

On Tuesday the *New York Times* published an article adapted from *Invisible Child: Poverty, Survival and Hope in an American City*, by Andrea Elliott. The article was called “When Dasani Left Home,”¹ and it details the experiences of a 13 year-old Brooklyn girl who left home to attend the Hershey School, a school for impoverished children. Andrea Elliott spent 14 months with Dasani’s family and originally wrote a five-part series in 2013. This book is obviously a deeper dive into Dasani’s life, and covers her time at the Hershey School and afterwards.

There’s a lot to it—there’s a lot even to the short excerpt of the book published in the *Times*. Dasani is one child, recognizable as an example of a bunch of social ills like poverty and racism and addiction, but also unique and particular. Uniquely and in her particular way, she contends with the challenges of growing up. Just as one example, at the Hershey School she wrestles with how and when to “code-switch.” That means switching between one behavioral or linguistic style and another. When you’re confronted by your neighbor on the school bus and called a bad name, shouldn’t you fight back, stand up for yourself? To her teenaged brain, not to do so sounds like hypocrisy, or covering up who she really is. Another Black adult tells her no, it’s a way of taking control.

You remain the same person, with the same feelings and urges. But you are choosing not to act on every urge. “That’s not being two-faced,” Williams says.

Dasani thinks about this. It sounds more like editing, which she is learning in film class. Some scenes get cut to make the movie better. She can do this with her thoughts, cutting some out so that they never reach the audience.

Dasani’s story is long and complicated, and her life is precarious, like a tower of Jenga blocks that continually loses pieces of its foundation. It’s not simple enough to draw a moral

from it—like “persistence is rewarded” or “some people are just too damaged.” But when you read her story, you end up caring about her.

Moses’ story is also complicated. From where he stands, there doesn’t seem to be any pattern or intention to it. Born to Hebrew slaves, he grows up as Egyptian royalty, and apparently even speaks Hebrew with an Egyptian accent. But he kills a man and now he’s not any kind of aristocrat, he’s a stranger who’s fled to a far-off land and gotten menial work as a shepherd. Was Moses always going to be a ne’er-do-well, born into the underclass and predictably sabotaging himself after receiving so many unearned advantages? Or was he a fake Hebrew, so privileged that he was now unrecognizable as one of his own people? It’s hard to say, at the moment when he’s ambling along with the sheep and sees a bush burning but not consumed. What he is, at the moment, is interested. Diverted. Curious. And that little thread of mild interest is all it takes for God to take the next step in the dance of getting-to-know-you, saying his name: “Moses, Moses!”

Barbara Lundblad has written about “God’s great and beautiful inefficiencies: this waiting for human beings to turn aside so that God can invite them to join in God’s work in the world.” She points out that in story after story, God waits for human beings to notice and turn aside and respond, and *then* God begins to act. God doesn’t wave a wand from heaven and effect liberation, for bound up in the very nature of God is the promise that God not only longs to be, but to be with (Barbara Lundblad, Chicago Sunday Evening Club). For Christians, that “be with” is the whole reason for Incarnation, for God becoming flesh. And here in Hebrew scripture, we see this same desire play out. That is precisely what Moses began to discover that day too, a God who not only desired to respond to the cries of God’s people and to bring them

into freedom, but a God who wanted to do all of that with and through Moses.

<https://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2020/083020.html>

God introduces Godself to Moses: “I am the God of your father”—and we don’t know Moses’ father and maybe Moses didn’t either, but apparently *God* did—“the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”—who each get named because each had different experiences of God. God is capacious and varied, God of so many stories, but the introduction is a start. Fine, says Moses, beginning to argue against God’s hard-brained idea that he, Moses, should be God’s point man in the liberation of the Hebrew slaves, but “*Who am I* that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” Who am I? The answer is, You’re the one I’m sending.

“You’re the one who turned aside when you saw the bush burning.” You know how many bushes God had to burn before somebody noticed? Who Moses is, is the guy who entered into conversation with God, who responded to God’s little outreach. Now it’s not long before Moses needs to know more about God besides “God of your father, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” What is God’s actual name? “I AM WHO I AM.” Which is not entirely satisfying, as open-ended as it is, but it *is* God’s name, and God has deepened this relationship by giving it. Maybe God isn’t deliberately evasive; maybe “I AM WHO I AM” is the best descriptor of someone who is beyond human comprehension. The point is that what we are witnessing in this conversation is the growth of a relationship. God has heard the cry of the people, and God will respond to them, liberate them . . . *along with* God’s new favorite partner Moses. They are beginning to care about each other.

Today, World Communion Sunday, is dedicated to the notion that all who celebrate the meal that Jesus ate with his disciples are actually in relationship with one another. Even when

we don't know each other's names or languages, we know the meal. We know the celebrants. What is communion, but a way of cultivating a deeper relationship? Recognizing that we all come to this table, we re-recognize our kin, and re-awaken our curiosity about them in all their complexities. Because curiosity is the beginning of connection, and connection is the beginning of caring.

Inefficiently, so inefficiently as to be anxiety-provoking, God is answering the cries of God's people and sending liberators. It seems that God will not do this work, though, without partners—and partners need partners too, as Moses needed Aaron. We remember today how many partners we have in the mending of creation, and now we remember to be curious about them too, to come to know each other in all our complexity and incompleteness as exactly who God was looking for to do this thing.

God, just as you called Moses so long ago,
so you call each one of us
to speak and act on your behalf in our world today.

Give us courage to step out in faith,
give us curiosity about others, so that we may find the partners we need,
trusting that your presence goes with us,
and that you will accomplish the liberation for which your people are crying out.

Amen.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/28/magazine/dasani-invisible-child.html>