

First Presbyterian Church
Exodus 3:1-15, “The I AM”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, October 1, 2023

Over the last couple of years my kids have been
well and properly introduced to the cruelty of “choosing teams”
in PE.

Who gets on what team, unfair advantages,
working the system to be with your friends,
dreading the taunting when you’re on the losing side...
nothing’s changed much over the decades, to be honest.

Some people really want to be chosen first ...
but other people are actually *terrified* of being chosen first.
You’re worried about being too slow, not making the right decisions,
getting laughed at or singled out for something.

But if being chosen in PE feels like a lot,
how about being chosen *by God*?

As I think about it, why would God choose me?

I’m selfish.

I have a hard time focusing.

I get worn out in meetings.

I don’t have a good eye for detail.

I’m easily irritated and low on patience.

I talk about a lot more innovation than I really put into practice.

I don’t go out and meet new people to come into the church.

I raise my voice and speak in unkind ways when I get upset.

I have times of doubt and questioning about what God is really up to.

Why would God choose me?

For that matter, why would God choose you?

I mean, let’s be honest, right? You’ve got your own list.

Well, first of all, there’s more to us than our list of negatives, okay.

But even just focusing on the negative – we’re not alone.

Here in Exodus, Moses, one of the great heroes of Israel, is informed that he has been chosen by God. And to be honest, he's having none of it.

In chapter 3 Moses meets the Angel of the Lord in a spectacular encounter that I will look at closely a little later.

When he hears that God wants Moses to go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel up from Egypt ... he wonders why God would choose him.

Five times Moses objects in one way or another in chapters 3 & 4:

- Objection #1: "Who am I? (3:12)
- Objection #2: Who are you? "What is your name? (3:15-15)
- Objection #3: What if they don't believe me? (4:1-2)
- Objection #4: Please, my Lord, I'm not a man of words... (4:10-12)
- Objection #5: Please, my Lord send someone else! (4:13-17)

Moses thought he was a failure, thought he had let everyone down, thought he must have been saved from the river by mistake, thought he was a murderer on the run, Moses thought he ... was unchoosable.

At the conference I attended last spring on the book of Exodus, I met a pastor named Michelle Jones from Portland. I quickly learned that Michelle had a way with words that goes far beyond my own.

As our group of pastors reflected on this passage together, she comes out with this gem right off the cuff:

"God chooses the unchoosable to do the undoable."

Following Michelle's lead I'm going to add that God takes Moses the unchoosable to a place that's impossible and reveals a name that's unchangeable.

So back to the passage, Moses is taking his sheep on a walk and it's a looong walk. He goes way out into the wilderness that just happens to be on the Sinai peninsula on the other side of the Red Sea from Midian and Egypt.

When he's out there he goes up on a mountain
and at the top of the mountain there is a bush.

The bush is unusual, though –
it's burning and yet not being eaten up by the flames.

From this not-quite burning bush, the messenger of Yahweh speaks.
“Moses ... Moses!”
And Moses says, “Here I am.”

Yes, but where exactly is he?

Moses is on a mountain that goes by three names in the Old Testament:
Horeb, the Mountain of God, and Mt. Sinai.

It's a special place. But the vision of this burning bush brings to mind
a place that is even more special than Mt. Sinai.

Careful readers of Genesis will recognize that what Moses sees
is very similar to what a person would see when standing
outside the Garden of Eden.

[Use a sheet to draw a map of Eden & Sinai: mountain, tree, partner, flames]

If we understand the symbolism of this imagery,
then we also understand the reason for the next thing spoken to Moses:
“Take off your sandals for the place you are standing ... is holy ground.”

God has chosen the unchoosable and put him in a place that is impossible:
at the doorstep of paradise, the Garden of Eden.

Now I don't think we are to understand that this is the actual place
where God placed Adam and Eve but rather
that in the face of the curse of sin,
God is undertaking a recreation project,
in which Moses will be God's chosen partner
to represent Israel.

It's here that God tells Moses
that the outcry of the children of Israel has been heard by their creator,
and they. will. be. redeemed.

God will take them out of Egypt and place them in a land
flowing with milk and honey
the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
so many generations before.

Not only that, but Moses will be the one
who breaks the news to Pharaoh and walks the people out of Egypt.
to worship God on the very mountain that Moses
is currently standing on!

God says,
**“And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you:
When you have brought the people out of Egypt,
you will worship God on this mountain.”**

Well now that's something. Moses was standing, at that very moment,
in a special place. In the future, God would bring him back to that place,
but not alone – the entire people of Israel would join him there,
and worship God together.

God chooses the unchoosable to do the undoable,
in a place that's impossible.

This is where we hear Moses' first objection.
He says, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh
and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

God says in v. 12, **“I will be with you.”**

That's the heart of it. God will be with you in your calling, in your future.
What a difference it makes to know that we do not go
through the life God calls us to on our own!

It's not me with all my flaws trying to make everything work all on my own.
It's God showing God's power through a broken person like me
through someone like you.

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church that God's power is made perfect in weakness, and that is exactly what we see at work here with Moses.

Moses has all kinds of objections about his weakness, and unfitness,
Moses has memories of his terrible mistakes from the past,
but the deep truth he needs to accept is that *he does not go alone.*

But Moses isn't there yet.

He says, "I'm about to go to the children of Israel and tell them,
'The Elohim, the god of your fathers has sent me to you.'
And they'll say to me,
'What is his name? What will I say to them?'"

And Elohim said to Moses, "Tell them, *I will be who I will be.*"

And in v. 15 we read (from Tim Mackie's translation),
"And Elohim again said to Moshe,
"Thus you will say to the children of Yisrael,
'Yahweh (יהוה), the Elohim of your fathers,
the Elohim of Avraham (the God of Abraham),
Elohim of Yitzhak (the God of Isaac),
and Elohim of Ya'akov (the God of Jacob),
he has sent me to you.'"

In using the name "I am" (Yahweh)
God is telling Moses and Israel
that the God of the present moment is with them forever.
Because the present moment is always with us as time moves on,
this is also a promise that I AM will continue
to be with them into the future no matter where they are.

By connecting this name of God with the one who made a covenant promise
with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel will understand that
the Almighty Power who rescues them from Egypt
is one and the same
as the God who was with the Patriarchs of Israel.

Whatever changes may come,
the future will not be disconnected from the past.

So we've got the present and the past.

The last lines in v. 15 look ahead **"This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me from generation to generation."**

So now we can say

that God chooses the unchoosable to do the undoable
in a place that is impossible
through a name that is unchangeable.

In all these times and places, has been, is, and will be I AM, "Yahweh."

Israel considered this name to be so holy, so set apart,
that it was never spoke aloud.

Whenever they would read their Creator's name "Yahwah" or "I AM"
they chose to say out loud, "the LORD."

And just so, anytime you see the "the LORD" in all capitals
written in your Bible that is a way of
honoring this tradition of reading
"Yahweh" but saying, "the Lord."

This is God's name forever.

So we come back to the original question: Why would God choose me?
Why would God choose you?

We are so focused on our faults and inabilities

but what we need to be focused on is the incredible
love, grace, perseverance, power, and commitment
of the great I AM who has chosen us!

And so we see that God chooses the unchoosable to do the undoable
in a place that's impossible
and reveals a name that's unchangeable.

You are chosen by God to share in God's redemptive love through Christ.