

Sermon: Exodus 2:23 – 3:15
Spiritual Life of Moses

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Moses is my favorite person in the Bible. When Matt asked if I would preach on the spiritual life of someone in the Bible, I quickly said yes, but only if I could preach on Moses. Moses is one of those people in the Bible who is often filed into the “Biblical Hero” category and then passed over because we kind-of-sort-of know all about his greatness already. But I would argue that Moses isn’t a Biblical Hero because of his greatness; Moses is a Biblical Hero because of his ordinariness. This is why Moses is my favorite person in the Bible, because I can relate to him; I relate to Moses’ ordinariness.

Moses was born to a Hebrew woman, who loved him with all her being. Because of this love, she put him in a basket and sent him off, down the river. All sons born to the Israelites—the Hebrews—were to be thrown into the river and killed by decree of Pharaoh who lived in fear of the Israelites revolting against him and his rule. Moses’ mom could not kill him. Moses, in the basket, was placed in the river where he was carried off and eventually picked up by Pharaoh’s daughter who saves him and raises him. So Moses—the Hebrew, the Israelite, part of the very people who Pharaoh oppressed and lived in fear of—was raised in Pharaoh’s house. As Moses grew up, he saw the injustice between the Israelites and the Egyptians. In a fit of rage he kills an Egyptian and as a punishment Pharaoh seeks to have him killed. Soon after he kills the Egyptian, he finds himself mocked by the Hebrews who do not trust him. So Moses runs away a wanted man, rejected by his own people.

Moses goes to the land of Midian. This wasn’t an easy journey. Scholars believe that the journey between Egypt and Midian was more than 6,000 miles. This is not the story of an adolescent boy running away from his problems. This is a story of Moses leaving everything that is familiar to search for answers, seek repentance, and to find God. While in Midian, Moses marries, has a child, and becomes part of the Midian community. The Bible tells us a “long time” passes. So much time has passed that the Pharaoh who sought to have Moses killed has died and a new Pharaoh reigns.

This is where our scripture today picks up. We meet Moses travelling *beyond the wilderness* to Mt. Horeb, known as “The Mountain of God”. We have not stumbled across Moses mundanely wandering with sheep. Moses is on a pilgrimage; Moses is seeking out God. Moses has come to the place where God is known to be and he is not disappointed. An angel appears to Moses through a bush consumed by fire and from this bush God speaks to Moses. God has big plans for Moses!

Moses is hesitant at first—who wouldn’t be, if they stumbled across a bush that was simultaneously on fire, but not on fire—then God calls out to Moses, “Moses, Moses” and Moses eagerly replies, “Here I am!” God identifies that it is God speaking and then tells Moses the great plans to which God is calling Moses. And Moses’ reply is: “Wait! Who? Me? Who am I that you should send me?” and then Moses says: “I don’t even know who to tell them sent me!” and then he says, “What if they don’t believe me?” and then he says, “I’m not really good at speaking to people” and then he says “Wouldn’t you rather send someone else?” It is this Moses, full of doubt, fear, anxiety, uncertainty, well aware of his flaws; it

is this Moses whom God has handpicked for this important task. It is this ordinary person, who is not afraid to question God's sanity, who is not afraid to ask "are you sure?", who is not afraid to admit he feels lacking in every way; it is this person whom God calls to be the champion of the Hebrew people. This is why I love Moses! This is why I can relate to Moses! Moses stands in the presence of God and says "you can't be serious!"

Christianity, and faith in general, is often boiled down to simple steps: Believe. Follow. Pray. Love. These are simple monikers with huge implications. Faith is not a hobby that you do in your pastime. Faith is an active, dynamic, intentional commitment. What the story of Moses tells us is that we are the perfect people for the job. God loves us in spite of and because of our ordinariness. It is in partnership with God that we become extraordinary—extra ordinary, beyond ordinary.

As I read this story over again this week, it struck me that there was a three step process that Moses went through. Moses self-reflected, Moses sought out God (or listened for God), and then Moses acted.

As Moses' life crumbled around him, he left Egypt in fear. He landed in Midian and while there he took care of himself; he got his life in order. He left Egypt and went to Median. While in Median he didn't hide out, fixated on what Pharaoh was going to do to him. Instead, Moses married, had a child, created a healthy, sustainable life where he was thriving. What do we need to do to care for ourselves? How do we get rid of what is toxic in our lives and create a healthy sustainable life? For me, my New Year's resolution for 2017 was: To Make 2018 A Great Year! So what that meant for me was that I wanted to spend this year making sure I was the best version of myself; I wanted to tackle all the things I keep saying that I would do "tomorrow". I got a physical and made sure I was taking care of my health. I looked at my finances to make sure I was being wise with my money. I reevaluated my career and made sure I was in place where I can thrive and where I am excited to come to work every day. These are just things that are pertinent to me. What is pertinent to you? How can you best care for yourself?

Second, Moses sought out God, which meant that he intentionally listened for God. Where do you encounter God? How do you hear God? Moses went on a pilgrimage to a place where he best heard God. And then he listened for God. I oftentimes find myself saying "Okay, I need to get through my to-do list and then I have thirty minutes set aside for God...so if you're going to speak to me God, it would be ideal if you could do it in those thirty minutes." What does it look like to live with a constant posture of listening for God? I don't think that means that we need to sit in meditation all day, but I think we can be mindful of where we encounter God in our everyday lives. Are you overlooking the burning bush that is right in front of you?

And then lastly, Moses acts. And I think this is the most important part. When Moses acts, he doesn't passively say "Okay God, whatever you say, I'm at your beck and call." Moses has a conversation with God. *Moses has built a relationship with God*, so that when God calls, Moses listens and isn't afraid to say "Let me make sure I have this straight". If you get nothing out of what I say today, remember this: we worship a big God, *God can handle anything we throw at God*. God welcomes our conversations when we say, "Are you for real?! You want me to do what?!", because God is not asking us to work on our own, God is asking to work through us. The task that seems impossible for Moses *is* impossible for Moses...if Moses were working alone. But Moses is working with God, and *nothing* is impossible for God. Who are we to think that we are the one case that God cannot handle?

So look at your life: What do you need to do to make you into the best version of yourself? What do you need to do so that you hear God when God is in the burning bush in front of you? What do you need to

do to be ready to say “here I am” when God asks to work through you? And remember this is not a one time process, this is a process that we are constantly moving through throughout our lives.

In the 1991 dark comedy *What About Bob*, actor Bill Murray plays Bob Wiley, a psychiatric patient who suffers from numerous phobias and ailments that leave him practically paralyzed with fear. He has been passed around from doctor to doctor as each medical professional becomes desperate to rid themselves of his obsessive, neurotic behaviors. The movie begins with Bob meeting a new doctor, Dr. Leo Marvin—played by Richard Dreyfuss—and the two hit it off. Their appointment is going well until Bob discovers that Dr. Leo Marvin is going on vacation for the next month and will not be seeing patients while on vacation. As a consolation prize Dr. Leo Marvin gives Bob a copy of his new book *Baby Steps* and tells Bob he will see him in a month. Flash forward a day and Bob, in the throws of a panic attack, finds out that Dr. Leo Marvin and his family are vacationing at Lake Winnepesaukee. Of course Bob goes to Lake Winnepesaukee where Dr. Leo Marvin’s family falls in love with him. As the days progress, Bob slowly overcomes his phobias, while Dr. Leo Marvin gradually loses touch with reality and has a breakdown.

One of the themes of this movie is the term “baby steps”. As Bob, who is crippled by his fear, seeks to find Dr. Leo Marvin, as he seeks to be part of this family, as he seeks to take back control of his life, he does so by “baby steps”. The first step is taking “baby steps” out of the office, then “baby steps” onto the elevator, then “baby steps” into the bus, then “baby steps” to Lake Winnepesaukee.

When we take a look at ourselves and try to evaluate our inward reflection, when we’re listening for God, and acting on God’s call, this is going to look different for each one of us. Perhaps you’re really good at the selfcare part. Or perhaps you’ve heard God’s call, you’re just having a hard time making the leap to action. Or perhaps you’ve got some hard work to do in the listening department. Or perhaps you are like me and forget that God can handle anything we throw God’s ways. I encourage you to take “baby steps”. Remember that the big picture is daunting, but each step is important, impactful, significant, and manageable. Moses was just an ordinary guy who allowed God to use him in some pretty remarkable ways!

And lastly, I want to point out something about our scripture reading from this morning. We started our reading today in Exodus at the end of chapter 2. Normally this passage starts at the beginning of chapter 3, but the end of chapter 2 says something really important. It reads: “The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. *God heard their groaning...God looked upon the Israelites and God took notice of them.*” Theologian Rebecca Blair Young writes, “While the Israelites were still groaning under slavery, God was already taking action. When the oppressed are crying out to God, God is already at work to set them free.” If you feel weighed down with burden, please know that God is already at work. And while you might not be able to see God’s action, I pray you receive the peace of knowing that God has heard your cry and God is big enough to handle your lamenting.

From the actions of the ordinary man named Moses, to the ears of the people who feel all too ordinary, may God work boldly. Amen.