

Sisters and brothers,
the life story of a person is often also the story of lands and places.
Our life history - as short or long as it may have been to date - is a
story of places.

We begin with the place of our birth, the place where we originate
from, continue with the place of our education, and remember the
place of our wedding. We look at the places where we lived and to-
wards the place where we will die, the place where our grave will be...
Our life is lived in many various places.

Street names and fountains, meadows, rivers and small pools tell sto-
ries of our childhood. Bus-stops, small corner shops and postmarks,
refugee camps and front lines, houses, villages, cities, - they all talk
about various events of our past and our present.

Even our goals and desires are connected to the names of places.

Places are refuge and lost homeland at the same time.

Places hold the knowledge of our longing for past and our hopes for
new beginnings.

The names of places in a person's life story tell a story of its own, and
often they open doors to opportunities which otherwise would remain
locked.

Finally places are junctions, at which threads merge, new patterns
grow, where connections are made, where responsibilities are devel-
oped and new purpose can be found.

The story of a human life is always the story of lands and places.

The life story of Moses is one such story of places, areas and coun-
tries. And in the beginning his story sounds like a thrilling novel:

*“By the Nile he is abandoned by his mother who cannot keep him safe
any longer. And by the Nile he is found by the daughter of the pharaoh.
He enjoys the best education in Egypt. One day he is walking like a
prince among the Hebrew slaves, who, as cheap workers, guarantee
the building up of the empire.*

*Out of the blue he kills an Egyptian, who had laid hands on a Hebrew
slave.*

*A change of location has to follow. Moses has to flee towards the wide
and dry eastern wilderness. Again he finds a place, an oasis with a
well, another turning point in his life.*

*Seven girls are there to collect water for the cattle of their father, and
they get into trouble with some other shepherds.*

Moses helps the girls. And after the dramatic story of his childhood and his fleeing, now a love story begins.

And again there is a change of place.

Moses arrives in Midian, he marries and stays.

He settles in the wilderness. He starts leading a regular, proper and quiet life until the day, when he steps out of this space again, leaves the well-known paths and comes to the bush at the mountain.

And again this new place is a turning point in his life.

Here, beyond the familiar environment, he meets God; he receives a new goal, a new map for his further way.

Places, and the stories connected to them, tell the story of the lives of human beings.

The two cannot be separated.

Each location in the life story of a person is a turning point and a chance of a new beginning.

Maps with names of places do not only give us information about the story of a human life, they also hold a sort of “inner geography”: the significance the places had for our growing up and becoming who we are...

The story of the different places in our lives is not only an outward journey but also a story of how we developed and became mature adults.

The names of places tell stories of our experiences and our desires, our failures and our dreams.

Stories of places are also stories of tears and guilt, of joy and happiness, they are stories of habits and of discoveries, they are stories of finding a home and saying goodbye, they are stories of seeking, losing and finding.

Places tell stories about our freedom and our limits, our growing and our fading. Places tell stories of how we found and how we lost people. They talk about our longing for a meaningful life, for identity and a home for our soul.

Names of places are often hiding and unfolding a rich emotional life.

Let us again – in this light – reflect on the story of Moses and on ours as well.

*By the Nile Moses is abandoned, by the Nile he is found and he enjoys the best education in **Egypt**.*

Contrary to his Hebrew fellow human beings, for Moses, Egypt was a place very close to paradise.

Egypt was home for him, a safe and comfortable childhood, a life without scarcity, a place of wishes being fulfilled. An experience of being privileged and sheltered.

Egypt was – without any glorification - a place of plates filled with meat, a place where he was pleased. Hunger and poverty were foreign words for him...until...

...until there came the crisis: one moment beyond control, one second of pure emotion, and the prince becomes a murderer, becomes an unsettled and hunted Kain. He has to flee; the Egyptian paradise is locked.

Still today people experience quick changes – the former paradise suddenly becomes a place of danger, where we cannot stay any longer.

Still today people experience quick changes – times of comfort and privileges, times when a bright future suddenly turns into crisis and danger.

Something happens, - we are a short moment beyond control -, and from then on we are on the run... The place where we felt comfortable and safe changes into a place where we are restless and haunted. Within a second everything is different and can't be undone.

Egypt – a paradise and a place of crisis... the starting point of a life on the run.

Again a change of location follows.

*Moses has to flee into the wilderness und again finds a place to stay, an oasis and a **well**.*

At this place of silence, this place of refreshment he finds roots for a new life. He calms down. He is granted asylum, and he marries.

Although he lives as a stranger among strangers, his life somehow becomes stable. He works as a shepherd.

Kain, the murderer, calms down, he starts working as Abel did, a shepherd in the outland.

Until today this is good. Fleeing from the place of crisis – and then arriving at a well, discovering fresh water, discovering new roots for a stable life in the midst of feeling guilty, in the midst of relationships growing cold, in the midst of searching for a meaningful life... It is good to settle and to work in a different setting, to draw off the attention, to forget...to work as a shepherd like Abel and maybe be blessed.

For some people a life like that is enough. They establish themselves in the wilderness.

Somewhere between the desert and the green lands, where there is only as much as they need, where nothing extraordinary happens, where all is calm and in order.

For some people a life like that is enough. Everything is cared for. No desire to run away.

And if there is a wish for a different life, the mail-order catalogue offers everything you need, you just order it...

One day Moses leads the sheep further on... far beyond the wilderness. He is out in the desert, near Mount Horeb, when he sees an amazing thing.

There, over on the side of the mountain is a bush on fire, but not being consumed. So he goes over to investigate:

"I'll leave my usual path a bit; I'll change place."

This is the departure, the courageous handling of all fears, leaving the familiar area and trying to discover new spaces...

This is the necessary step of curiosity which also belongs to our self-development. It tells us, that we will only find new meaning in our life, when we peel off something old, when we leave our former paths at a certain point and take the risk of the aloneness in the new land.

How many people fail when looking for a new meaning for their life, a new identity, a new life-project, because they avoid this one step out of the wilderness, this one step out of their boring life, because they are afraid of being alone. They become desperate and don't realise that there is only one step to be made ...which, however, must be taken by themselves.

Moses is courageous enough. He approaches the bush in order to see, and God sees him and his desire to see, and talks to him.

A new place again.

Kain has changed into Abel, has reorganised his life and suddenly realises: There is more to it! Something is on fire. Something takes off his shoes, lets him cover his face with his hands, and makes him feel lost. He is no longer the one who knows but the one who seeks...

There is nothing much to be seen, but what Moses can hear immediately moves him to yet another place.

"Here I am", is his answer to God's call. He faces up to God.

Here I am – a refugee with a new home in the outland, still looking for a blessing, still courageous enough, still curious enough to be dissatisfied by the monotony of everyday life.

Can we follow him facing up to God and join him in saying:
Here we are – refugees, having made new lives, but still not feeling at home, still longing for a blessing, still courageous enough to resist the monotony and to leave the common path?

And can we hear, like Moses did:

“You know me! I am the Lord of your fathers and mothers. And even if you don’t know it: you are not alone!

Long before you were born I started a relationship with your ancestors, and now there is a task for you in this long story! And if you want to find a path back to a meaningful life, then you will have to tackle this task! Change the place. Move on!

I need you – in **Egypt!**

*“The cry of the Israelites has now come to me. I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send **you** to the Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.”*

How does this call of God sound in our ears?

I need you – in Egypt! At the very place from which you once ran away. I need you in the places of crisis, of oppression, of injustice and inhumanity. I need your support for the tortured, the desperate, for those who hunger for bread and freedom.

When this holy call of God comes to our ears, we might be frightened, throw our hands up in horror and lose track of everything.

But on the other side we will discover how much of a fire there still is in our meager life, a fire that starts burning again. We will discover how this call of God inflames a new life in us, how courageous we suddenly are again, how we start to be reborn as new people...as soon as the passion of God infects us, this passion of God that inflames in love to all people who are oppressed and that inflames in rage against the oppressors.

It is the love of God to all the victims on earth that inflames us and forces us to change the place, move back to the places of the conflicts in this world, move to places where power is the main issue of all discussions and where individual people become worthless.

I have to pause for a moment... Is that true? Will we not react more or less as Moses did?

“Here I am”, he answered courageously. But after having heard God’s call, the answer sounds very feeble and frightened: Who am I? I am a nobody!

This is the sharp question about our own identity, our own person:

“Who am I?” And God’s answer is: “I will be with you!”

That's all.

“Who are we to be able to lead such a life!”

The move to old or demanding places is pushing us into the crux of the question: Who am I?

And God's answer still remains the same and leads us on into the New Testament when Jesus says: “I am with you always – to the end of the age!” Nothing more and nothing less.

Would that be enough for us?

On our search for a meaningful life and in all our efforts of finding our identity, the texts of the Bible tell us stories like the one of Moses:

Stories about how faith begins and how people can be newborn. It all begins with being curious and courageous enough to leave the old paths and then discover that God's call inflames a new fire in us and sends us out: “Change the place!”, “Join the oppressed!”

It all begins with God's promise: “I am with you! I'll support your work for justice. I am with you on your journey into a good and a wide open space – no matter how much desert there will be before you arrive. I'll be with you!”

And then we can answer: “Here I am, Lord. Let me move on!”

Amen

Prayer

Loving God, may you give us
all the courage we need
to go the way you lead us
to the places where you need us.

Help us that when you call,
we may go unafraid

Help us to take the steps
and speak the words
you want us to,
and if we don't dare to do so on our own,
give us, please, sisters and brothers
to stand at our side
to make us bold and strong. Amen.