

“God’s Call For Your Life”

Exodus 3:1-15

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Sometimes, parenting can be a great metaphor to understand our relationship between God and His people in the Bible. One day, while I was working on my sermon in my office, there was a sound of a collapse and right away, I heard the sounds of my baby crying. When I hurriedly went to his room, I realized that he had fallen down, and his body seemed to be caught in between his Dumbo baby seat and its tray. I guess he had tried to stand up and had lost his balance while he was sitting on the baby seat. He looked funny and on the other hand pitiful as I rescued him from this small trouble. At Centennial Church, my colleague, Pastor Linda, said that church ministry is much easier than parenting. Do you think this is true?

Today’s Scripture reading reminds us that God heard the sounds of His people’s suffering and crying from slavery in Egypt. The Bible history tells us that the Israelites lived there for four hundred years in slavery to the Egyptians. God observed the misery of His people and their suffering, so He decided to “come down” to deliver them from the Egyptians to a promised land. Our God is a compassionate and a rescuing God for His people in times of need. He carefully heard and watched over his people and came down to us when he heard our suffering and crying. This morning, I want to share our God who is willing to come down to us when we are troubled.

Christians often say that God is always with us. I wonder how truly you feel God’s presence in your daily lives. God is real and alive, but sometimes we are not sensitive enough to God’s signs and voices. A well known German poet and writer, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 - 1927), wrote a children’s story about God. The title is “How the Thimble Came to Be the Dear Lord.” The story is simple: Although it is true that God is important, and He is always with us, adults sometimes forget this and don’t care about God anymore. One day, all seven children in a small town gathered together and discussed how they could keep and protect God. After a long discussion, they decided to take turns in looking for symbols of God in their lives every day. They believed that God is almighty and believed that he could become anything - even their belongings. When they saw the thimble among one of the girl’s belongings, everyone agreed that the thimble would be a symbol of God. They took turns keeping the thimble

for the entire week.

Does this story challenge our faith? Are we sensitive to God's presence like these little children, or do we often forget who God is because we believe that we are busy? Looking back on my high school days, I was a pretty serious about the existence of God: what if God is real? what priority must be placed in my life? This serious curiosity has led me to be a pastor and to preach about God for many years and now in front of you.

As some of you may already notice about my baby, he seems to be serious all the time. Probably, he considers his calling to become a pastor for his future ministry like his daddy. Congregation, help him to learn how to take it easy! Maybe it's just because he's unsure of himself.

Today's Scripture reading is one of top ten biblical stories in our culture. It is about the call of Moses who was asked to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt to the land flowing of milk and honey. Don't assume that Moses was a perfectly prepared leader for this great mission; for him, it was very unexpected and surprising news. Ironically, he wasn't ready. God met him in the burning bush, and it was a life changing experience for him. The key for this story is not focused on Moses' perfect leadership, but God's appearance and calling for Moses even though he was not ready yet. Do you remember Moses' reaction to God's call? He said that he was scared and afraid to confront Pharaoh and even said that he couldn't talk well. What happened to Moses?

It might be helpful to get to know about Moses' background a little bit more before we revisit our Scripture reading. Moses wasn't a promising leader when God called him in the burning bush. His age was almost over eighty years. Currently, he was shepherding the flocks of his father in law, Jethro, in the wilderness. He was born and raised as one of Hebrew people, but he was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter, and he spent forty years in an Egyptian royal family. One day, he was involved in helping the Hebrews and when this resulted in a murder of an Egyptian, he fled out of Egypt into the Midian wilderness. He settled down there and lived another forty years. In his life, he had struggled with identity confusion – not success. He called himself an alien in a foreign country for forty years. What can we learn this morning from this story of Moses? There are couple points that we need to pay our attention to in this passage.

First, as we see in his life journey, we know that Moses was confused, lost, unclear and unsure about his life. It was quite a depressing life situation to him. Have you ever had this kind of moment in your life? We've all been lost in the journey of life being perplexed and disoriented. What happened to Moses was amazing and surprising. God "came down" to him and met him where he was. He wasn't necessarily where he should be. One my colleagues who majored Middle Eastern Studies taught me that the most unique thing about Christianity when comparing it to other religions in ancient ages is that God humbly "comes down" and "saves" his people. I talked about "Grace" a couple weeks ago. It is also a sign of God's compassion and mercy for his creation. At verse 7, God also said to Moses that "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."

Our God is willing to come down to Moses and the Israelites, and He is willing to come down to each of us in times when we are feeling lost, confused, perplexed and unsure, too. When you are weak, sick and you feel that you do not deserve it, God is willing to come to you and bring you comfort and show his caring presence in you. We don't have to be scared and afraid about ourselves. Do you remember the characters in the Bible? God has changed many people's lives through His encounters in their lives. Noah was a drunk, Abraham was too old, Jacob was a liar. As you know, David had an affair & was a murderer, Elijah was suicidal. Jonah ran from God. Peter denied Christ, the disciples fell asleep while praying, Martha worried about everything, and even Zaccheus was too small, but it didn't matter to God. God came down to them and made them great people and leaders in the Bible. In your storm of life, when you feel you are exhausted, and you can't do any more, do not give up. God will come down to you. Listen to the voice of God in your heart.

The second important thing that we should be aware of is the place where God met Moses in his life. It was "in the wilderness" while he was shepherding flocks. The "Wilderness" was not a special place for Moses. It was an ordinary place where his daily schedule and daily life were happening. According to the reading, when God appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush, the bush was blazing, but yet it was not consumed. This shows us the mysterious presence of God. William Robertson Smith, in his book *The Religion of the Semites*, suggested that the fire in the burning bush was a form of static electricity that can develop around such objects as bushes in arid climates. Even though bushes are an ordinary thing in the wilderness, spread out around Moses while he was guiding his sheep and goats here and there, the one miraculous thing was that God came down and called his name, "Moses, Moses!"

God will meet you anywhere and anytime not only here in our worship time, but also in your daily schedule, in your personal moments of prayer, in your service to people and even in your workplace. Just as God met Moses in the wilderness, God will be present to you where you are.

The last point is that we should not lose our ‘spiritual curiosity’ and our ‘sense of discernment’ of God’s presence in our daily lives. If you look at verse 3, there is another great insight for our spiritual practice. When Moses looked at the mysterious sight in the “burning bush,” we need to be aware that he didn’t pass by but instead, he said, “What is going on?” and “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” Then, God reminded him that he was entering a ‘Holy Ground.’ God asked him to take off his shoes. God gave him a great mission and a plan for him. God is everywhere as we go, and God promised us through Jesus that God will be always with us. We have to check in with ourselves whether we have a spiritual curiosity to be sensitive to hear God’s call and discern God’s presence in our daily lives.

I hope that our Sunday worship will be one of your ‘holy grounds’ where you can hear God’s voice for you in your daily lives. Spiritually tune yourself in with God’s calling during our worship. Just open your heart to being curious and sensitive to God’s presence in your soul. Open your heart to a hunger for God’s presence and God’s encounters with you in your prayer and worship. I pray God will come down to you and meet you where you are so that you may receive peace and strength and find hope in the midst of your struggles in your daily lives.

Let’s be sensitive to our daily life so that we may not miss God’s presence and calling for us. In our Methodist belief, there are four ways to sense God’s presence in our faith. Those are reason, tradition, scripture and experience. Your experience is a channel of wonderful ways to feel the presence of God. God is still speaking to us through our service, prayer, and through our spiritual experiences. Try to catch God’s voice in your life. We need to be spiritually awake all the time. Think about each moment in your daily lives. Where is your ‘holy ground’ that you can ‘take off your shoes’ in your daily life, which means where you can lay down your worries, your stress and yourself, and quietly and curiously ‘turn aside and look’ to be sensitive to the presence of God.

God always wants to be with us and to meet us, but sometimes we do not pay enough attention to Him because we are busy with our own agenda. We need to lay down our own stuff first, and we should open and carefully listen to the voice of God. While I was preparing this sermon for you, God gave me a heart for you and I through the following message. It comes from Jeremiah 29:1

saying: “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Our God has a plan for you in your personal life and for this church as well. Amen.