

Exodus 3:1-12, 4:10-13 ~ Mark 1:16-20
 Can Your Hear God Calling? Activating our Spiritual Gifts
2nd of 3 Sermon Series: *Were You Calling Me?*
 6th Sunday of Easter ~ Mother's Day ~ May 14, 2023
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Introduction to First Scripture Lesson, Exodus 3:1-12, 4:10-13

Perhaps you are among the millions who jumped for joy this week at the release of the new open-world video game "Tears of the Kingdom" in the Legend of Zelda series. If so, the story you are about to see in 3-D from Exodus chapter 3, may remind you of the pop-up map that came with the original game nearly 40 years ago. You are invited into the ancient world of Moses, where a new King had arisen over Egypt who did not know Joseph. Times had gotten very bad for the Israelites, now captives under Pharaoh. That's where our story begins today with all the "Breath of the Wild" sparks of exploration, discovery, and puzzles to solve. But this adventure is real and it's part of *our* story. It's also part of Jesus' story. It happened about 1250 years before Jesus was born to Mary. And it goes like this...

Sermon

How could a murderer turned dutiful son-in-law shepherd named Moses, become the person who would lead the uprising and escape of the Hebrew slaves from bondage in Egypt? And how did a poor fisherman named Simon, who didn't even have a boat to fish with, become one of Jesus' most trusted disciples? Yes, Simon was the disciple whom Jesus would rename Peter, because '*petros*' is the Greek word for rock. The fisherman turned rock on whom Jesus would build his church. And how can our 145-year-old church called FPC Marshfield, become an ever *more* vibrant beacon of God's Light and Love for *all* creation this summer of 2023, when I am away on sabbatical for three months?

While the complete answers to these questions are known only to God, the two "call stories" you just heard shine a light on some of God's basic operating procedures that are still operating today. This morning we will consider how our creator, sculptor God works that divine chisel to set the angels inside of us and inside of our church, free. Last week I told you that story about the day when Michelangelo was laboriously pushing the large, heavy rock down the street and his neighbor asked him what in the world he was doing. So today we can imagine that when God looked at the fugitive Moses, and when Jesus looked at those scruffy fishermen, the divine eye could see the angel hidden inside each of those rocks. But then what?

Let's take a closer look at the divine strategy in play here, not for open-world video games, but for hands-on, live action to save the world. Today rather than playing "Breath of the Wild" or "Tears of the Kingdom," (Okay, you online listeners may be doing that right now), God has another adventure in store for us. Instead of the Zelda series hero, "Link" we have Moses straying from the path, embarking on a side quest, that becomes the main quest. Next, we have Jesus morphing four fishermen into a brand new "catch and release" fishing adventure that no longer involved a boat or even water.

Today, in this second sermon of this series on activating our spiritual gifts, we are drilling down on the "Chiseler." That's right, aka: God. We are looking at these stories to give us clues about *how* God, the one with the chisel and the ball pein hammer, seems to go about setting free our better angels. The world needs them, now! Our spiritual gifts, when activated, engaged, and synced, are the key to breaking the log jams that stymie and threaten to undo us. Gifts that God has given to every single one of us. Last week's scripture and sermon taught us that truth. Whether we believe it or not, this is part of the Good News that the children were singing about. "We are bringing Good News of a Living Savior." But did we hear it?

The Good News is this: God is calling YOU, to live in the Light of our Living Savior. To live and move and act like people who know that LOVE WINS. And we know that this kind of winning, this type of victory, is not a one and done event or achievement. God raised Jesus from the dead once and forever, yes. But God's call to us is *not* a one and done. God is calling us every day, everywhere, all the time. Particularly when you least expect it. God is funny that way.

Did you notice how in both of these stories, Moses and Simon were doing their very ordinary jobs on a very ordinary day? Moses was out in the wilderness, trying not to fall asleep from boredom, tending a flock of sheep that he did not own, but had married into by dusting up a few shepherds threatening Jethro's daughters at the well one day. Likewise, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, were out doing their jobs, fishing in the sea of Galilee. We know less about their backstory. But we can guess that the day Jesus called them, their calloused hands were casting those nets for about the hundredth time that day. Aching muscles, sore backs. Just wishing for a decent catch and for the sun to set so they could be done for the day.

One writer has called this move of God's, "the surprise invasion of the ordinary." Nothing special about the time or the place. Mt. Horeb was not the tallest mountain; everybody fished the sea of Galilee. Nor did Moses or Simon appear to be "hero" material from looks of them or their resumes. They were actually "hot messes" as we say these days. So, what did God see in them? Along with their unique mix of talents, skills, and perspectives needed for the job at hand, they had something else. Something that is in critically short supply right now, particularly as we are emerging on the other side of the COVID-19 Pandemic after three long years. It's something that has been evaporating and there is no vaccine, bivalent or otherwise, to magically inject it back into us. It sustained Moses and Simon Peter through all their trials and tribulations.

Truthfully, even with the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency officially ending last Thursday, the deficit of this one thing seems to keep growing with devastating consequences. It is even larger than our national debt. What is that one thing? Yes, I am talking about our growing lack of trust: Trust in God, trust in one another, trust in the institutions upon which we all depend. Moses and Peter trusted God. Yes, they definitely had their moments of doubt and denial. We all do. And still, they remembered and returned to their who God had called them to live in the Light. They remembered that "My life is *not* just about me." They followed the voice that called them out, that called them to follow not their way, but God's way.

Did you know that's why we are called a "church." That word "church" comes from the Greek word that means literally: "to be called out." Yes, by the voice of God. To be about God's work: to be called out and called together to act with justice; to love tenderly, to serve one another, and to walk humbly with God.

Why listen to me blather on, when we have Moses and Simon Peter backstage ready to tell their own stories, live? Get ready to time travel in more ways than one. Straight from New York, it's the Late Show with David Letterman!

DL: Good evening and welcome to our show. We have a great line up tonight. These men were not easy to get to come on the show. They were way out, I mean way out there, you know... not in Manhattan. They weren't even in New Jersey... Not that I would have gone to New Jersey to get them. The first one, Moses, was way out in the wilderness. No cell phone tower for miles. Or for millennia. He gets his signal from *another* kind of tower. He will tell you about his "Close encounter of the first kind."

And Simon Peter, our second guest, well... you've seen those pick-up trucks with the bumper sticker, "I'd rather be fishing"? That's Pete. He used to fish for fish--but not anymore. Once *he* got the call, his fishing no longer involved flies or worms, or lures. He's obsessed with this new kind of fishing. Reeling them in: catch and release into the sea of grace and compassion.

These men are here tonight to tell us about their calls from God. Stay tuned: you will also hear my newest "Top Ten List." Top Ten reasons you might want to say "NO" when God calls you into action. First, Let's give a hearty round of applause for the amazing grand champion of the God-hero round up, Moses, himself!

DL: Hello there, Moses! Thanks for being on my show! Shalom!

Moses: Shalom to you and to everyone in the audience.

DL: I know you have a long story, and we don't have much time, so I'd like to skip right to that day you saw the bush burning and heard the call from God.

Moses: Ah yes, I remember it well.

DL: So, set it up for us: were you in a sacred place at a special time, offering up a sacrifice to get the ball rolling?

Moses: Well, no, not really... I was just out there, *way* out there tending the sheep of my father-in-law, Jethro. Just like I always did, every day since I ran from, I mean left, the palace of the Pharaoh.

DL: Ran from? What was your rush?

Moses: Well, I'd rather not say, just that I was, in fact, running for my life.

DL: Okay, so you saw the bush, heard the voice, and said, "sure God, whatever."

Moses: Well, no. I had no idea why God called me to do this job. I was a sub-par shepherd. I'd already killed a guy. And I was no leader. Certainly not a speaker. I was sure there had to be some mistake.

DL: But I thought God didn't make mistakes.

Moses: Right—so I realized maybe I was the one who wasn't seeing it. Besides he did make me a promise.

DL: Well, that's good. Did he promise to make you a great speaker like Billy Graham or Martin Luther King Jr?

Moses: No, he didn't. He promised me the one thing, the only thing, I needed.

Letterman: A megaphone?

Moses: No. God promised to be with me always, to lead me, to guide me.

DL: And that was it? You trusted him with that promise alone?

Moses: Well, yes. I trusted God to make good on the promise. *And* I got a trick staff that could morph into a snake as a little bonus gift. That was pretty cool. Then I got forty years of God making good on God's promise... But you said you didn't have time for all that.

DL: That's right, in fact it's time to bring on my next guest, Simon. But first I have my "Top Ten List" inspired by you! Top Ten reasons you might want to say "NO" when God calls you into action. (But I will cut it down to my top five, to increase my ratings with this crowd):

- #5. You are really more spiritual than religious.
- #4. You prefer a step-by-step plan. Trusting God doesn't seem like a plan.
- #3. You don't think you are especially good at anything that God could use.
- #2. You like the world as it is. The status quo is your jam.
- #1. You don't want to discover the potential God gave you.

Now for my second guest, Simon Peter. The guy who left his nets immediately and went with Jesus.... Wait, wait, what? He's left the studio? Sorry to tell you, Peter's gone fishing for people again. I guess that's what happens when you hear God calling you. Well, that's all for our show tonight. And now for a word *with* our Sponsor, let us pray...

*Parent God, Merciful Redeemer, and Friend,
May we know you more clearly,
Love you more dearly,
And follow your call more nearly,
day by day. Amen.*