but God uses us to carry
out the plan**

This is where we find our purpose – if we’re willing to accept it

Moses has all the excuses in the world for why he won’t accept God’s call
to lead the people of Israel

If you keep reading into Exodus 4, he tells God, “what if they don’t believe
me?” “But I’m not a good speaker.” “Please, choose someone else.”

Our response to the idea that God might need our help is often like that of
Moses in v.11: “Who am I, that I should go and do this?”

We resist. We struggle. We fight.

What sounds like deep humility on the surface really could be any number
of things, especially fear, perhaps even just laziness or a desire to be
left alone

Sometimes we prefer meaninglessness – we prefer not to answer the
question “why am I here?” because we just don’t want to be bothered
with a call on our lives – with a responsibility given us by God

Sometimes we don’t want to be drawn into God’s story – we want to live in
our own story, where we’re totally in control

I think that’s part of Jack’s problem. He’s entered a world where he can’t
fix everything anymore. He just wants his old life back, where he was
in charge.

But here’s the thing: God has created us in such a way that our purpose,
the answer to the question “why am I here?” is never satisfying until
we make that connection to God’s purposes, God’s story, God’s
desire for the world

We are made not to serve ourselves, but to serve One who is larger than anything we can think, or feel, or imagine

We are here for a reason

Even Jesus, being very God, came to carry out a specific purpose of service: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...” (Matthew 20:28)

The question for us is, will we have the courage to figure it out – to find our place in God’s plan for the world – because God does have a plan And God relies on you and I to carry it out

Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Succasunna UMC, Succasunna NJ

¹ Locke asks the question in “White Rabbit,” Season 1, Episode 5.

² There’s a great scene where one of the other characters, Hugo Reyes – who is perhaps the most genuine, gentle, and kind character on the show – picks up on this. In a conversation about Hugo’s previous admissions to mental hospitals, he says to Jack: “What’s that thing called where doctors make you feel better just by talking to you?” “Bedside manner?” Jack says. “Yeah, that. Yours sucks, dude.” (“Man of Science, Man of Faith,” Season 2, Episode 1)

³ “Man of Science, Man of Faith,” Season 2, Episode 1.

⁴ Their conflict becomes intense at the end of season 3 into season 4. Locke holds Jack at gunpoint for a time. Later, Jack holds a gun to Locke’s head and pulls the trigger only to find that it’s not loaded. Their argument? Over whether it’s the right thing to do to leave the island. Locke insists that they must stay; that the island ‘needs’ them to stay. Jack’s only concern is rescue and return to his ‘normal’ life.