

SIGHT UNSEEN - BY FAITH, MOSES
A SERMON BASED ON EXODUS 3:1-12
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 2020
10:00 a.m.

Moses was having a good life, a quiet life.

He was in a good place.

He had managed to get out of Egypt.

Which is what they used to say before you 'got out of Dodge.'

His former life in Egypt had been extraordinary to say the least.

Moses had had more in common
with the lives of the children of stars in Hollywood today,
than he would with any ancient Israelite.

His was a story that could track
with the adopted children of Madonna.

Lifted out of the basket of obscurity,
into a life of wealth and fame.

He was born to an Israelite, who were at that time slaves to the Egyptians.

When Pharaoh, king of Egypt, began to feel threatened

by the sheer number of Israelites in Egypt,

in fear of a revolt,

he took up a slave management program,

and culled them.

He ordered the death of the new born Israelite baby boys.

When Moses was born, his mother hid him.

When he got too big to hide,

she put him in a papyrus basket,

waterproofed it and set him in the basket

and the basket in the river.

Pharaoh's daughter found the basket in the river among the reeds.

She took the baby that was in it home.

So Moses, the Israelite baby skirted death

and was adopted by a princess.

He was raised a grandson to the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

We can assume he enjoyed a life of privilege, education and expectation.

I imagine he may have been conflicted too.

He knew he was a Hebrew.

He knew he had been snatched from death.

I wouldn't be surprised to discover
that his adopted mother had told him the story
about finding him in a basket in the river
countless times.

I wouldn't be surprised to discover
that when Moses displayed teenaged attitude growing up
that he would have been told how lucky he was

to have been rescued,
and to be living a life of privilege,
living in Pharaoh's palace no less.

I wouldn't be surprised to discover that he had been told
when he failed to rise to expectations,
that he could have been one of those Hebrew babies
who weren't rescued by royalty.

It's my guess that he eventually needed to see
how it all could have ended up for him.

To know how it could have played out.

To see what his story might have been.

In chapter two of Exodus,

we see a grown Moses wandering out to the other side of the tracks
to see how the Israelites lived.

He saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite, one of his own people.

He saw it.

He saw a chance to take a stand for his people.

He saw it.

He saw a chance to use his power and to change things.

It would be a better world without violent Egyptians.

He looked, glanced this way and that,

and then, thinking no one saw him,

he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand.

The next day, he saw violent Israelites.

They were fighting with each other.

He asked them, 'Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?'

He didn't understand why they would turn on each other.

They had a common oppressor.

He got an answer.

But it wasn't an answer to his question.

Nor was it a response he was looking for.

“Who are you to rule over us and judge us?”

“Are you going to kill us like you did the Egyptian?”

“Are you going to take this one into your own hands too?”

Moses felt the fear rise up.

He realized that someone saw him dragging the Egyptian's body
into the hole in the sand.

He realized the Israelites weren't going to guard him.

He also learned Pharaoh wanted him dead.

The hole he dug in the sand was becoming quicksand
and it was swallowing him.

So that was that.

He fled.

He left his life of privilege.

Left his life of doing what he thought would help the Israelites.

He got out of Egypt.

He got out of Dodge.

He moved to the country, to the desert.

He settled down.

He found a family that appreciated him.

Moses found a wife,

and shared his livelihood, his sheep.

He worked for a father-in-law who respected him.

Moses went from prominence,

and power,

from position and passion,

to a quiet, peaceful life where he could mind his own business.

Where he could deal with his own sheep.

It was a good place.

It was a good life, a quiet life.

It was a life that took him to Mount Horeb,

the mountain at the far side of the desert.

Here, at Mount Horeb is where his story takes another unexpected turn.

Because you wouldn't expect a quiet life to take you to Horeb.

The name Horeb means to dry up, to be in ruins, to be laid waste.

Moses came to the edge and to the end.

He came from position and power and passion,

to quiet, and calm and reserve,

to the edge of the desert and the end of the road.

However, Mount Horeb is also known as the mountain of God.

It would seem God lives at the end of the road.

It was at the end of the road where Moses had to take his shoes off.

It was the end of the road that he found holy ground.

Those places at the edge of the desert, at the end of the road,

are places God shows up.

They are places where God speaks,

They are places where we hear God speak.

Those places where we are at the end of the road

and at the end of ourselves

they are often holy ground.

Moses saw a bush that was on fire, but wasn't burning up.

Rather than back away from this sign of God,

he stepped toward it.

Seeing that Moses had taken a step forward, God spoke to him.

'Moses, Moses.'

Moses answered with a simple, four word sentence.

It is a sentence that we have heard Abraham speak.

It is a sentence that we have heard Mary speak.

It is a sentence that Jacob, Samuel, Isaiah and Esther spoke.

Moses said, 'Here I am Lord'.

Moses, in seeing a sign of God at work,

in taking a step forward,

and in being willing to announce himself to God,

found himself in an audience with God.

God said, 'Don't come any closer.

Take off your sandals.

You are on holy ground.'

God had something to say to Moses.

"I am the God of your father.

The God of Abraham.

The God of Isaac.

The God of Jacob.

I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt.

I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers.

I am concerned about their suffering.

I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians.

I have come down to bring them up to a good and spacious land.

The cry of the Israelites has reached me.

I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them."

God saw what Moses had seen.

God heard what Moses had heard.

So we can be confident,

God knows.

It naturally leads to a question, 'What is God's intention?'

God hasn't said anything to Moses

about the Israelites and the Egyptians

that Moses didn't already know.

Moses was probably pleased to hear that God

had finally got around to paying attention to what was going on.

Moses was probably wondering,

what any of this had to do with him.

Moses was leading the quiet life.

He had fled his former life.

He got out of Egypt, out of Dodge.

He had his freedom.

He had a good life.

What Moses didn't perhaps realize,

was that he was actually at the end of the road.

God revealed his intention.

"I have seen the misery of my people.

I have heard their cry.

I have come down to rescue them.

I have come down to bring them up.

So now, go.

I am sending you.

I am sending you to Pharaoh, to bring my people out of Egypt.

I am sending you to bring my people out of Egypt.

I am sending you to bring my people out of slavery.”

What does God do?

He shares the work.

God said,

‘I have seen their misery.

I have heard their cry.

I know.’

God didn’t say,

‘I’ll deal with it.

Just thought I’d let you know Moses.’

That's not why God calls us while we are at the end of the road.

He calls us back from the end of the road.

God said to Moses.

So now, go.

I am sending you.

I am sending you back to Egypt,

back to Pharaoh,

back to work.

This time, not for yourself.

Not for your own sense of justice.

Not with your own strategy and under your own power.

This time - I will be with you.

Moses had a question.

Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh,

and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

Did you see how well it all went last time God?

Don't you remember the Israelites who asked that very question.

"Who are you? Who made you ruler over us?"

The Israelites turned me in.

Pharaoh wanted me dead.

I opted out.

I have a nice life here in the country.

Who am I that I should go?

God's answer. "I will be with you."

It's easy to opt out.

The further away you are from Egypt, the quieter it is.

The easier it is to mind your own business.

Tend your own sheep.

Stay out of other people's way.

Do your own thing.

The further you are from Egypt,

the easier it is to stay blind to people's enslavement.

To be deaf to the cries.

To stay where you are and not come down.

But Horeb is the edge of the desert and the end of the road.

There's nothing there.

The end of the road requires a new path.

God called Moses out of the wasteland.

God sent Moses back.

Back to Egypt, back to the misery,

back to the cries, and back to the enslavement.

Not to be miserable again,

not to become a slave,

not to re-enter Egyptian life,

but to rescue those caught in it,

to be God's means of leveraging them out.

People are caught and enslaved to some terrible task masters.

There are those who struggle

under poverty, violence, and oppressive governments.

There are those who feel trapped

in despair, loneliness, and lifestyles they hate.

There are those who suffer

under the taskmasters of diseases that won't go away,
grief they cannot escape,
relationships that are destructive.

Casting them off and declaring them 'not my problem'
can dress itself in some nice finery of language.

"It's none of my business." sounds respectful.

"I want to respect their choices." sounds noble.

"I am already doing all I can." sounds justifiable.

"I have already done my part." sounds complete.

That is a journey will take us to Mount Horeb,
to a desert's edge of tending our own sheep.

Truth is, a lot of churches and Christians land there.

However, God calls, even at the edge, even at the end of the road.

Sometimes that is the best place to hear him.

At some point you have seen, or you will see,

something that invites you to take a step closer,

something that could prompt you to say,

'Here I am Lord.'

We will want to ask the same question Moses did.

“Who am I that I should go?”

Sometimes I hear humility in Moses’ question.

I’m not good enough, smart enough, strong enough for that job.

But today,

when Moses’ asks, ‘Who am I that I should go?’

I hear tone.

‘Why do I have to? Who am I? Why should I? Why me?’

When I hear tone,

God’s answer seems that much stronger.

We ask, “Who am I that I should go?”

God says, “I will be with you.”

Too often and too easily,

we think that coming to church

that coming to the mountain,

is for us.

We come to the burning bush

and hope for a little affirmation in our quiet place,
and the chance to take our shoes off,
maybe even put our feet up.

I come to church to be fed.

I come to church for spiritual nurture.

I come to church to be encouraged, strengthened, cared for.

We can get a little resentful if the church asks too much of us.

Now don't misunderstand me.

Restoration happens

when we come to meet with God in a posture of worship.

You can come to worship counting on that.

But when we come to God in a posture of entitlement,

with demands of what we want from God,

with a list of expectations

rather than open hands and open arms

of giving ourselves to God

it means we have forgotten to take off our shoes.

We have forgotten to be humble

and submit to God our creator.

It means we have forgotten that creatures have a creator.

God calls.

At some point you have seen, or you will see,

something that invites you to take a step closer,

something that could prompt you to say,

‘Here I am Lord.’

We have seen it.

We have heard it.

People in slavery.

People trapped.

People losing hope.

People wondering if they have a future.

People stuck.

People beating up on those around them.

People in Egypt.

God has seen it.

God has heard it.

God knows.

God makes an investment and shares his work.

I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians.

I have come down to bring them up.

We see God's character again in the life of Christ.

I have come that they may have life

is what the Son of God said.

I have come to set the captive free.

And you will be my disciples.

God has seen.

God has heard.

God knows.

And God calls.

I am sending you.

I will be with you.

When you go, I will be with you.

When you go, those enslaved

will meet you, hear you, see you,

and they will see me

because I am with you.

I will bring them up out of their slavery.

If we simply tend our own sheep,

look after our own flock,

think about our own lives,

it will lead us to the edge of the desert,

to the end of the road

to Mount Horeb.

God shows us grace, refusing to leave us there,

investing in us by sending us back in,

back to where the action is,

back to where the people are.

Who are we?

Who are we to go to Pharaoh and bring God's people

out of Egypt.

Why us?

Because God will be with us.

You will see God.

You will hear God.

You will know God.

God has promised.

God offered a sign as evidence that he would be with Moses.

I love this sign God offers.

It is a sign that takes place after the fact.

It is sign where the writing is on the back of it.

You can only see it and read it after you have taken steps
past it and look back.

God said, "This will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you.

When you have brought the people out of Egypt,
you will worship on this mountain."

When you have taken the steps,

and obeyed my call,

and look back to where you've walked,

you will see I was with you.

If you don't step ahead, you can't read the sign.

God is sending you.

I'm guessing

you may already know which Egypt God is looking at with you.

If not, God will show you.

When he does. Go. God is sending you.

God will be with you.

Go bring the enslaved to a land that is good and spacious.

Bring them out of slavery, out of misery.

God will be with you.

Bring them to worship the God who sees them.

Amen.