

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:1-15

A flight nurse told this story about an experience she had while working one day.

"Our helicopter was called to transport an unconscious scuba diver to the" hospital.

During the flight, she came to and began kicking and yelling.

The rule in such cases is to keep the patient away from the pilot. So, the paramedic and I struggled to keep her on the stretcher.

"When we arrived at the hospital, I removed my flight helmet and tinted face shield so I could make eye contact with the patient. She looked at me and gasped, 'You're human!'"

The story of Moses has many twists and turns and even a surprise or two. So remarkable was Moses' life that it took four books in the Old Testament to tell his story. More is said about Moses in the New Testament than any other old Testament prophet.

Generations before Moses, there was Joseph and the time when his brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph's story did not end there. Eventually the tables turned for Joseph and he found himself in a prominent role in Egypt—a position that made it possible for him to save his family from certain starvation by moving them to Egypt. This is how Moses roots ended up in Egypt.

Four hundred years had passed since Joseph moved his family to Egypt. While they were in Egypt, this Hebrew family grew and grew and grew to over an estimated two million strong. Eventually the pharaoh of Egypt, considering the Hebrews to foreigners, felt threatened because their numbers were growing fast. So, He decided to make all the Hebrew people Egyptian slaves so as to control them so they wouldn't upset the balance of power.

Also, to slow down the population growth of the Hebrew people, Pharaoh instructed the midwives of the Hebrew women to kill all baby boys as they were being born. The midwives however, feared God and did not obey the Pharaoh's command. Of course, that meant the population of the Hebrew people continued to grow, and Pharaoh's anger led him to take more extreme measures. He commanded that every Hebrew boy born was to be thrown into the Nile river to drown.

It's into this setting that Moses was born. But, his mother was lucky enough to find a way to save him. She put him into a basket and placed it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter found him, felt sorry for him, and asked her father if she could keep him, to which he agreed. The baby's mother was chosen to nurse him and when he was weaned, he was given to Pharaoh's daughter as her son.

Moses grew up and began to observe how the Hebrew slaves—people of his own kind—were being treated and he didn't like it. One day he caught an Egyptian beating a Hebrew man. It made Moses so angry that he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. But the word got out of what Moses had done and he fled Egypt and went into hiding, working as a shepherd.

Now, our God is not one to just sit back and let us hide. When he has something in mind for us, he will try to get our attention. We might think of him as a God of surprises, and sometimes the surprises—well, let's say just may not be welcomed by us; particularly when He has a rather large assignment for us.

While we may want to do things for God, we may not appreciate the things he comes up with for us to do. Think of Abraham and Sarah who became parents when they were 100 years old. Sarah laughed at what seemed to be crazy talk—who would have thought it possible—they didn't.

Then there's Jacob who found himself wrestling with God one night. That had to seem like a bizarre surprise for him. And think of Joseph's brothers—they never imagined Joseph's dream would come true that they would one day bow down to him. Then there's Mary, never having had sexual relations, not even married yet and an angel shows up to tell her she is going to have a baby who happens to be our Savior, Jesus Christ. Surprise, Surprise!

For Moses, the surprise came while he was shepherding one day. God suddenly appeared on the scene through a burning bush with a surprise for Moses. Moses saw the bush that was burning, but strangely it was not being consumed. As would be the case for most of us, his curiosity was piqued. He needed to know more. He needed to take a closer look. "When the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to see, the Lord called him from the bush."

Did you ever notice that when God set the bush ablaze, he didn't choose a bush right in front of Moses? God didn't choose to speak through a bush that Moses was about to stumble upon. It was within sight, but at enough distance that Moses would have had to go out of his way to explore it. And he did. And it was this curiosity that brought Moses to this amazing burning bush, which turned out to be so much more.

Have you ever heard the saying, "curiosity killed the cat"? Well, that's not always the case now, is it? Curiosity brought Moses to an encounter with God. We never know where God is going to show up. He may show up in some of the most unlikely places. It's not that God doesn't want to be found; it's probably more the point that people tend to overlook God's presence, God's voice in the obvious places or circumstances. Our God is not one to give up on us even when we may be trying to hide something. We don't need to be perfect for God to reach out to us.

But wait, there's more. God speaks from the bush. He tells Moses to remove the sandals from his feet. This gesture is an ancient practice when entering a holy place of a divine presence. It is a gesture that honors the holiness of this ground, this mountain, and this God. Removing shoes as a show of reverence is a practice still in use in Islam and other religions.

However, Moses removing his sandals has another significance in light of Moses' earlier self-declaration which we read in Exodus 2:22. Moses said there: "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land." Who could blame him for feeling that way? If we turn to Exodus 2:14 we would read that the Hebrews had rejected Moses as one of their own. We know, also, the Egyptian Pharaoh sought to kill him (Exodus 2:15) after Moses killed the Egyptian harming a fellow Hebrew. The Midianites, whom Moses was living among while working as a shepherd, saw Moses as a foreigner, "an Egyptian", in fact. (Exodus 2:19). Moses found himself feeling not fully at "home" in any human community.

Taking off one's sandals is also a gesture in many traditional cultures that is associated with entering not only a worship space but also a home. Thus, here at the foot of the mountain of God, Moses the "alien," has at last found a true "home." Moses finds his true home not with humans but with God, the God of his ancestors, "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6).

There are many reasons today that cause some people to feel like outsiders—like they don't belong. Imagine how the people driven out of their homes by hurricane Laura must be feeling right now? Many returned to the destruction of everything they owned. As they grieve their loss, they may wonder, "where is my home?"

I always felt like an outsider when we went to visit my Old order Amish relatives. Yes, my grandmother was there; my aunts and uncles and cousins were there, but I didn't look the same as they did because I was not Amish. We arrived at their homes in a car—not a horse and

buggy. I had a lot of things they didn't have, but I was an outsider and their stares and their speaking in the German/Dutch that I did not understand only alienated me. It hurt.

As Christians we live in a world, a society that is not our home. Immorality, hatred, prejudice, selfishness are not characteristics nor a way of life in what is our home.

But, my friends, we all do have a home. And, I'm not talking about our home in the lifetime yet to come—our home in heaven. We have a home, here and now; our home is with God. Surely, there's a burning bush through which God is calling for our attention; and he's telling us to take our shoes off and make ourselves at home in him. This is God I'm talking about—God who wants us to **choose** to make our home in him.

We also learn from Moses' burning bush story that, in God, we are blessed with meaning for our lives. That's what happened to Moses. Okay, so maybe we won't be asked to go save and lead a large group of people out of slavery like Moses was called to do.

Throughout the years of your life, you already have answered God's call and helped to build his kingdom. But you're not finished. We continue to find meaning and purpose in our lives as we worship God, pray for others, show compassion for others, extend kindness to others—even those whom we might usually tend to avoid—and when we spread the gospel.

**We have meaning and purpose for our lives simply because we belong to God—the One who told us to call him the great "I Am."** "I Am" promises us, just as he promised Moses, to be with us and to help us with whatever he calls us to do. The only thing that holds us back from fulfilling our life's purpose is ourselves, our fears, anxieties, our avoidance, even the excuses that we are too old, or we have too many physical limitations. I have said it before and I will say it again, our lives have meaning and purpose serving God until we take our last breath.

Back in the days when fathers waited outside for the baby to be born, there were three men waiting for the joyous news. The first was informed by the nurse that his wife had twins. He told the nurse, "isn't that ironic. I pitch for the Minnesota Twins."

A few minutes later the second man learned his wife had triplet. The coincidence was that he worked for 3-M.

The third man panicked and raced for the door. He was stopped and asked what happened. "I work for a 7-11 store, and I'm getting out of here!"

Yes, our God speaks to us through burning bushes if we choose to look and listen and sometimes surprises us with purpose and meaning for our lives that we never imagined. But he backs up those surprise calls with the promise that we have a home in him, even now, and that home is filled with the guarantee that the Great I AM is there to help us and empower us as we fulfill his will for our lives. Amen.