

Mo Blessings Mo Problems
Bushwhacked - Exodus 3:1-15
June 8, 2025
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Happy birthday, church! On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the moment when the Holy Spirit descends on the disciples as tongues of flame, igniting their evangelistic passion and fueling their desire to spread the good news of Jesus. It's a great story, but did you know it's the second time in scripture that God uses fire to spark a revolution? The first time, God used fire to kindle a call in a scaredy-cat shepherd.

As we continue our sermon series today on the life of Moses, our hero has settled into a nice routine. We learned last week about his tumultuous beginning, when baby Moses was placed in a basket on the Nile river to save his life, only to be discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. Moses grows up in Pharaoh's palace but never forgets his Hebrew roots. As a young man, when he sees an Egyptian overseer strike a Hebrew slave, Moses kills the Egyptian, which forces him to flee Egypt. He settles in the land of Midian, gets married, and goes to work for his father-in-law as a shepherd. Moses, who had such a miraculous beginning, is probably planning on living the rest of his life in obscurity.

In our reading, it's just another day for Moses. He probably got up early, put on some coffee, fetched his copy of the Midian Herald-Leader. He got his kids up for school and threatened to make them walk if they missed their camel. He kissed his wife goodbye and headed out for a day of tending the flock for the family business. Nothing new here, just another day. At breakfast time, Moses was responsible for keeping the sheep safe. By dinner, he'd be responsible for confronting Pharaoh and freeing a whole nation of people from slavery.

It's interesting that God would choose to come to Moses, because from all we know, Moses wasn't a particularly religious man at this point. In fact, there's no sign Moses worships the God of Israel; after all, he grew up bowing to golden Egyptian idols. That lack of familiarity with God may explain some of Moses' reluctance to jump at this opportunity. You'd think being called by God would be an honor. Not for Moses. "Who am I, that I should go to the Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Or, as it's translated in the Living Bible, "But I'm not the person for a job like that!" Moses is saying, "Me? God, you couldn't be suggesting that I go, could you? I mean, I'm a worker not a leader. I'm one of the behind-the-scenes people, not the frontline person. I lead sheep, not people."

Have you ever responded to God like that? "Me? You don't want me! I'm not a trained spiritual professional. I can't find the book of Hosea in the Bible without looking in the table of contents. I slept in one morning last month and didn't make it to the worship service. I've spent a Sunday or two at brunch instead of in the pew. And you should hear what I called that driver who cut me off yesterday! Oh, you probably did, because I used your name. You see? You don't want me, God. I'm way under-qualified."

Here's a news flash: We're ALL under-qualified to do God's work. Steph is graduating Friday with her Master of Divinity degree. Steph, do you feel like, after four years of seminary, you have divinity mastered? I've been doing this about 25 years, I feel about as unprepared as when I started. Moses made excuses because he felt inadequate to do this alone. And he was half right. He WAS inadequate, but he wouldn't be alone. God

tells him, “Don’t worry, Moses, I’m not sending you out alone. I will be with you. You couldn’t do it without me, anyway. But with me, you can do anything.”

God’s giving him the hard sell, but Moses isn’t ready to give in that easy. “Well...well...What if they won’t listen to me? What if I tell them I’ve come to save them and they just glare and cross their arms and ask, ‘Who sent you?’ What do I tell them?” In other words, Moses is saying, “Not only do I not think I can do this, nobody else does, either. Everyone is going to see me leading and just laugh.”

And God does something never done before: God tells Moses God’s name. “I AM who I AM. Say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you.” Later, in the Gospel of John, when Jesus gives all his “I am” sayings – “I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd, I am the way, the truth and the life” – he is drawing directly on this statement to show his divinity: “I am.”

For Moses and for us, that name means both comfort and mystery. It is comforting because it reminds us of the rock-solid stability of God. In a world where absolutely nothing is stable – jobs, governments, economies, our own bodies – God stays God. The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses is our God today, and we can put our trust in God just as much as those people did thousands of years ago. God is the great “I AM.”

But there’s mystery in that name as well. “I am who I am” – what does that mean, anyway? Sounds a little like Popeye, doesn’t it? If you don’t know who Popeye is, ask someone two generations older than you. OK, God, you are who you are, but who ARE you? Have you ever asked that question? I have...about once a week. When we’re faced with our own crossroads or tough decisions or crises of faith, what does that mean to us that God is the great “I AM”? Who ARE you, God?

I believe we each have to answer that for ourselves, and here’s why. A more faithful translation of God’s name to Moses is, “I will be who I will be.” In other words, “I am God, and what that means for you will depend upon how you live your life.” Who is God in our lives? For Moses, God may have been “I am with you.” For others, God may be “I am forgiving” or “I am the one who turns dead-ends into paths forward” or “I am the one who made you just as you are.” Who is God for you? Only you can answer that. That’s both the comfort and the mystery of God in our lives. “I am who I am.”

So, after a little more hemming and hawing from Moses, he finally agrees to God’s plan. Moses’ journey to Egypt is the most important event in the history of our faith, at least until that night in the manger with shepherds and the angels and that bright star. But did you know it almost never happened? We almost never had any of this story. No Great Plagues, no Ten Commandments, no Charlton Heston in the cool beard. But one thing, one split-second action, made the difference in this story and in the whole history of God’s relationship to his people. One teeny tiny little thing saved all those slaves, and ultimately saved us, as well.

Moses is going about his routine, doing his job, living his life, tending his sheep, when he sees a bush on fire. And the Bible says, “So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush does not burn up.’” Only when the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush.

What did Moses do? What’s the teeny tiny little thing? He turned aside. That’s the thing. That’s what gets the whole ball rolling. Instead of keeping his head down, or

ignoring this strange sight, or just sticking to his routine, he goes over and looks. He notices. And then God calls to him.

Moses could have said, “Wow, that bush is burning and it’s not being consumed! I should probably check that out! But, you know, I’ve got a job to do, and my partner is making meatloaf for dinner, and I’ve already taken a break from work this morning. I should probably just ignore it.” It was certainly his choice. His attention was his to give or not to give. And by giving it, his life was forever changed and enriched by God.

Often times the circumstances of our life and the evil that operates in the world around us keeps us from focusing on God’s presence in our lives. God is right there, in the midst of the storm, in the center of the chaos, but we are so distracted that we don’t even look. In your life, what keeps you from looking? What distracts you from seeing God’s presence around you?

We complete our routine day after day, we tend our sheep and pay our bills and do our best to be good family people and good citizens and even good churchgoers. We fight the good fight and try to keep a smile on even when it feels like there’s not much to smile about. But maybe, just maybe, God’s calling us to something greater, something more meaningful, something...more. Maybe there’s a burning bush in our lives, waiting for us to turn aside from our over-scheduled lives, to take off our blinders and to take our hands off the panic button and look. And when we look, maybe, just maybe, God’s waiting to speak to us and call us to something far greater than we can ever imagine.

Moses turned aside to see a bush that was burning but not consumed. Today, God may work differently, but no less powerfully. My burning bush was a conversation in a parking lot with the minister’s wife, who said half-jokingly that I should go to seminary. Your burning bush may be a crisis in your life, or an empty nest, a job change, or a simple invitation from someone you know, maybe someone in this church, to join or to serve or to teach or to lead. God speaks to you through those kinds of situations. And it’s your choice, your attention to give. Do you turn aside and look and give your attention to God, or do you ignore it because you think you are inadequate or under-qualified or not ready?

You woke up today, maybe had some coffee, maybe read the paper, maybe scrolled social media. When you woke up, maybe you were responsible for doing your job or providing for your family or just putting one foot in front of the other, making it through the day with your sanity and your hope intact. Sometimes that’s all we can do. But there’s a call out there. Maybe you haven’t heard it yet. Maybe you’ve already heard it, but don’t know how to respond. What would happen if you turned aside and said to God, “Here I am,” if you invited God to do something extraordinary in your life? You know who you are today. Who will you be when you wake up tomorrow?