

Fifteen hundred years before Christ, God brought Israel up out of Egypt, from slavery to liberation, from emptiness to fullness, from darkness into the light. This began with God's call on one man's life: Moses. I want to talk about Moses' call by God and what you and I might take away from it as regards our own relationship with the Lord and with one another.

PRAYER

READ Exodus 3:1-10

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "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 surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

The back story is familiar. Moses was raised by Pharaoh's daughter amidst great wealth and the idols of the Egyptians. Nonetheless, he grew up knowing he was a Jew, and he was proud of that. As he visited his people who were enslaved by Pharaoh, he killed an Egyptian who beat a fellow Jew. Thereafter, Moses was hunted by the Egyptians and he cast himself into self-imposed exile.

The text for this morning's message finds Moses in the mountainous desert region of southern Arabia, herding his father-in-law's sheep. He'd been in exile for 40 years. On a particular day, he may've been sitting against a rock enjoying a cool one as the sheep grazed when he saw a bush spontaneously burst into flames. To his surprise, the bush did not burn up.

We read, **Exodus 3:3-4, Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."** ⁴ **When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."**

Have you ever been out someplace, like a restaurant, and you heard someone call your name? "Hi, Richard.... Hi Cathy...." It's startling, isn't it. And you think to yourself as you glance around, "Someone here knows me." And you think, "I hope they didn't see me dribble soup down my chin."

Our names are a powerful part of who we are. They're connected with our sense of identity. When God called Moses by name, He was saying, "I know who you are." Indeed, the Lord knew everything about Moses, even the murder he had committed in Egypt.

And Moses said, **"Here I am."**

Other Bible characters responded to God's call in the same way, men like Jacob, Samuel, and Isaiah.

"Here I am": The words are simple, but they are filled with meaning, a meaning that is deep and personal. In the Bible, when a person says, "Here I am," they mean, "I am listening" and "my heart is open."

Have you ever wondered about how your past experiences and decision have affected who you are today? I don't think we'd be human if we didn't. But such reflections can be depressing and heartbreaking.

I have invested money in things I later regretted, made decisions that later led to great embarrassment, and I've said things to people which all but destroyed my relationships with them. In the midst of my struggle, however, looking at life from Moses' perspective, I've discovered that the Lord never gives up on anyone.

We read, **Exodus 3:5, (God) said (to Moses), "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."**

The word "holy" identifies a person, place, or thing as something which has been set apart for the work of God. That place where Moses stood was holy for God met him there and called him into his service to redeem Israel from slavery in Egypt.

This building here in which we worship is a holy place. But it is not holy because of the crosses, pulpit, altar, and other ornaments. It's holy because God is here with us. We hear his voice with the reading and preaching of his Word. He is present in the bread and the wine at his table. And his spirit communes with each one of us because of our baptisms. God is with us. Thus the "place on which you are standing is holy ground."

We read, **Exodus 3:6, (God) said (to Moses), "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."**

With these words, God was giving Moses his letter of reference. It had been 400 years since anyone had heard from the Lord, so he wanted everyone to know that he was the God – the one and only God – who had given their forefather, Abraham, the promises they had been longing to see fulfilled for many generations. Brothers and sisters, we worship a God who has a track record, a history of redemption.

Indeed, our faith is unique among the religious traditions of the world for it is rooted in a history with God since the beginning of time. When the Lord said, "I am the God of your father," the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he was saying, here's my resume, you know all about me, and you know you can trust me. I blessed your forefathers, and now I'm going to bless you.

By pointing Moses back to the work He had done, God filled him with the confidence and courage he needed to follow Him.

I'm sure Moses was relieved that God didn't look at his own track record. If he had, he may have come to the conclusion that Moses needed an anger management class at the very least, but certainly not an appointment as the liberator of his people.

God doesn't look at our history or track record, our pedigrees and framed diplomas when he calls us into service. Rather, he looks at himself. God is a God of grace and

mercy, a God of love and peace. And he takes great joy in doing the impossible, even bringing forth from ashes, diamonds.

We read, **Exodus 3:7-8, Then the Lord said (to Moses), "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians...."**

God empathized with Israel. He saw their afflictions, he heard their cry, he knew their suffering, and he felt their pain. That's what it means to empathize. And we read, God came "down to deliver them."

This May when I saw children on the streets in West Africa hungry and alone, I empathized, and I was troubled. After more than 60 years of development work on the continent, why are the children still orphaned in such great numbers and why are they still dying of malnutrition and disease?

When we see other people's pain, we feel it. It's a part of what makes us human. But how we respond to what we see and feel is what makes the difference. Either we look away and forget what we saw as quickly as possible, saying things like, "It's too much; I can't help; there's nothing I can do; the problem is too big."

Or we take action. Consider the Lord. He empathized with Israel's oppression and he decided to do something about it. He said, "**I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.**"

We read, **Exodus 3:10, (God said to Moses,) "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."**

That's just like God, isn't it?! All of these great plans, but who does the heavy lifting? Moses! It's like the CEO of a car manufacturer. The CEO has a press conference and he tells everyone about the new car he's going to build, but in fact he's not going to turn a single wrench! After all, he's got a whole team of engineers, draftsmen, suppliers, and assembly line workers who are going to actually build the car.

God could've liberated Israel with His angels. But instead, he equipped Moses with the tools he needed to succeed. In fact, God has always entrusted his work to people. He decides on a plan of action and then he sends us out to do it. Which means when people

complain about how God didn't save the malnourished children from dying, what in fact they're saying, in fact, is Christian's failed to fulfill the mission God had called them to.

Friends in Christ, God called Moses by name with full knowledge of who and what he was. So too he calls each and every one of us, for he doesn't look at what we were, but he anticipates what we will become.

Jesus said in **John 10:27**, **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."**

Like Moses, God knows our names, and He calls us, not from a burning bush but from his cross on Calvary and with his Spirit he appeals to our hearts. As the voice of a shepherd calls out to his sheep, the Lord calls out to you and me, and He leads us.

Jesus said in **Matthew 18:20**, **"where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."** Friends in Christ, the Lord is present among us. As He did with Moses, so too he comes to us in His holiness, setting us apart for a godly work.

God reminded Moses of his track record, that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Bible is God's letter of reference, the record of his might acts of redemption among a broken people. I bet I could go from pew to pew and each and every one of us could tell a story about how God has helped us in some way. Indeed, God has written his letter of reference on each one of our hearts.

The Lord has called each and every one of us by name with a full knowledge of everything we have ever thought, said, and done. But as it turns out, these things don't matter to him. What matters is how we respond when he calls out our names, and he already has. And our response is, **"Here I am!"** Please say it with me: (Here I am!)

Brothers and sisters, God has chosen you for a purpose, and He's made you His son, His daughter, an heir of His Kingdom with a mission to make a difference in this world he's given us.

This week may you be filled with assurance, knowing in your heart of hearts that the Lord knows your name and that he loves you as you are, his son, his daughter.

This week may you be filled with courage and confidence in your work in your home, school, job, and church, knowing that the Lord has called you to do that work in his love and grace.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.