

“Hi, Moses”
Sermon, September 3, 2017
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[Exodus 3: 1-15; Acts 3: 11 - 15]

I consider today's sermon to be a third part of a trilogy that I started here a few weeks ago although I didn't know that at the time.

The first was the story of Joseph and his brothers and how God was working in the background to bring God's will to fruition. I charged you to be in the forefront working for God in the meantime.

The second was the story of Jesus and Canaanite woman and their rather tense conversation. She wanted, or rather demanded, that Jesus take the demon from her daughter, and Jesus at first was reluctant to do so. But they worked it out by really listening to each other. I shared a line written David Augsburger, "*Being listened to is so close to being loved that most people cannot tell the difference.*" I charged you to listen to each other.

That brings us to today and Moses. What charge will I give you from this story?

First, let's look at Moses:

He grew up in Pharaoh's household, even though he was a Jew. Through God's providence, he learned culture, leadership, science and a host of other disciplines that were reserved only for the privileged people of the day.

More than likely he had big dreams. But then in a moment of rash, hot-tempered behavior while trying to be a hero to his oppressed countrymen he killed a man and his life took a huge turn.

He had to flee to the desert where on the other side he met a man with 7 daughters, one of which he married. He settled into the sheep tending business and for years he lived the mundane life of a shepherd - no big dreams here. He was doing fairly well while, at the same time his countrymen were still in bondage.

Comparatively speaking, many of us live comfortably while others around us near and far are struggling. But things can change for us, too. They certainly did for Moses.

One fateful day while he tried to find a new place to graze and water his sheep he met a burning bush. It's not every day you meet a burning bush except if you live near the wildfires in California.

But from somewhere in the midst of this burning bush Moses heard a voice. God called out to him “*Moses, Moses!*” That was the beginning of a new direction in his life. God had a mission for him to accomplish. He was to be God’s instrument for the salvation of God’s people in Egyptian bondage – a mission far bigger than anything Moses could have imagined or dreamed of.

God basically showed up and said, “*Hi Moses, remember me, I’m the God of your weary years and silent tears, the God of your ancestors. In fact, I’m the one who sat down with your great, great, great, great grandfather Abraham. Moses, I know you’ve carved out a comfortable space in Midian, but I’ve been troubled lately. I’ve heard their cry and I’ve seen the oppression. I’ve heard and seen what most folk don’t want to hear and see these days, and I’m here to help you remember what your passion used to be before you took your eyes off the prize and exchanged your mission for the comforts of Midian.*”

Living in Midian - a suburb of Egypt, Moses was close enough to benefit from its business but far enough away to insulate his conscious from some outrageous injustices being perpetrated upon his people.

In a similar way, we are like Moses, living comfortably well but not in close proximity to injustice. But, if we pay attention, God points out injustices to us - violence, the poverty, unemployment, the and incarceration especially of minorities, the numbers of students drop out of school, blatant sexual discrimination, and so on.

You get the picture. If we are sensitive to these things that God shows us shouldn’t we be challenged to respond as Moses did and return to Egypt to do something?

A little story: A few years ago I visited a flower shop frequently where they had ½ price flowers on Friday. I became friends with one of the employees and we conversed extensively. One day while she was busy arranging flowers for me she realized that she knew the church where I worked - one with which the church did business. She couldn’t stop praising this church. “*They are so loving and kind. They accept you as you are. They do so much work for the community. You are so fortunate to be with them.*”

The lady in the flower shop indicated by her words that people watch the behavior and the actions of “faith” communities. What we do and say is noticed!

I suggest that we are called to be “Moses” people and to do “Moses” work.

What would Moses do today?

- Would he have been out in Charlottesville protesting?

- Would he be working for zoning laws in states where any land can be developed at the right price?
- Would he be speaking out for environmental protection laws?
- Maybe he would go to City Council Meeting or be part of a civic association, write the News Journal, or twitter, call his congressional representatives.
- Most importantly he would be able to answer God's call to move people from a place of oppression – regardless of its format to one of promise. That is the call to the community.

This week I received the newsletter of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship some of the articles were headed: Climate Justice Working Group, Challenging Racism Working Group, and Gun Violence Prevention. I would say that this is Moses work.

Have you had a “burning bush” moment in your life? I asked that in Mug and Muffin this week and people said that hardships in life were times when God got their attention: disease, family difficulties, relationships - experiences that brought God into close focus - up close and personal.

If you, personally would think about this in your own life, and identify such a time, could you see a way in which your life changed direction?

“Maybe,” you say.

I would suggest that losing your newest pastor recently was a burning bush moment for the church. How could that change the church's direction? What new thing could be brought from this event?

I would call people who hear God's call and work for the community Moses people doing Moses work. The florist noticed what I perceive a Christ like community strives to be – one made up of peacemakers, where peace is not just simply the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice in all of its complicated forms.

This story of Moses is a powerful theological reminder of the God who remembers the pain and prayers of God's people, those who are oppressed, suffering, and struggling, and then the God who acts in and through the events of history to affect the liberation and emancipation of those people.

This story is also a touching reminder that much of God's liberating action if not most of it is accomplished through the activity of human hands, heads, and hearts.

Moses was not only invited to remember the God who would bring this about; he was not only

invited to celebrate this God who would bring this about but he was invited to act!

Martin Luther King was a Moses man. His prophetic model invites us to “*choose the high road of community rather than opt for the low road of human chaos.*” He stood among Jesus’ followers who faced the worst that life could bring and still loved, hoped, proclaimed good news, pursued peace and sought justice. Those are things that we as a church – a faith community, and we, as individuals are called to do.

My charge today would be to stand with Moses and with Jesus and respond to the world’s needs in whatever way you can.

PRAYER:

Gracious God, now fill us with your vision of how we should live together. Guide us and instruct us along the way, as we in this community of faith and as your sons and daughters follow Jesus, living this day and every day in the name of Jesus, our Supreme Peacemaker, AMEN.