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“So-called Christians” **Sermon on Exodus 3:1-15**

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When he was just a little baby, he had a life-changing event. He was found by Pharaoh’s daughter floating in a basket in the river Nile. She named the baby “water.” She named the baby “Moses.” There are things that happen that change us and change the world. Things we have no control over.

Like our temper. One moment we have it and another moment we don’t, and that can be a life-changing event. People can get hurt. If you’ve ever visited a prison, most of the people in there are there because a few seconds of their life got out of control, and now they’re in there for life.

One day, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. “Moses looked this way and that and killed the Egyptian.” It only took a few seconds, and it changed his life.

He went on the run and found himself by a well one afternoon. And there were a bunch of teenage boys harassing some women, not letting them find a space at the well. Just being mean. Moses saw it and chased them off. “There you go! Those guys won’t be back. The well is all yours.” Oddly, that little incident ended up being a life-changing event - he married one of the women at the well.

All of this leads us to today’s scripture. Moses is now working for his father-in-law as a shepherd to his sheep, which is a sure sign that he doesn’t have any control over his life. No one ever says, “When I grow up I want to work for my father-in-law as a shepherd.” But the good news for Moses is that every moment can be a life-changing event.

From Exodus 3:1-15 Hear the Word of God

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 Horeb, the mountain of God. 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. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' 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.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' 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.

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, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' 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 worship God on this mountain.'

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?' 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."' 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.

We don't have a lot of control over life. We are subject to one life-changing event after another. They can be as small as your car not starting one morning or as big as a promotion. A life-changing event can be as silly as getting that puppy or as serious as a heart attack.

A blind date can change your life. A teacher can change your life, too. Someone who cuts you off in traffic can cause a rage that will get you on the evening news. Sometimes a person has nothing better to do than to put a knife in your back, and the scar it leaves is that you'll never trust anyone again.

Someone who was in the 8:30 service texted me, "Life-changing events, like the one Phil Smith, a lawyer in Memphis (who was in Seattle with me last week to train at a banking school), and his wife woke to early Friday morning: their son Wes was killed in a random shooting. He was a junior majoring in finance at TCU in Ft. Worth. He was his high school class president, and a star athlete in football, basketball, and lacrosse."

Can you imagine? Please pray for the family.

If I gave you a moment, you could come up with a list of life-changing events. Friends you meet, teachers you've had, accidents that have happened. While you're thinking about that, let me direct your attention to Moses who had an out-of-nowhere, burning bush, kick off your shoes, holy moment. A life-changing moment.

Just seeing or hearing that event would be life changing. What do you do with an event like that? Tell your friend? “The other day I was walking around, and I saw a bush that was on fire, but it wasn’t burning up. Just on fire, and a voice came out of the bush.” Who are you going to tell? Maybe tell a psychiatrist who will greet your story with a prescription that takes a little bit of the edge off your game.

Better not to tell a soul.

What we often do as Presbyterians is we don’t talk about the mighty and mysterious acts of God that we see in and throughout our lives. We hesitate to tell anyone. But that’s why we’re here, right? If you’re not here to have a life-changing event, what’s the point of you being here? If you’re not here to look squarely and deeply into your own sin, why are you here? If you’re not here to hear the assurance that rest-assured, even if you’re still living with your sin, God is merciful. God is healing. If you’re not here to hear the voice of God calling on you to let go of that part of your life that you’re grabbing onto so tightly that it’s killing you, then, why are you here?

Moses got a holy ground and a burning bush that talked to him. I suspect that would change any of our lives if we had the same thing interrupt our day-to-day. But that’s not the life-changing event. The life-changing event is not the burning bush, or the talking bush, but the moment when we answer the call.

Did you hear the call of God to you today? It didn’t come out of a burning bush. It came out of someone we call Guy. He read it off some paper. But, after he read it, he said, “The Word of the Lord.” And you said, “Thanks be to God.” You weren’t just saying that, were you?

Let me paraphrase the call of God that you heard.

God called you and said, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to that which is good...” If it helps, you can put your name at the beginning or end of that line. “Donovan, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to that which is good.” Donovan, do that!

God is talking to you right now. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer...” “Insert your name there – God is talking to you. “Bless those who persecute you, and do not curse them.” God is talking to each and every one of us and all together! We’re all hearing the same voice, the same words, the same call. So, guess what? You don’t have to be afraid to share that anymore with anyone in here. I heard God calling me; what did you hear?”

We have to act on this call because if we don’t do anything, we get that name: those “so-called Christians. Hypocrites.”

Moses had a call; just imagine if he had said, “No, I’m going to keep this to myself. Maybe see a therapist. Hope it goes away.” That response would have impacted so many lives - as many as there are stars in the sky. He tried to say no. He tried. He said, “Who am I?” And God said, “You’re the one I called.” “Who are you?” “I am who I am, the God of your ancestors. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Joseph, the God of your grandfather, your father, your mother. This story of faithfulness has gone from generation to generation, and now it has landed on you. It’s your turn. What say you?” And Moses said, “Here I am, Lord.”

Did you hear the call of God? God called you and said, "Let your love be genuine." What's your response? "Here I am, Lord."

Live in harmony with one another. That's the call. Your response? "Here I am, Lord."

Do not repay anyone evil for evil... "Here I am, Lord."

If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. Overcome evil with good! "Here I am, Lord."

We are so-called — Christians!

This is the vision of the church, and it always has been. We are to radically love others. We love, because Christ first loved us. We talked about it in Fellowship Hall a couple of weeks ago. And people said, "That's a great vision. How do we start?" I think we start by hearing the love and the hope that God has in us. That we should be so-called to share the light of God's good news.

I heard it on Wednesday in Bible Study. We were talking about acting on God's call, and one of the guys shared a time when he sat down at J. Alexander's with his wife for dinner. A waitress came by and took their order. She came back with the wrong order for him.

He said, "Well, thanks! But I didn't order this." The waitress apologized, and almost immediately, someone from the establishment came over to apologize, eager to make the necessary reparation. How would you like to have that job? A career of dealing with hungry, irritated people. There's a calling!

But, instead of being irritated, the one sharing the story said he made a conscious effort, that bordered on an unconscious effort, an effort you know that comes with so much practice and so many stories and so much hope and light, that he heard his lips speaking with grace and joy. "Hey, mistakes happen. It's okay."

The one who was in charge of fixing everything fixed everything. But my friend noticed that the waitress who made the mistake was keeping a wide berth around the table. Nevertheless, she came with the check and an apology.

"It's no big deal. Mistakes happen. Don't worry about it." He gave her a good tip! And that's the end of the story. Now I know, in a crazy world with terrible injustices, that story is nothing. You can start big and go to Pharaoh. Or you can start small and watch what happens.

Because, maybe, later that day, someone might ask, "How was your work?" The response was, "Well, I'm learning. It's not easy. But at a table I met someone who had so much grace and love and light. I was so drawn to it." It was life-changing!

We are so-called Christians.