

Aug. 7, 11 Comm. Sun. Exodus 3

“LET MY PEOPLE GO”

Every time I think of Moses I cannot get away from the movie The Ten Commandments starring Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner. In fact, as I was driving to the office on Thursday thinking about this sermon I could picture Charlton Heston and Yul standing there in Pharaoh's court surrounded by all the people. There is Heston as Moses, his long white beard, with his shepherd's staff in his hand. A bald Brynner as Pharaoh stands with his hands on his hips as they have a conversation about why Moses has come back to Egypt. Moses tells Pharaoh he is on a mission from God to free his people. Now this is the line I thought of. Pharaoh looks down at Moses, smiles as only Yul Brynner is able to do and begins in a soft voice, “Moses, Moses, Moses.”

Have you ever been called to do something you may not have wanted to do that God told you to do? God's prophets found that to be the case. God called them to do a job. He never said they would be successful. The call to Ezekiel was to go to a “stiff-necked” people who would never listen to his message. Oh, they would hear the words, but it wouldn't change a thing in their lives. He was to still preach God's message and not worry about the results. The message is God's. The results will be left up to the Holy Spirit's convicting power. They were to preach warnings of what would happen if lives didn't change.

I remember a story where a preacher was asked to preach in an old southern country church. He found his way to the church and no one was there to greet him. He checked his calendar to make sure he had the right date and right time and sure enough, he did. He sat outside on the steps waiting for the people to show up, but none came. He found the door unlocked so he went in and yelled, “Anybody here?” No answer came back, but the echo of his own voice. He checked his watch and saw the scheduled time for worship was now

at hand. He made his way to the front of the church sat down in his place, looked out to an empty church, said a few words of prayer, and said to himself, “Well, I don’t know where all the people are, but I was called to preach in this church, so I will preach.” He began to preach like he would if there had been a thousand people there. He preached with conviction and with enthusiasm. On and on he went, even working up a sweat. Finally, he came to the end of the sermon. He paused for silent prayer and heard a strange noise. When he looked up from the altar rail where he had been talking to God, there was a man with tears in his eyes. He asked where had he been, did he just get there or what? The man said no, he had been lying under one of the pews fixing something. The preacher asked why he didn’t yell out that he was there and the man said he was too scared to interrupt him. Now he stood there with tears in his eyes in response to God’s message to him. He was the one that needed that message. He was the one the preacher was sent to speak to. So it doesn’t matter how many are in church. God’s message is always for someone who is listening to his voice.

“Pharaoh, God has a message for you today. LET MY PEOPLE GO.” They have been in Egypt over 400 years and these last years, not sure how many, they have been in bondage as slaves. The Pharaoh who came to power didn’t know the story of Joseph and had no feelings for them. “Why have our folks do the dirty work,” he would say. “We have these people who are growing so fast that if we are not careful they will be more than we are and will take over our country. Let’s make them our slaves.”

But God heard the cries of the enslaved people and waiting in the dessert for almost 40 years is Moses. He has a burning bush encounter with God and is transformed from shepherd to savior. God was sending him to Pharaoh to let his people go. Enough is enough. Moses tried his best not to go. He gave God excuse after excuse. He could have said he was too old. He could have said he had a good job here and he didn’t want to

leave. He had a wife and children. Moses said he wasn't a good speaker so send his brother Aaron. Excuse after excuse that he offered was shot down by God at the burning bush. "Moses, Moses, Moses" God said, "You're my man. I'll send Aaron with you, but you're the man I have chosen for this job. I have one message for Pharaoh. It's "Let my people go." I'm going to warn you. It won't be easy. But don't worry. Do what I tell you and your people, and Pharaoh will see my Glory and you will leave Egypt as a mighty nation and I will lead you to the land I have promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Now I know most of you know this story. But what do we learn from this? First of all, we learn **God has chosen us**. We might not be all called to be a pastor, but we are all called to minister in his name to others. We are told we are a 'holy nation, priests to one another.' I believe God is still calling people, but many refuse. They refuse his call to repentance, to salvation, to a transformed life. He calls some to various kinds of ministry as lay people to be servants of God. Many are chosen. Not all respond. Some might be like Moses making excuse after excuse. I can relate to that because I fought God's call into ministry. I could not believe he could use me to preach his message to others. I knew there were other more eloquent speakers. When I told our pastor I believed God was calling me into the ministry he encouraged me to follow my heart. When I asked him why he thought I would be a good minister the only thing he said was "Because you got 'it.'" I never questioned or asked what 'it' was, but if he thought I had 'it' then I must have 'it.' Still to this day I don't know exactly what he meant, but I know God must have known I had 'it' and he helped me develop 'it' at Asbury College and Seminary and throughout my ministry. I guess I still got 'it' because God isn't through with me yet as I continue to be his servant. May not be an eloquent speaker, my English not so good at times, but at least I got 'it.' And that's what counts. And oh, how I love Jesus. As long as I got that, then my ministry will be successful, for I am surrendered to God's call to bring messages of hope

and salvation to those who he puts in the pews each Sunday, and to those I come in contact with daily.

The second thing we might learn is that **those whom God calls, he prepares**. You would have thought that Pharaoh would have let the people go after the first miracle performed before him, but he didn't. Even his own magicians could copy stuff Moses was doing. So what if his staff turned into a snake. His own guys could do that as well. But the miracle came when Moses snake ate the snakes of the magicians. Pharaoh's heart was hardened over and over again. And much to the amazement of Moses, Pharaoh made it harder on the Hebrew people. Not only was Moses getting grief from Pharaoh, his own people were telling him to go away before more troubles came to them. What they didn't see, it seems, was God was watching over them for all the plaques hit the Egyptians, and the Hebrew people were spared. They and Moses were learning a lesson most of us should learn....trust in Jesus, trust in God and those whom God has called, he prepares.

A third thing we learn from this story is that the **journey to freedom is not always easy**. Finally Pharaoh's heart was melted and he let Moses and the people go. Thousands upon thousands with their families, their belongings and all the riches they could round up left Pharaoh's place and headed to the Promised Land following Moses, who was following God. Every step of the way seemed to be like a VBS adventure. Read Exodus chapter three to the end of the book to find the trials and tribulations of the journey of faith that led to their freedom. And as you all might know, many of the original troops never made it there because, well they rebelled, lost faith, and I just can't say why God pulled the plug on them, but I can guess. They didn't listen to God's message or his messenger.

And that's a sad point of the story. After all the things God promised and all the miracles some still didn't believe. God parted the Red Sea which alone was a great miracle. He dried the ground so the people could pass through to the other side. Time and

time again they lost sight of what God was doing. They were his chosen people from far back as Abraham. If they would continue to be his people, God would be there God and provide all things for them. But there was that fear thing. They feared what was ahead instead of trusting in the God each day for their daily needs no matter what they were.

The story ends happily. Their journey ends at the gates to the Promised Land. It was rough at times and though Pharaoh gave up, Satan kept nipping at their heels. But God was watching over them and now they were free....until another day!

Let me remind you that we are called by God, God prepares us for the journey, the journey is not easy, but one day we will reach the Promised Land.

Communion is a reminder to us of what Christ did. We come to the altar, see the empty cross, and remember that what was promised around the table of Grace that first Lord's Supper is for us today as well. It is also a reminder of the first Passover meal in Egypt as the people killed the lamb and placed the blood over their doorways so they could be free from the sting of death.

When Jesus sat with his disciples for his final meal it was a reminder of the freedom their people received. But now he was giving them a new covenant. First he would die to set them free. Second he would rise to open the road to heaven. Third, one day he would come back to take those who believe to heaven where we will live with him for all eternity.

One more thing tying the story of Moses with communion is this. When Moses went to Pharaoh on behalf of God, he told him to take his hands off all the chosen people and let his people go. Pharaoh fought teeth and nails to keep them but eventually let them go. But remember he changed his mind and went after them but God prevented him from enslaving them again.

At the cross, when Christ was dying God was saying to Satan, “let my people go.” Satan kept saying no. He had his chains wrapped tight around God’s people in the bondage of sin and his temptations. He refused to back away. But on that wonderful Easter morning and the tomb was empty the chains of sin were broken and God’s people found freedom from the bondage of sin. But like Pharaoh, Satan continues to prowl around like a roaring lion to put Christians back in chains.

This morning, as you come to the table you might not hear the voices, but when you receive the bread and juice Jesus is commanding Satan again, “Let my people go. My son’s death on the cross has set them free from your chains forever.”

So it is written! So it shall be!