

Exodus 3:1-15

¹Moses 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. ²There 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. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When 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." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He 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.

⁷Then 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, ⁸and 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. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹²He 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."

¹³But 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?" ¹⁴God 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.'" ¹⁵God 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."

Matthew 16:21-26

²¹From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

Here I Am, Lord September 3, 2017

I think most of us have spent the week watching the news and the devastating effects of Hurricane Harvey on the state of Texas and now Louisiana. We watched and waited for news from loved ones as well as friends of friends who may have been caught in the storm. I know we've felt sympathy and sadness as we watched the loss of homes, businesses, and lives. Our hearts were moved as we witnessed women and children being carried to safety, men wading chest deep in water as they looked for help for their families that were stranded at

home, animals and pets being carried on shoulders and found abandoned or still chained to trees. I don't know about you but my heart breaks for them all. I can't imagine what it must be like to lose the many things in life that provide safety and shelter, comfort, and even identity. It should make us very thankful for what we have.

And like our reading today I believe we have heard the cries of those people lifted up to the heavens, and it may very well be that the burning bush we need is right on our door step today. God has heard his people cry and wants us to respond just as Moses was asked to do. And Jesus gives some pretty clear directives as well as he reminds us that being a disciple of his means taking up your cross, denying yourself, losing your life is finding it, and thinking and seeing with divine perspective rather than earthly priorities, is what it's all about. Funny how these things arrive when we most need to hear them, don't you think?

And so, I am wondering what to say about these things. In many ways, these are parallel stories. Both Moses and Jesus know what it means to say yes to something that scares them. Both are headed toward danger and possibly death. Both know that caring for others will cost them something. And both know that trusting God is their only hope. But I think they both also know that God is entrusting them to do his will in the world. And that is a little scary too.

I read the most interesting thought by Lutheran Theologian Lee Snook who said, "God does not will all things, but in all things, God *wills* something." Not, "Why on earth does God will this to happen?" but, "what on earth does God *will* to happen despite and because of all this?" I've taken to reading this every day. It reminds me that in the world we live in, difficult and dangerous events take place, and God's will, is that we not sit back and make excuses like Moses or the disciples, but rather, take up our cross and follow Jesus, whether to it be to **Egypt or Jerusalem**, healing and restoring the world as best we can, trusting in God to sustain us.

Now don't get me wrong, I love this story of Moses. He is so wonderfully human that I can't help but love him. He reminds me of all of us. We often don't think we have the skills necessary to do what God is calling us to do. Even Jesus had doubts at times and certainly the disciples did. But what I see in Moses is that, he was uniquely ready to do what God asked him to do. He was both an Egyptian and a Hebrew. He knew how the system worked and he knew the people. And I believe that he had been carrying this burden on his heart for some time before God reminded him of it. He knew where he came from and he knew his part in the drama. This encounter may have been unexpected but I don't think it was a surprise. He just needed to see things through God's eyes for once. Get a divine perspective as Jesus reminded Peter and the rest of us.

In the animated movie *Prince of Egypt*, a retelling of the Exodus story and Moses' life, there is an incredible song that the Midian Priest Jethro sings, which I think speaks to all our texts today. Because of Moses' brave actions in saving Jethro's seven daughters, including Zipporah whom he will marry later, they are honoring him with a dinner. Moses is feeling that he doesn't deserve it, he hasn't done anything of any importance, and is still feeling the shame of running from his former life. He has a very human perspective on things at the moment. But Jethro reminds him of what he has done that is honorable, and then sings this amazing song.

Through Heaven's Eyes by Stephen Schwartz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHU7oPA-11E>

*A single thread in a tapestry,
though its color brightly shines,
can never see its purpose
in the pattern of the grand design.
And the stone that sits on the very top
of the mountain's mighty face,
doesn't think it's more important
than the stones that form the base?*

*So how can you see what your life is worth
or where your value lies?
you can never see through the eyes of man.
You must look at your life,
look at your life through heaven's eyes.*

*A lake of gold in the desert sand
is less than a cool fresh spring.
And to one lost sheep, a shepherd boy
is greater than the richest king.
Should a man lose everything he owns
has he truly lost his worth?
Or is it the beginning
of a new and brighter birth?
So how do you measure the worth of a man
in wealth or strength or size?
In how much he gained or how much he gave?
The answer will come, the answer will come to him who tries
to look at his life through heaven's eyes.*

*And that's why we share all we have with you,
though there's little to be found.
When all you've got is nothing,
there's lots to go around.
No life can escape being blown about
by the winds of change and chance.
and though you never know all the steps,
you must learn to join the dance,
you must learn to join the dance.*

*So how do you judge what a man is worth?
By what he builds or buys?
You can never see with your eyes on earth;
look through Heaven's eyes. Look at your life.
Look at your life.
Look at your life through Heaven's eyes.*

Sometimes we forget that God is working through us and has a purpose for our lives. And that purpose, I think, is to love one another. To be Love in the world even when we feel that we are too small to make a difference. I certainly feel that way when faced with disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, and forest fires, let alone political and social unrest. Sometimes it is easier to make excuses and hide. And the prospect of trusting God or doing as Jesus asks, to lose our lives in order to find them or take up your cross and follow him, seem contrary to what my emotions are telling me. But as I watched the news this week other stories emerged that gave me hope and courage. The other beautiful stories of those who responded to the call to help their neighbors in Texas. It seemed that every hour a new boat or tractor or big truck appeared and strangers were helping strangers to find safe haven. A twitter post I saw said, "I'm tellin' you guys, Texas needs to erect a statue honoring "**Random Average Dude with a Bass Boat!**" Like good Samaritans they sought out those in need and brought them to shelter. People gathered what they had, no matter how small or large, and used those gifts and talents and blessings to rescue others.

And when I think of Jesus' words, "to take up your cross, or deny yourself," I think for many, that means to take up something unpleasant or undesirable and do it for the kingdom. But I don't think it means that. I think it means that you take responsibility for the talents and gifts that God has given you and you pick them up and use them for others. Does that make any sense? Use what you have been blessed with. Just like Moses and the disciples, you are uniquely qualified to care for those in the Kingdom, but you have to 'own' that, you have to say 'yes' to that, and when you do, I believe you both lose your life...and you will find your life, the very life that God intends for you. And in all of this, God promises to be with us.

There will be a continuing need for food and supplies in the difficult days to come. Those folks have a long road ahead of them and there are many ways that you can help. And any help you can give will make a difference in the world.

I want to close with a special note my younger sister sent me on my 42nd birthday. My sister Roberta and I are 11 and ½ months apart...I'll let that sink in for the mothers this morning...and please remember my poor mother...and from August 25th to September 10th every year we are the same age...and right now we are both 63. I keep this note where I can see it and occasionally I read it to remind myself that God has a purpose for my life and I thought it would be a nice way to close today. It was written by author Roy Lessin and it goes like this:

*Just think,
You're here not by chance,
But by God's choosing.
His hand formed you and made you the person you are.
He compares you to no one else-
You are one of a kind.
You lack nothing that His grace can't give you.
He has allowed you to be here at this time in history
To fulfill his special purpose
For this generation. Thanks be to God! Let us pray*

Pastoral prayer for Sunday, September 3, 2017 — Labor Day weekend

September 1, 2017 by [Jill Duffield](#)

Almighty God, as the flood waters recede and the extent of the devastation is revealed we cannot help but feel overwhelmed by the suffering of our neighbors, our neighbors in Texas, Louisiana, India, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and around the globe. The images we see are both harrowing and heartening: those grieving the loss of life, first responders and ordinary people alike endangering themselves to rescue others, entire towns under water, entire nations mobilizing to bring relief. Help us to pay attention to both the pain and the hope so that we, too, will be moved to action.

Trusting that you have the power and the ability to bring light into the deepest darkness, we look without flinching at the inequities made glaringly obvious when disaster hits. While the rain falls indiscriminately on all, the ability to recover from the damages it has wrought is anything but fair. Those already living on the edge have been washed over it, and now is the time for your people to intervene for justice long denied.

We pray, Lord God, that our exploitation of creation can no longer be tolerated, that those living on the margins or in the shadows are our brothers and sisters and your beloved children, that your law is fulfilled in love, and

that you stand with the vulnerable – in all of this, compel us to passionately do your will and be about your work.

The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. The fruits of the Spirit are inexhaustible, but too often left unshared. The power when two or three are gathered in your name is greater than any obstacle or evil, and yet we fail to recognize and claim it. The promise of mustard seed sized faith to move mountains is given, but we refuse to sow that small seed. Patient God, inspire us to step up and step out in your name, knowing that you will take whatever we offer, bless, multiply and use it to feed the multitudes scattered on the hillsides far from home.

Gracious and loving God, knowing that the world you created and called good is hurting, we unashamedly ask for you to intervene. Comfort, grant peace, give strength, sustain, bless and encourage those who this very day are about to give out and give up.

God of the burning bush and empty tomb, speak to us your commissioning word, show us your resurrection glory, so that each of us, all of us, will be compelled to take up our cross and risk our lives in your service in order that we might find them in you, in each other and in the reconciliation you sent your Son to bring. May our love make undeniably evident that we are followers of Jesus Christ, the One in whose name we pray using the prayer he taught us saying,...