

“CALLING MOSES”
A Sermon Preached at
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(transcribed from audio file)

This morning’s scripture is Exodus 3:1-12.

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, “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 spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” NRSVue

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Anyone else watching the Olympics? Getting that Olympic fever? Yeah? I watch these sports and I think like, I wish I could do that. I can't do any of that. I saw people the other day on skis going downhill. Already I'm disqualified. I can't do that. And then they jumped off a ramp. I can't do that! Then they land on what looked like a banister and went down sideways and flipped off the back of it. I can't do that!

I keep watching these Winter Olympics. I want to see a sport that I can do, that I can relate to cause Summer Olympics have that. Right? When you watch the Summer Olympics – they ran down the track. I can do that. I mean I can't compete at that level. Right? It would be fun to have just one average person running alongside them, cause you're talking trash about the guy who comes in last, but he or she would still blaze right past any of us. Right?

Like a javelin. I could throw a javelin. Not far, but I could. Basketball – I could do these things, but Winter Olympics shows me a whole host of things I could never do.

Until the other day I saw one sport I could do. They have this sport. It's called luge. It's the first sport I've seen where I think you could participate involuntarily. You just need a couple of buddies who are willing to tie you to a sled and push you down a steep hill. You go down this ice death tunnel and you're just like "Aaaaaahhhhh". I'm like, I could do that. I could do that.

Just imagine how they invented this one. There's like these two guys, Jim and Bob. And Jim's like, "Hey what do you think if we take Keith and we just strap him to this thing and we throw him down the hill."

Bob's like, "Love it. Love it."

Now there is another version of this. I don't know if you know this cause luge itself goes like 87 mph down that little ice death tube. Right? But they've got another version cause I think what happened was that Jim and Bob were watching Keith go down over and over again and Bob's like, "I've got an idea to make it more fun."

"What's that?"

"What if we put him on it headfirst?"

Jim's like, "Bob, you know, you've got a lot of good ideas. Right? I mean we love your sled and the teams been using those, so let's try this now" and sure enough they strap in and go headfirst down that little ice death tunnel.

Do you know what they call that sport? Skeleton! It describes the worst outcome that can happen. You're going to end up a skeleton. But I could do those. Again, I couldn't do them very well though. Evidentially it takes a very fine set of just adjusting your weight certain ways. In the luge, evidentially flexing your calf muscles makes all the difference in the world. I have a hard time doing that so I don't know, maybe I couldn't do that sport. But it does seem like a sport where you really wouldn't have to be willing to do it in order to participate.

Moses is being invited to participate in this very important chapter in the life of the people of faith and he doesn't want to do it. God's like, "Hold on. I've got a sled I'm going to strap you to. You're going to do this."

Moses, this great figure of the faith and he's just trying to get out of it left and right. What we read today is just the beginning of Moses whining and pleading to get out of this gig. But you gotta remember where Moses is in his life at this point.

When he was born it was a time when the Pharaoh had given orders to kill all of the Hebrew males that were born. And he was hidden away. He was raised in Pharaoh's household, so he had 40 years of living that royal lifestyle. But then one day he saw one of the Egyptian's beating on the Israel slave and he said, "That's too much. That's not right" and he intervened and in intervening Moses ended up killing that Egyptian who was abusing the Israel slaves and that made him an outlaw. That made him a fugitive.

And so, at around 40 Moses had to head off into the wilderness in the desert and hide and there he lived that life for about 40 years. So, keep in mind, Moses is 80 years old when he gets this call. That's a rough retirement, but he gets this call and what is the response that Moses gives?

The first one that Moses says is, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let your people go? Who am I?"

And God says, "Relax. I'll be with you and it'll all turn out all right in the end."

And then Moses says to God, "Okay, but like, who are you?"

Cause keep in mind, we don't have the Ten Commandments yet. We don't have all the laws. We don't have the temples. Things are chaotic and messy and forming in this relationship between God and his people. And Moses is like, "When I go to your people and tell them that I've got news and they should just follow me on the way out the back door while Pharaoh's not looking. What do I tell them?"

He said, "Just tell them" and he gives him the great popeye line, "I am who I am." He actually says, "Tell them my name is Yahweh." Yahweh which means, I am who I am.

Okay, but here's the thing. Moses comes back with a third objection. "But why would they believe me when I say that?"

And God says, "Okay. Fine. I'm gonna give you some little tricks you can do. Little miracles you can do that will convince them that you really have the authority that I say you have."

And Moses, after three objections to the Lord God Almighty, comes up with a fourth one. "But yeah, like this seems like kinda dangerous work that we're doin' here, and I don't think I'm qualified for it. I don't talk so good. I don't talk so good and I...." Maybe Moses had a stutter. Maybe Moses just didn't have the gift of gab. I don't know what it is, but it's like, "I don't talk so good" and God hears this fourth objection and says, "Look, I'll give you the words to say. I will inspire you. I will give you what you need to say, when you need to say it."

And finally, Moses hits with his fifth objection which just says, "I don't want to do it. Send somebody else. I don't want to do it."

And God starts to get perturbed. But what God says in response to this reluctant obedience that comes from Moses, "Okay. Fine. I'm gonna give you your brother Aaron and he will be the mouthpiece. He will speak for you. I will give you this partner in this ministry together. You'll get it done."

Moses did not want the job. If you read the rest of your Bible, you will find that this seems to be a pattern with people. God says, "I've got a job for you" and people go, "I don't think I want to do it." Or, "I don't think I can do it."

When God called Isaiah to be a prophet, "Here I am Lord."

He's like, "Okay, I want you to go and declare all these things to other leaders".

Then all of a sudden Isaiah is like, “Oh, well, uh, I’m an unclean person and unclean lips and like I don’t think I’m qualified.”

Went to Jeremiah to be a prophet. Jeremiah’s response was like, “I’m too young. I’m not old enough. You can’t use me.”

Went to Gideon to get a job done. Gideon’s like, “I got the weakest army of them all. Why are you picking us?”

Jesus picked the apostles. They quite frankly just kept finding themselves ignorant like “we don’t know how to do any of this stuff, Jesus.”

It seems to be a pattern that we have a hard time accepting God’s call on our life. And in that early faith, they started to develop this idea like, oh well, God calls certain leaders and the rest of us are just going to stand back and let them handle stuff, cause when we do get to the time of the Ten Commandments, God’s there on the mountain with the people and the people are like, “Yeah, Moses, you need to go up and handle that. That’s a little too crazy for us.”

But over the course of God unfolding and revealing and being with us in history, over the course of Jesus’ ministry and what he taught and what he revealed, we learned that we are all called. We are all called, but to different callings, to different missions, to different assignments, with different abilities. We’re not all going to be downhill skiers. Some of us are going to get strapped to a sled and sent downhill. It’s going to feel like that.

But the truth is that each and every one of us has been equipped by God for exactly what God is asking for us to do. Not beyond our abilities, not beyond what our hearts can do. We do have limits, but if God has a job for you, God will equip you. God does not call the equipped. God equips those whom he has called.

And we believe through the writings of the Apostle Paul, that we are part of a priesthood of all believers. You each are called, like Moses, into the particular places of your life. You are within families, circles of friends. Some of you are within workspaces. You’re within neighborhoods, within the larger community, part of a nation, a citizen of this world. And in all these identities, there is a part for you to play in the midst of all that’s going on.

And I think that part of what we are told in the story of Moses is a story that we can relate to, because I imagine there are times when you have felt a situation in front of you and you've just thought to yourself, uh, who am I to handle this? How do I know that God is with me? I need some signs here. I don't think I have what I need to handle this. I'm gonna need some help. And those cycles of thoughts and beliefs and experience exactly what Moses went through and it's exactly what you're bound to go through, especially maybe when some of those big parts of your calling come along.

You know, there's actually a place, a holy place over in the Middle East where you can go where they believe is the mountain where this all happened. And there is a bush there that is purported to be a descendant of that original bush that's highlighted in this biblical story that you hear. People started picking off pieces of the bush, so they had to put up a little fence around it eventually. They were afraid they were going to kill that big bush as it's grown.

What I think is the most hilarious thing though about this whole setup is what is located just 10 feet away from the bush. It's a fire extinguisher. Just in case this thing catches on fire again, maybe we don't want to hear what it has to say.

It's a natural thing in our callings to feel a bit of reluctance. In fact, the humility you feel in your life, the inadequacy that you feel in your life when faced with what is the right and good and just thing to do, that's probably a good thing. Sometimes those really cocky, confident people are the ones you got to watch out for.

But to have faith that God has given you exactly what you need to play that role that you've been called into, to perform at the level that is needed in that moment. We're not all going to live Olympic lives, but we have the opportunity to participate in something truly eternal. But it involves each one of us listening for with our mind and our heart and our soul, listening for that call, recognizing those moments where this is where I'm meant to play a part and I may feel insufficient for this task and I may even wonder if God is really with me in this, but I'm going to have faith that God is present and even more so I'm going to look for the people that God has placed round me, to help me in this and that's where we, as a community, come into play.

We are not meant to do ministry or our mission alone and you are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. You are surrounded by other people who have been called by God as well. And the part that you play is sometimes that kind of support role. Someone might need you to be their Aaron, their person to step in to give them confidence in that moment.

Our lives of faith are callings that we have. They work because God has prepared them to be this way and has given us the gifts, the abilities and the circumstances and the people around us. We simply have to be willing to participate.

That's the opening. That's the answering of the call. I invite you to look, look for those spaces in your life. You might already be neck deep in it but look and trust that God is with you. Not to do more than you are able, but do exactly what God is able to do through you.

May God be glorified and may the world hear of God's love through your witness.

Halleluiah and Amen.