



Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

THE CALL

Sermon for August 28, 2011

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 12: 9-21

Most of you know the story of Moses either because you have seen one of several movies (not necessarily true to the Exodus story) about him or you learned about his story from the Bible. In today's scripture we find Moses tending the fields, wandering with his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness. Suddenly he spots a burning, talking bush, a bush that was blazing, yet not burned up! "Moses, Moses." He responds to the call of his name in a typical ancient Middle Eastern way, "Here I am." Next the bush tells Moses to remove his sandals as he is standing on Holy Ground. The voice continues: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face out of fear and awe. God goes on to discuss his awareness of the suffering of Israelites in the land of Egypt and how God has decided to rescue them. Next is the big shock! God has chosen Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. Can you imagine the panic that's about to set in? Remember he murdered an abusive Egyptian before he escaped from Pharaoh's land. Besides the anxiety of the murder, Moses is not a guy that has a lot of self confidence. Actually it is quite common in these Biblical Call scenes for the person to feel unworthy and to make an excuse why he can not go. Moses lists 4 excuses before he finally just says in chapter 14:13, "O, my Lord, please send someone else."

Let's not get too much ahead of ourselves. In our reading Moses asks two big questions: WHO AM I and then to God, WHO ARE YOU. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" I wonder if he has identity problems. He was raised by his biological mother, pretending to be just a Hebrew woman who needed some work when she was hired by the Pharaoh's daughter to be the wet nurse. He was adopted by the Pharaoh's family. I'm not sure when he realized he was not Egyptian. In Exodus 2:11, it reads, "One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinfolk." So although Moses was reluctant to answer God's call, his experience in Egypt and his relationship with the Pharaoh's family gave him some special expertise. Also it is obvious from his past that he has a deep sense of justice, a desire to intervene for the mistreated. So



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Moses is thinking about the possibility of answering God's call, when suddenly he wonders about what he should tell the people about who sent him with this good news. So the next question Moses asks God, WHO ARE YOU. "If you are the God of the ancestors of the Israelites and they ask me your name, what should I say?"

God responds "I am who I am" and my midrash Internet group went wild this week in their discussion about the translation of these words God said. Thom Shuman says the Hebrew is difficult to translate, because the ineffable God is not easy to define. He sees that as evidence that God and God's story "will not come across as logical, rational, or with an easy-to-assemble set of directions and explanations." Listen to Thom: "What's your name?" Moses asks. "Well," says the Mystery, "most days, I-am-who-I-am; but on alternate Tuesdays, I like "I-will-be-that-which-I-now-am; in months that have only 30 days, you might call me "I-am-who-causes-to-exist." But always, always, I-Am-who-gives-life." A Rev. Anneke says the "I Am" is untranslatable in English and comprises present, past, and future of the verb in every sense. So it also means: I was and will be, I will be as I was, I will have been, etc."

I wonder if God was saying to Moses, "You can't know who I am or what my name is until you walk in my path, until you sign on to my mission for the world." And despite feeling inadequate, Moses trusts God and accepts that God will be with him. He's also hoping to get some help from his brother Aaron, so Moses signs on for God's mission. After traveling this path, Moses no longer has to ask who God is as experience reveals it then and now. "To know God, you have to go with God... You just can't sit back and expect to really know God, you have to get up off the couch and get in the game, take a risk, try something marvelous, reach for something you thought unachievable, step out onto the winding road the end of which you can't see from your doorstep."¹

At this point I want to take some time for you to think about what God might be calling you to at this time in your life. It doesn't have to be a whole new vocation; it doesn't have to be anything related to your current or past occupation. Let me give you an example from our own congregation. Several months ago, Jeanne Bartlett got very interested in how to help the

¹ David Lose, from *Working Preacher* on Internet.



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homeless families in our area. As she explored the need, her interest matched up to the interests of the Deering/Hillsboro Ministerium. Her leadership helped them set up the Feed a Teen bags and Homework dinners. I believe that God was calling her, and us, to this project. Let's have some silence as you think about what may be now happening with you. Is the Spirit calling you? What do you feel God is trying to communicate to you? What task, what mission are you being called to? (silence) Anyone feel like sharing?

So many of us feel that we are not the type that God would call. Yet if we read the Bible carefully we will see that very few of those that God calls, including Moses, are made of the stuff of faith heroes and yet God uses these ordinary people to do great things. I believe that most of us are feeling a desire to give ourselves to something meaningful.

I want to move on now to a different concept of Call. We have been talking about being called to do something specific, meet a need whether that is building houses in Haiti, working at the food pantry, teaching Sunday School, or going to seminary to become an ordained minister. The Call I want to discuss now is the Call so well described in Romans about the way that Jesus and our faith is asking us to be, day by day wherever we are and whatever we are doing. I particularly like Eugene Petersen's translation in the Message and read parts of it here for you:

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. ...Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. Bless your enemies, no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. ...Don't hit bck; discover beauty in everyone. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. ..Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness."

My sisters and brothers, our world seems to put its faith in striking back rather than discovering beauty in every single one of God's children. If we treated our enemies as the scripture dictates—giving them food instead of bombing them, giving drink to the thirsty instead of striking them down, it



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might confuse and confound them. It might even lead to transformation, a change in them as we let the Spirit work through us. Instead we so often follow the world's way by striking back and calling that necessary for "justice" and in the meantime children starve and all ages get injured and killed. (Kate Huey) Fear and anxiety reign.

You and I are called to love each other, even those we don't like. This is not the kind of *eros* love we have for our intimates; it is agape love, a selfless love. This is the way I described it in my sermon on this passage in 2008: To love someone is not just being nice to them or catering to their likes and dislike. Loving is acting toward others in ways that help them experience some of God's goodness. It's not easy. Remember we don't have to invite them over for dinner or go to the movies with them. Thank goodness! It's hard enough to love those distant enemies such as Al Qaeda and it is evermore so much harder to love and bless someone who has personally done us wrong or threatened to harm us. To me loving in the way Jesus describes is doing whatever we can so that others can experience God. It's not for us to judge. This love that Paul is describing to the early Christian community in Rome as well as to us today is a love that is humble, an attitude that does not insist that our way is superior. It is a love that is authentic, genuine and unconditional—a love that is God. If all the Senators and Representatives in Congress who say they are Christian would take this reading of Paul and let it guide them, what a different political climate we would have today.

I have discussed two different Calls today. The first Call is hearing and responding more to the big picture of what God wants you to be and do. The last Call is more about how Christians are to live day by day. Maybe some of you may be thinking that either call is just too much for you to achieve. Remember transformation is God's job. Confidence in ourselves is not as crucial as having confidence in God. Remember Moses! Maybe you are thinking that there's no way you have it in you to do all these things listed in Romans 12. You are most likely right; however, Jesus said that with God all things are possible. So remember as you think about whatever kind of Call, the crucial think is not confidence in our selves but confidence in God. May you be open, listening and ready to follow! Amen!