

You Want Who to Lead Your People?*Exodus 3:1-15*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The voice of the captain woke him from the uneasy sleep of a transatlantic flight. “Ladies and gentlemen,” the voice announced, “we are in need of medical assistance. If there are any doctors on board, please come to the front of the plane.” He hoped and prayed that someone would get up. A few minutes passed. Now the announcement became a plea. “Please anyone with medical experience come to the front of the plane, we have an urgent situation.” “It’s been so long, he thought to himself – I wouldn’t remember what to do.” There was a pit in his stomach as he recalled the last time he had practiced medicine. It was 25 years ago – a little girl. His surgeries had been flawless till that day, but that one wrong cut had ended her life. He never went back. Now, he was a successful business man, and he had managed to put the past in the back of his mind. If he came forward now – whether he was successful, or his efforts failed, his past would be out in the open again. One more time the captain pleaded for help. His college age daughter elbowed him and simply said – “Daddy go, they need you.” And he went.

What are the things that threatened to stop this man from answering a call to action? You could say he felt unworthy – he was out of practice; he was unsure of himself. He was certainly worried about failure. He had experienced it in his past, he knew the pain and the sting. He was also afraid of letting go – of doing something that could change his present life.

Maybe you’ve experienced similar thoughts when called to action. Or maybe you consider your life and you think, “I’ve never really experienced anything like that.” If so, I encourage you to reconsider. You see, we’ve all been called to action. God has given us each the overarching call to share the message of Jesus – to “go and make disciples” by teaching and baptizing. But he’s also given specific action calls to make disciples through words and actions in various stations of life – as mother and father, as employer or employee, as a member of a congregation, as a pastor or teacher, as a student or classmate, as a friend. Often it’s these specific callings where we face head on those threats that would stop us from acting – feelings of unworthiness, fear of failure, unwillingness to let go of our lives exactly as they are. So how do we combat those threats? To help us today, we consider one of the most well-known leaders in the Bible: Moses. Moses too faced these threats, and as we look at his call, we learn how God helps to overcome our fears and moves us to act.

3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, ^[a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And 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 ^[b] will worship God on this mountain.”

13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

15 God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

God's call to action could not have been more clear, and it could not have been more powerful. Moses sees this bush on fire and it isn't consumed, and then he hears the voice of God himself call out his name, and command him to remove his sandals because even the ground he walked on was holy in the presence of God. How would you react? Would you pay attention? Then, the call to action: God explains the history which Moses of course knew – the harsh slavery of his fellow children of Israel. And he says it, **“I am sending you to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”** And my goodness, having just heard the voice of God and watching the burning bush – that certainly would convince anyone to answer the call right? Not so much! Right away we see the obstacles which threaten to keep Moses from answering the call to act. **“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”** If we read on past the verses before us today, we can see Moses articulate all of his fears and excuses, but the obstacles are evident even as he speaks this one little sentence. **“Who am I?”** An expression of unworthiness isn't it? Oh there was a time when Moses was ready and willing. Yes Moses, as he observed the abuse of the Hebrew people took action – serious action. In his zeal for justice, he killed an Egyptian who had been mistreating an Israelite, but his action backfired. It did not inspire loyalty from other Israelites, and he certainly couldn't go back to Pharaoh's court where he had been raised. Why would things be any different now? What would make the Israelites who wouldn't even know him anymore follow him now? And seriously, were they just going to walk out of Egypt? Fear of failure. And if he answered the call, things would never be the same. Now he was married, had family, and a decent life as a herdsman. He had recovered from his previous failure – why risk it all by going back? Fear of letting go of life exactly as it is.

So what moves Moses to go? It's really not a what, it's a who. God leads Moses to go, but notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't use flattery. He doesn't say to Moses – “Well Moses, actually you would make a good candidate to go, you know the court of Egypt, you have life experience now, you measure your response, and I know deep down, you still have pity in your heart for those poor slaves.” No, because that isn't why God called Moses. He didn't call him because he was worthy. He didn't call Moses because he was a success. And he didn't call Moses as a punishment for past sins. He chose Moses because of his mercy – that quality in God that leads him to love the unlovable and the undeserving. He calls him because of his mercy towards Moses and because of his mercy towards the Israelites. And so he moves Moses by with the promise “I will be with you,” and with the assurance that he, was going in the name of the one true God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the God who simply names himself “I am.” Tell them, “I am sent you,” he says to Moses. This whole call, and this whole rescue of Israel, was not a reward for good behavior, or for time served. It was an outpouring of God's mercy. And by the way, God does that over and over and over again as he carries out his promise to forgive sins and bring people to heaven.

Let's consider just three key individuals whom God used to lead his people: David, the Apostle Paul, and Peter. Take out a pencil and quickly write down two major flaws of each. Didn't take long did it? Seriously, would you hire any of these guys to work for you? Yet God called them to action in his kingdom. Why? Because he is merciful.

Grab that pencil again – write down two ways in which God has called you to do his work in your life. So what are the obstacles that threaten to stop us from answering God's call to act? (you don't have to write them down). A young father sits with his child. It's bed time. The little boy says, “Daddy, can you tell me a story?” In his mind, dad remembers something the Bible said about bringing up his children in the way they should go, and thinks, “I should really tell him a bible story,” but he's never done it before, and he thinks, “this kid seems to know more than me. Who am I to lead this child?” A young woman - high school age - sits down next to a fellow student in tears. She asks what's wrong, and learns that she's had an abortion. She knows she should share forgiveness through Jesus, but she doesn't know where to start, and she doesn't want to give the impression that she condones the abortion. “Who am I to lead this person to Jesus? What if I fail?” A Christian couple knows it's the time in their child's life to begin talking about what sexuality really means for a Christian, but they both know that they didn't live up to God's standards, they feel like hypocrites. “Who are we to lead God's people in their Christian walk? We aren't worthy.” A retired woman is having coffee with a friend, when the friend, reading through the obits asks, “What do you think will happen when we die?” She knows the answer, she knows it's an opportunity, but she's worried she'll say the wrong words. “Who am I to lead this person to Jesus?” A young woman, year three on the job, her position pretty secure – opportunities for dialogue, worries that it might damage her career. “I don't want to let go of life as it is.” “God, you want who to lead your people? Why me? I'm unworthy. What if I fail? I don't want to let go of life like it is!”

And God says, “I want you, even though you are unworthy, even though you might fail, even though you don't want to let go of life as it is. Do you know how much I value you? I let my son be tortured and killed to make you part of my family. I called someone to share that information with you so that you could receive the benefit of what my son did. I didn't do that because you deserved it – I did it because I care about what happens to you. Now all of these gifts are yours, and I am calling you to action so that others can have them too. Yes, it's scary sometimes. Yes, it might make you feel uncomfortable. Yes, it can put your life as it is at risk. Yes, there will be times when you fail. But that's OK. I will be with you. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. And I want you to lead my people.” AMEN.