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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 17, 2016
9th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Acts 16:12-15; Mark 8:34-38

Hymns: 541; 421; 307; 54

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Exodus 3:1-14

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

⁴So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

⁵Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground."

⁶Moreover He said, "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 upon God.

⁷And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. ⁸So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

⁹Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the

Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

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

¹² So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

¹³ Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What *is* His name?’ what shall I say to them?”

¹⁴ And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Finding Ourselves in Different Places in Life.

As we live out our lives we find ourselves in different places in life. Adjustments need to be made. Sometimes the changes come relatively quickly. As we begin life we are in the security of our parents’ care, but before you know it it’s off to the first day of school. Schools change and years go by and the end of school comes. Then one’s working life commences. And again years go by with perhaps some stressful moves along the way, and before you know it, one looks back and thinks where did all those years go? So the senior years begin, and advance, and one begins to think in terms of reaching the end of one’s earthly pilgrimage.

Some think that means it’s time to sit back and let life go by. That is not unique to old age. Too many young people lose their way and life goes by. Too many people think of life in terms of this world, and the goals and ambitions of this world. They also,

without even realizing it, are allowing life to pass them by with its true meaning and purpose.

Today we are looking at the Prophet Moses. We have many impressions come to mind about Moses. However it is important for us to remember that Moses too found himself in some very different places in life before he served as God's prophet and the leader of the Children of Israel. Without considering Moses' life in detail we should recall that Moses spent his first forty years (yes, forty years) living as a prince of Egypt. Then things happened and Moses spent the next forty years of his life working as a shepherd for the man who became his father-in-law, Jethro the priest of Midian. That makes Moses eighty years old at the time of our text, a man already well advanced in years. But the Lord still had a plan for Moses, a purpose for Moses to fulfill, a calling that would last the rest of Moses' earthly life. --

**THEME: Moses' Call at the Burning Bush Reminds Us
of our Sacred Purpose in Life.**

I think we often downplay the fact that we have a sacred purpose in life. This sacred purpose begins with --

I. God Revealing Himself to Us.

So it was with Moses. Moses was having a regular day working with the flock in the hills and mountains of the Sinai Peninsula. In fact he was tending the sheep on a mountain that was called Mount Horeb, or that we also know as Mount Sinai. As he was moseying along something rather extraordinary caught Moses' attention. He saw a bush on fire. That alone would have been attention getting out in the wilderness where it could be a hazard to the flock, but something else was going on that captured Moses' attention, something that wasn't normal, something that wasn't natural. While the bush appeared to be on fire it wasn't being consumed by the fire. Moses drew near to check it out, and as he did, it quickly became apparent that this was indeed something spectacular. The Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Our text directs our attention to how special this was by declaring that this was the **Angel of the Lord** who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. In this context we shouldn't think in terms of a created spiritual being who serves God like the angel Gabriel or the angel Michael. This is

a special Old Testament title for the **Son of God**. The word “angel” means messenger. The Angel of the Lord is the messenger by which God chooses to reveal Himself to His people. He is the Son of God. The message for Moses is a message of deliverance. God revealed Himself to Moses in grace.

The Lord declared the ground upon which Moses was walking to be holy ground, for there God revealed Himself to Moses with a spectacular message of salvation.

Don't we all agree that this was indeed a special day in Moses' life, a very special revelation for Moses to receive? If we do agree to that, then let us also understand that the Lord has intervened in **our** lives also in a very special way. He has revealed Himself to us in a special, even a spectacular way in the Holy Scriptures. Yes, God reveals Himself to us in His Word through which He speaks to us. He identifies Himself not only as the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, (for we do worship the same God as Lord as they did), but He also reveals Himself to us through His Son. In these last days He is not identified to us as the Angel of the Lord, but as Jesus Christ **“the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

He is the **only** true God. When we venture near to the Lord through the reading of His Word, or by gathering together around the Word of God we should do so with great reverence. The ground upon which we are walking right now is holy ground. The Lord has revealed Himself to us that we might know Him, and believe in Him, not only that He exists but that He knows us, and cares for us. He calls us even as He called Moses. He calls us to be His own special people. He calls us to faith in Him. He calls us to serve His purpose in this life. We are called by the Lord **“to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness,** (the darkness of sin and death and the darkness of this world) **into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). He lights the way for us to walk through this life on our earthly pilgrimage. He guides and directs us on our way in all those different times of our lives.

For most of us this began when we were young children and the Lord called us to be His own through the grace of Holy Baptism. That wasn't the end, it was only the beginning. As we have passed

through the different time of our lives God continued to reveal Himself to us in His Word that we might continue in faith that we might continue to serve Him in every circumstance of life, when things are going smoothly, or in times of trial.

So Moses was given a special mission and calling late in life. God called --

II. Moses to Lead Others to the Promised Land.

God had seen the plight of the Children of Israel as they have suffered in slavery to the Egyptians. God reveals to Moses the plan that He had for their deliverance. He was going to bring them out of the land of Egypt, save them from this dreadful slavery which brought cruel oppression and death, and bring them to the land which He had promised to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. God would deliver the people who lived in Canaan into the hands of the Children of Israel, for the inhabitants of Canaan had filled up the cup of iniquity. They had run out of grace extended to them by a merciful God.

Moses was about to begin the most important time of his life. He would lead the people of Israel according to the word and will of God out of Egypt from which they would be saved with a mighty deliverance. Moses would lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

Exodus 3:10 “Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Could God have done this without Moses? Without doubt He could have. He could have sent His angels to lead the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. God in His grace and wisdom chooses to work through us His people. This was why the Lord had directed Moses' life down the path it had gone. The Lord raised up Moses for this mission of salvation, to lead the people out of slavery.

And so the Lord also has a mission of salvation, a divine purpose for us in our lives. While the message entrusted to us is not focused on a deliverance from Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan, it is a great message of deliverance. In fact it is even a

greater message with the promise of a greater deliverance to a more wondrous Promised Land. The slavery of sin and the controlling power of the devil wreaks havoc on people's lives, not only here in time, but also in eternity. So the Lord has called us and directed our lives to this purpose and calling of His salvation. There are different times in our lives when we fulfill this calling in different ways. There are various gifts and corresponding roles or functions for different individuals to fill. Whether we are eight or eighty we have a function in God's plan to assist others, to lead others out of the land of oppression to the Promised Land of heaven.

It was an intimidating task that the Lord laid before Moses. So it is for us also. So then the closing verses of our text are so important for us, for there we learn of --

III. The Promise of the Lord's Presence.

Moses' response was, "Who am I?" After forty years of being a lowly shepherd, forty years out of the spotlight of being considered royalty in Egypt, Moses no longer saw himself as great or powerful or important. He saw himself as no more than a humble shepherd tending someone else's sheep. So he said to the Lord;

Exodus 3:11 "Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Feelings of inadequacy are not only common, they are accurate. Who am I that I should be God's messenger? Who am I that I should be chosen to lead others out of the wilderness of this world to the Promised Land of heaven? I am just another sinner. I am no wiser or stronger than others who are struggling in this world. And the Lord's answer to us is not a pep talk about our own capabilities or self-worth. He directs us away from looking at ourselves with our sins and shortcomings to looking to Him. Consider the Lord's response to Moses.

Exodus 3:1-14 "So He said, 'I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'

¹³ Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "What *is* His name?" what shall I say to

them?”¹⁴ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This was key for Moses. It was the power and authority of God that Moses presented to Pharaoh, telling the king of Egypt to let God’s people go. It was not Moses that Pharaoh defied, but the Lord! It was not Moses that ultimately delivered the Children of Israel from slavery and oppression, but the Lord!

How important it is for us in every circumstance of life to comprehend the Lord’s presence with us in life. It’s a great encouragement when we are dealing with troubles and tribulations to know Jesus’ promise, “**I am with you always even to the end of the world**” (Matthew 28:20). However, we tend to set that truth aside when we are considering why the Lord has us here in our particular time of life. Maybe we think, “I’m too old to do anything.” Maybe we think, “I am too young.” Maybe we think, “I’ll leave it to others because I am too weak, too uneducated, or too shy.”

Whatever our cause for concern it is answered by the Lord’s presence in our lives. He is with us in all our ways. He is with us as we endeavor to do His will in our lives; that is to lead others out of the slavery of sin to the Promised Land.

And yes, Moses too was concerned that others wouldn’t pay attention to what he had to say. They wouldn’t recognize Moses’ authority. Moses needed to make it clear that the great “**I AM**” had sent Moses to the Children of Israel, so that they would know to follow Moses, believe what Moses had to say, trust that this truth would lead them to the Promised Land.

Again that is no different for us. It is a question of authority. When people present their ideas about God, and then object to what we have to say, what is their authority? Is it greater than yours? Some claim their own authority, that what they say is their own truth, and who are you to tell them otherwise? Others look to the social norm, what’s popular to believe at a given time in a given land, and declare that is the truth for them! That remains nothing more than human authority. Still others claim the authority of science. How

dare you go against the authority of science! And then we may even be intimidated as if this is a superior authority to man, or God. How foolish of us. We possess the authority of God's Word. It is the **"I AM"** that has called us to faith, entrusted us with His Word, and sent us to proclaim that Word of life to others. **Jesus is the great "I AM," "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"** (Revelation 1:8). There is no authority in heaven or on earth that is greater than Jesus'. He abides with us forever.

So then it matters not at all what place you are in life. The Lord Jesus has been with you, and led you to this place in life that you might serve Him ALL your days. He would have us continue to show forth His praises and His truth that others might know the deliverance that is found in the Lord. In doing this we show them the way to the Promised Land.

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans15:13)