

A Sermon Preached by Gregory Hall at Clarence Presbyterian on January 16, 2022

THE CALL OF MOSES

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Exodus 3:11

A man once paid a visit to his local psychologist. When the doctor asked him, what had prompted the visit, the man said, "I'm suffering from an inferiority complex."

In the next several weeks, the psychologist put his new patient through an intensive battery of tests. Next came a long wait while the test results were tabulated and an appropriate diagnosis made.

Finally, the doctor called the man and asked him to return to the clinic. "I have some interesting news for you," the doctor began. "What's that?" asked the man.

"You do not have an inferiority complex," the psychologist explained. "You just are inferior."

I believe that many of us suffer from feelings of inferiority. I believe that these feelings of being somehow unworthy can often keep us from being better Christians. At many points in our lives we feel that we just do not have enough will power, drive or moral character to be of any use to God. As a result, we remain lukewarm in our faith and miss opportunity after opportunity to serve God.

Our reading of the Bible only tends to make matters worse. When we read the Bible in a superficial way it comes out sounding like a comic book filled with super heroes who have unsurpassable qualities. There seems to be no way that you or I could hope to measure up to these great men and women. We cannot slay giants like David or suffer death like Stephen.

We can mollify our consciousness by saying that things have changed since the time of the Bible. Life has gotten more complicated these days. Yet when we take a close look at the people in the Bible, they are not all that different from you and me. The times have certainly changed, but the people of long ago were faced with many of the same fears, doubts, and weaknesses of character, as you and I face in our lives.

Last fall we studied the essential stories from the Book of Genesis. Today we begin our winter focus on the stories of Moses and David. In our Old Testament lesson for today we read the story of the call of Moses found in the Book of Exodus. In this passage Moses experienced the same sense of doubt and unworthiness as you and I in the face of God's call upon our lives.

Moses was born into slavery, but had the good fortune to have been raised in the household of Pharaoh. He had been forced to flee Egypt when he killed an Egyptian slave driver who was beating a Hebrew slave. He fled into the desert to the land of Midian. He married and settled down to the peaceful life of tending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro.

One day while he was out in the fields, Moses came upon a strange sight: a bush appeared to be on fire but it was not being consumed. He went over to see what this was all about; when he came close to the bush a voice came out of the fire. The voice called to Moses by name and proceeded to identify itself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God went on to say that he saw the suffering of his people. He saw how they had been beaten and killed by the Egyptians. Thus, Moses was told that he had been chosen to go and lead the people out of Egypt. Moses was told that he was the one to bring freedom to his people.

Now notice the reaction of Moses to this message. He did not act like it was good news. He did not thank God for this opportunity for service. He did not begin to act like any hero we have seen in the movies. He did not look for the nearest telephone booth to change into his superman outfit. No, it is clear Moses did not like what he was told at all.

We can almost see all the doubts building up in his head. I am just a shepherd; how can I lead my people out of Egypt. So, Moses turns to God and asks the question you and I raise time and time again ourselves, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" Then in the next chapter and a half, Moses makes the case to God why he is not the person for this task. He gives all the reasons why God ought to find someone else. Moses raises up all his own failings and weaknesses as reasons why he is unworthy of the task God is calling him to perform.

The first objection which Moses raises is that he just does not know God well enough. He says **If I go to the people in Egypt and tell them that the God of your Fathers has sent me and they ask what is his name, what shall I tell them?** Names in the ancient world were considered more important than they are today. It was thought that if you know a person's name then you had a special relationship with them. Moses was asking God for a new name for God, which would indicate that Moses had received a new revelation, that he had some superior faith. Moses felt his faith and knowledge of God were unworthy of the task he was called to.

This is a feeling that is not uncommon for many of us. We often feel that we just do not have enough faith to act. We all too often feel that we just do not know enough about the Bible, we are not theologians, we do not pray enough to be of any use to our heavenly Father. We sometimes compare ourselves to others who seem to tell a compelling story of how they came to faith with some dramatic experience. Sometimes our faith can seem small and petty compared to others.

We can sometimes feel that our faith is just not adequate. We are reluctant to act in faith choosing rather to wait until our faith is stronger or our knowledge of God is more complete. Surely others are of more use to God than me.

God answers Moses' request for a name by giving a response that scholars still have not been completely able to figure out. God says **I am who I am** or **I will be who I will be**. These are only two of the possible translations of God's response. But whatever the translation the clear message from God is that he defies definition. God cannot be fully known. He is greater than our finite human minds can grasp. We can only know God in part; our faith cannot completely

penetrate the mystery of God. God tells Moses that he must respond to the call with the knowledge that he has, for that knowledge cannot be complete.

So, we must act now with the knowledge that we possess. There will never come a time of perfect faith or complete knowledge of God. We are to respond with that faith that we now have.

Then Moses raises another objection. He says I am just not gifted with the right talents for the job. Moses says **I am not an eloquent man. I am slow of speech, I am not a fit spokesman for you, and no one will listen to me.**

Moses uses an excuse that you and I also use. There are many times that we feel that we just cannot be of any use to God because we lack talent or training. There are so many other people who have more ability than we do, let God use them. We just are not convinced that we have what it takes.

God does not allow this objection to stand, he says to Moses **I will be in your mouth and teach you what you should say.** This does not mean that suddenly Moses would be transformed into a great communicator, but rather that God would use the stammerings of Moses' mouth and make them sufficient for his purposes. God asks Moses to offer his limited talents and he would use them to accomplish his own ends. We know the rest of the story. We know that Moses was able to lead his people out of slavery, not because he was particularly talented or gifted, but rather because God was able to use the gifts Moses did have to his ends.

Moses was not through with his objections. His final complaint was that he was powerless. Moses felt that it would be hopeless for a poor shepherd to march into Egypt and tell the powerful Pharaoh to let his people go. Pharaoh was one of the most powerful people in the world, how could Moses hope to stand up to him.

Again, Moses sounds a lot like you and me. We too so often do not act because we feel we have little power. I am just a plain nobody and "you can't fight city hall" becomes not just an attitude but also a way of life. You and I so often feel that every problem, which we face, is bigger than we are. The result most of the time is that we end up not trying and nothing happens.

God answers this objection in what at first, appears to be a strange way. He tells Moses to throw his rod on the ground and it will turn into a serpent. This is a sign by which God is saying that I will provide the power. Success in God's work comes from relying on God.

Moses had to work through all of these objections in order to understand God's original answer to his question. God had answered him **I will be with you.** Moses' concern and ours with our lack of faith, of talent and our sense of powerlessness is really a concern with self. We think that in order to do God's will we must rely on our own resources.

This is the wrong focus. The simple promise of God is that he will be with us. When we seek to follow God, we are to rely on him to supply the power. The focus needs to be on God and

not ourselves. We should think not about what we cannot do, but rather what God can do. We should ponder not our own unworthiness but on God's completeness.

When Jesus lived on this earth, he chose people like you and me to be his disciples. Jesus did not choose the men and women who were the great religious leaders of his day. He did not go to the corridors of power to provide great leadership for his new movement. He did not call the captains of commerce to be his first followers.

No, Jesus chose fishermen, tax collectors and other plain people of the day. Paul tells us that we have this treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels. We are the earthen vessels. The first followers of Jesus were earthen vessels. Yet it was this simple band of ordinary folk who helped change the world. It was through their witness and work that the News of Jesus spread throughout much of the known world in one generation.

It was not because these disciples had extraordinary gifts but rather because God was at work in and through them. Countless people have followed these simple people across time and space in doing wonderful things for God. They held on to God's promise to be with them in all things.

Jesus has called you and me into his service. God has called each one of us to serve his kingdom. We might not be called to lead people out of Egypt, but God is calling you today to some act of service. It might mean delivering meals to those in need, it might mean sharing your faith with a friend, it might mean listening to a person who is hurting, it might mean giving of your money to help those who are poor, it might mean overcoming some temptation or addiction which has controlled your life for years, it might mean forgiving someone who has hurt you, it might mean to begin daily acts of prayer. It may seem hard for you to begin. It may seem impossible to attain, but we can do it because God is with us to give us power.

I believe that God is not silent. God continues to call men and women into his service. The Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware tells us:

The entire cosmos is one vast burning bush, permeated by the fire of the divine power and glory.

So may we say with Moses **“I must turn aside and look at this great sight.”** When we are open to God's call, the Spirit of God is at work in us. You and I can receive great power to accomplish his will, if we let God work in our lives.