Where Are You Standing?

Romans 12:9-21, Exodus 3:1-15
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – August 30, 2020
Rev. Michael F. Atzert

Moses had lived quite a life so far to this point. As you may know from reading the previous two chapters of Exodus, Moses was put into a basket after a decree went out that all firstborn males should be killed. He was "adopted" by Pharaoh's daughter and lived his childhood with her. After he had grown up, he defended one of his own people by killing an Egyptian and fled to be a foreigner in a strange land. Then, he "meets" his future wife, Zipporah, as he defends their rights to draw water from the well and begins to work for his father-in-law as a sheep herder.

Meanwhile, the Hebrews are being enslaved by the Egyptians. Their work is hard – it is brutal, and they are crying out to the Lord for some relief and respite. They want to be rescued from their life of oppression. They must wonder if their groans are being heard by God. Little do they know that God has heard them, and God is about to act through this foreigner, this sheep herder, this ordinary man.

We come to chapter 3 and read the familiar story of Moses and the burning bush. God appears to Moses while he is leading his flock through the wilderness. He arrives at Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel comes to him in the bush, which is aflame, but is not being consumed by those flames. The Lord calls to Moses out of the bush from the holy ground on which Moses stands. Moses is commanded to remove his sandals out of respect and reverence to that holy ground. Moses is given a task – a calling to deliver God's chosen people, the Hebrews, from the hands of Pharaoh.

But he is just a sheep herder. But the Pharaoh wants his head because of all he has done. But he is a foreigner and an alien and not skilled enough to do this. Moses

knows it all too well. He says to God, "Who am I?" Who is he that God should choose him? He has no special skills that would enable him to complete this task for God successfully. It might be – it will be – dangerous. He might get hurt or worse yet, he might lose his life. Moses has finally established himself in a new land. He has a new wife and a new life. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

God assures Moses that he has nothing to fear. God will be with Moses. God will give Moses what he needs in order to fulfill his calling by God. And God is giving Moses proof – a sign – that it will be so. Moses is not convinced. "What if they ask Who sent me? How can I tell them about You?" Moses clearly does not want to accept this call from God. He is standing on holy ground, but clearly, he was not feeling very holy.

Can you relate to this portrayal of Moses? For surely, we are normal folks. Most of us probably do not come from rich stock or special pedigree. We have each had our share of struggles and trials like Moses, perhaps not to the extent that he has, but we can sort of relate. They have been trials for us, nonetheless. What if God summoned us to holy ground and called us to serve Him in some way? It might be something great, maybe even to helping to save some nation of people. Or it may just be some surrender, requiring much from us, but something we believe we can attain with the faith we have.

As the news this week of the two storms hitting the Gulf became more of a reality, I was reminded that this week was also the 15th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. For the last number of years, that anniversary meant that I would email a dear friend who I first met in the days after Katrina. At my last church, the whole town united in the days and years following the storm and adopted a town in Mississippi where we provided over

$250,000 in support to them over a three year period. There were also 3 separate trips by high school students and two churches. God connected us with a pastor down in Mississippi who coordinated all of the efforts there, someone we had prayed for at that first meeting. It was a community-wide effort. This week, I re-read some of the emails from those early days as we were assembling and trying to figure out what we were supposed to be doing – what God was calling us to do.

For you see, none of what we did could have happened if not for the hand of God. The Task Force assembled was made up of the mayor and town council members (politicians), school administrators, Board of Education members, clergy, and other community leaders. Can you imagine? But we left all of the baggage at the door and worked together for a greater good. In many ways, I feel like this was my burning bush moment. I was not prepared or equipped to play a part in that effort. Only God could see to it that happened. My dear friend called me this week after she received my email. We reminisced and were in awe once again how lives were brought together by a storm. And thanked God that He was in control.

Although Moses questioned God, although Moses appeared to be afraid and uncertain about the huge task to which He was called, God showed Moses He was in control. "I AM WHO I AM." Whoa. Can you picture the scene of the majesty and the reverence and the power of God at that moment in Biblical history? If Moses ever doubted it, the Lord's authority in the I AM statement should have cleared it up for him. If the Hebrews ever doubted it, the Lord's tie to their ancestors – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – should have cleared it up for them.

This would not be the last time in his ministry that Moses would doubt. He continued to plead that God would send someone else, that God would take away the burden of serving God from Moses. However, God had called Moses to this task. And God continued to show Moses that He was in control every step of the way; that He would see Moses through these times and give him the words and the direction to fulfill His divine plan. Moses was indeed standing on holy ground – the holy ground of God's perfect will.

Friends, God is still in control today. And because He is in control, when God places a call on your life, He will give you the strength, the courage, and everything else in between in order to fulfill that call. All you need to do is show up and be faithful. I almost feel like we are standing at our own burning bush. Pick one of the issues facing our communities, our state, our nation. How can we come together – leaving all the baggage at the door, all those things that should separate us – and answer God's call to serve one another – to show the love of Christ – to honor one another above ourselves, as Paul wrote in the first Scripture reading? How do we take up our crosses in the midst of pandemic, division, storm cleanup and anger and show the hope of Christ? What if God called this congregation to something bigger and greater than we have ever considered? God may be preparing us for some great work for His kingdom. Will you be an agent for God? Where are you standing? Is it holy ground? Let us pray…

Loving, merciful and patient God, we thank You for those in the Bible who appear most like us - human, frail, and faithless at times. Guide us, we pray, to know that we stand on holy ground, we answer Your call, and we respond in obedience. Give us the strength to follow Your will – and help us to dream big. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.