

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-15

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

In 1995, Kirk Douglas suffered a debilitating stroke. Despite contemplating suicide, he fought back and began acting again. "No matter how bad things are, they can always be worse," he remarked one day several years later. "So what if my stroke left me with a speech impediment? Moses had one, and he did all right."

Yes, Moses did alright, but he didn't do it all alone. Moses' life from the moment he was born had 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 whole story. References to Moses are more frequently found in the New Testament than any other Old Testament character.

Today's story takes place in Egypt. We might wonder how Moses, a Hebrew man ended up in Egypt. That story begins generations before Moses. It begins with Joseph. If you know the story of Joseph, you may remember that he was not popular with his brothers. He was his father, Jacob's, favorite son. He also was a dreamer and his dreams that are recorded in the bible put his brothers in the position of being subservient to him. So, you might imagine that jealousy and anger were a big part of their family dynamics.

One day when Joseph was alone with his brothers, they decided to sell 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 all to Egypt. This is how Moses roots ended up in Egypt.

Four hundred years had passed since Joseph moved his family to Egypt. While in Egypt, this family grew and grew and grew to over an estimated two million strong. The pharaoh of Egypt, became concerned about the population growth of these foreigners. It created some angst in him. So, he decided to make all the Hebrew people, Egyptian slaves. He believed by doing that he could 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. Frustrated and angry, Pharaoh took more extreme measures and commanded his people to throw every Hebrew boy born into the Nile River to drown.

It was under this nightmare of a regime that Moses was born. Fortunately for him, his mother was creative and came up with a plan that she hoped would 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, asked her father if she could keep him, to which he agreed. The baby needed someone to nurse him. Moses' sister, who was watching this all take place, told Pharaoh's daughter that she knew someone who could nurse him, which just happened to be Moses' mother. 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, at least not at first, particularly when He has a rather large assignment for us. This was the case for Moses, which we will see later.

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, they became parents when they were 100 years old. Sarah laughed at what seemed to be crazy-talk, who would have thought it possible, they certainly didn't.

Then there was 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. And of course, there was Mary, a virgin and not yet married. She was visited by God's messenger, Gabriel who told her she was going to have a baby. And, as if that wasn't enough of a shock, her baby would be the Chosen One, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Surprise, Surprise!

As we heard read to us this morning, Moses received his surprise call while he was shepherding one day. God suddenly appeared on the scene through a burning bush. 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 to 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 of a distance that Moses would have had to go out of his way to explore it, which is what he did. It was this curiosity that brought Moses to this amazing burning bush, and he discovered that it 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 or when God is going to show up in our lives. 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, or listen for God's voice, in the obvious places or circumstances. Our God is not one to give up on us, even when we are not paying attention to Him or when we try to avoid Him.

God, then, spoke to Moses from the bush. He told Moses to remove the sandals from his feet. Moses removed his sandals and covered his face with them because he was afraid. Taking off his sandals was an act of reverence, acknowledging his own unworthiness before God's presence.

This gesture was an ancient practice performed when entering a holy place of a divine presence. It was a gesture in those moments that honored the holiness of the ground where Moses was standing and presence of God. Removing shoes as a show of reverence continues to be a practice used in Islam and other religions.

However, Moses removing his sandals had another significance in light of Moses' earlier self-declaration which we read about 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, while Moses was still in good standing with Pharaoh, we would read about the rejection he experienced from the Hebrew people.

Remember, Moses was born Hebrew, and not of his own doing was taken into Pharaoh's household and raised as an Egyptian. He was living an easy life, unlike his Hebrew family. So, the Hebrews wanted nothing to do with him. And later, we know, the Egyptian Pharaoh sought to kill him (Exodus 2:15) after Moses killed an Egyptian who was beating a fellow Hebrew, so he no longer felt safe among the Egyptians. The Midianites, whom Moses was living among while working as a shepherd, also saw Moses as a foreigner, "an Egyptian", in fact. (Exodus 2:19). So, we can understand why Moses found himself feeling not fully at "home" in any human community.

But it was here, in this foreign place, God created a holy space for Moses, a place where God's presence announced, (through the command for Moses to remove his sandals), that Moses was always at home with God. Moses would belong to God wherever he would go. In this experience then, Moses found 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 they are foreigners, uprooted from what was their home and now without a place to call home. Poverty and mental illness cause some people to have no home. But also imagine how the people driven out of their homes by the tornado in Dawson City, where the Wrights and Fergusons are going to help rebuild homes for people who have been living in temporary housing since 2021. Imagine what it must feel like for those who lost everything because of hurricane Idalia? Or think about the people in Maui who lost everything due to wildfires? As they grieve their losses, they wonder, too "where is my home?"

As Christians, the Bible tells us that we are foreigners. We live in a world, a society, which is not our home. Immorality, hatred, prejudice, selfishness are not characteristics, nor a way of life in what is our real home.

But, my friends, we all do have a home. And I'm not talking about our home in the lifetime yet to come, 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. But, we all have a purpose to fulfill for God.

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, 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 own feelings of incompetence, our fears, our anxieties.

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 triplets. 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 God 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. When God comes-a-calling, and we respond with reverence and obedience, our lives will never be the same, but we will be at home in God. I don't know about you, but that's exactly where I want to be. Amen.