

## Reflection on the Word – August 30, 2020

### Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 12:9-21

This morning's reading from the Hebrew scriptures lands us in the midst of the story of Moses. To set the scene --- Moses was born at a time when the people of Israel, in Egypt, were living as slaves, oppressed under the reign of the king or Pharaoh. Feeling threatened by the increasing numbers of Israelites, the Pharaoh ordered that all of the baby boys born to Hebrew women be drowned, by throwing them into the Nile.

I expect you remember the story, even from your Sunday School days, of how when Moses was born, his mother placed him in a basket and hid him in the bulrushes, with his sister keeping watch. When the Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe at the river, she discovered the baby and long story short, after paying his own mother to nurse the baby, eventually took him to the palace, to be raised as her son.

One day, after Moses had grown, he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, and killed the Egyptian. When Moses discovered that there had been witnesses, and fearing the wrath of the Pharaoh, Moses fled to the land of Midian where he married and spent his days tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro.

## 2.

The story tells us how God heard the groaning of his people, enslaved in Egypt. With the death of the oppressive Pharaoh – Israel had found its voice and sounded its pain. And this cry of pain is the beginning point of the Exodus. Israel groans, and God responds! It's an echo of what is happening today. Innocent or unarmed black men are killed by police and millions respond in protest. Indigenous women and men, struggling with mental illness, are shot down by police, and there is an outcry about systemic racism toward Indigenous people. Does God hear them, too? I believe so. Because over and over, the Biblical story reminds us that our God is a God who hears the groans of his people, is receptive to human outcry, and engages human beings, working through them to address human need and work for justice.

Back in Moses' day, God remembered the people to whom God had made promises in the book of Genesis – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – and a nation to whom God was committed. God understood their suffering . . . and also understood that something had to be done for God's promises to come true. As Carla Pratt Keyes writes: *God identified with his people – an oppressed and enslaved people. And as we read the story, if we care about God, we must also care about the lives of those people God has identified with.*

### 3.

*We have to care, as God cared, about the power of the Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's labor policies, and all the various ways Pharaoh acts to oppose God's will and hold God's people captive.*

And the Pharaoh for us may be the powers of government, or law enforcement, or some multinational company, which value control or profit over and above anything else, including fair or just treatment of people.

The Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church USA, contains words originally written in South Africa in the years of apartheid; words challenging us to appreciate how, in a world full of injustice, hostility, and hatred, God “is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” And, the confession says, God “calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry . . . God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind . . . God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly.”

Today's reading from Exodus describes God's promises in much the same way, where God is speaking, telling Moses, “I know about my people's pain and have come down to rescue them. I will bring them into a good and broad land, a land full of milk

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and honey.”

For Moses, it was a day like any other. He was minding his own business, taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. Maybe as he watched the sheep graze, or as he walked, leading them to newer pasture, he was dreaming of a better future. Perhaps he wondered what was going on with his friends and family back in Egypt, a place he'd had to leave after murdering an Egyptian taskmaster. A people and a place that needed him.

Suddenly, he sees a bush that is burning, but not consumed. And out of the bush there is a voice. Calling his name. “Don't come any closer,” the voice says. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” It was a moment where there was this connection with something far greater than himself. Moses recognized the ground as holy, because he knew God was there. And then God tells Moses how he has heard the cries of his people in Egypt and how he is going to bring the Israelites out of that land of oppression. “So get going, Moses,” God says. I'm sending YOU to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.”

It was a call for him to go where he did not want to go and do what he did not want to do. The story tells us that Moses made all kinds of excuses – he could not

## 5.

speak – “Who am I that I should go to the Israelites?”

The struggle went back and forth between Moses and God and God always had the answer: You can't speak, I'll give Aaron to speak for you; you go and I will be with you; I will show you the signs. And finally Moses went. Because he trusted that God would be as good as his word. Moses trusted that when he was feeling powerless in his own strength, God would provide the means of support that he needed. In essence, God would be what he needed God to be in any situation that he might face.

What did the Burning Bush experience mean for Moses? God wanted to get him up out of his comfortable existence to do the work for which he was destined. Moses was never the same again. He had a new intimacy with God, and a new motivation. His past lifestyle was forgotten. And he received a new power for his call to service.

This story of the call of Moses reminds us that God's grand intentions become specific human responsibilities. What God has promised, WE, (particularly we, the Church), must act to bring about.

Over and over again we must hear GOD'S CALL to help people in suffering and need. Because for many of us it's an option, as it was for Moses, simply not to get involved. We could stay in our places of relative

## 6.

safety and comfort. Yet God shows us in this story how to listen to people in pain, remember our connection to them, and DO what is good for all of God's people.

And so it is that Paul's words in the letter to the Romans speak to us – about the way in which we are called to live, in community. We are called to live out of a love that is genuine and not false; to care for those who are in need and show hospitality to strangers; to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

As a church, as God's people, we are to be committed to each other's welfare ... and to make God's love and justice known in the world around us. We are to build the land that God has planned and when that happens, God is experienced, and there is a sense that we truly are on holy ground.

The job description that God has for you and me won't be the same as for Moses but it will be real and challenging all the same. God wants us, who carry the name of Christ, to get involved, by our living, by our praying, by our giving, and by our caring. God looks not for our ability but for our availability. So let's be receptive to God's call and, when it comes, answer it. Because God will put to use whatever gifts we have. Amen.