

“Who Am I?”

Sunday, September 3rd, 2017

13th Sunday after Pentecost

#1 in Series: EXODUS: Gods calls, provides, and fulfills

 **Exodus 3:1-15 (NRSV)**

The Book of Exodus picks up where Genesis left off; after Joseph’s death.

It narrates the oppression of the Israelites under the rule of a new Pharaoh and the fundamental act of salvation for God’s people.

This sweeping story focuses on what it means to live as the redeemed people of God and establishes for all time that the response to salvation should be obedience in the service of God’s wider mission to bless all of humanity.

[Read from Wesley Study Bible]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

For generations, philosophers have pondered the question, “*Who am I?*”

The story of Moses brings us face-to-face with that question and another: “*Who is God?*”

Moses’ dilemma is understandable.

“Am I Jew or Egyptian? Am I slave or royalty?”

The cause of confusion was that, although Moses had been born to Jewish slaves, he had been adopted by the princess of Egypt when she found him floating in that basket in the Nile River.

Though he grew up in the palace as Pharaoh’s grandson, Moses never managed to shake his humble Jewish roots.

By the time he turned 40, however, Moses believed he had the answer to the age-old question of who he was.

He thought he was to be the leader, even the savior of his people the Israelites.

He made his bid as Israelite leader when he killed one of the many Egyptian slave drivers who were making life miserable for his people.

But, while Moses was certain of who he was, the Israelites, whom he had hoped to rescue, were not.

When Moses later tried intervening between two quarrelling Israelites they turned on him and challenged: *“Who are you? Are you going to kill us like you killed that Egyptian?”*

(Exodus 2:14)

Terrified that his secret was out, Moses fled to the wilderness of Midian where he lived as a shepherd for the next 40 years.

Surely, during his time in the wilderness the age-old question came back to haunt Moses:

“Who am I?”

Now, a few not-so-flattering descriptions seemed to fit. Who was Moses? He was a political failure, a murderer, and now a loner.

Let us pray... Lord, many of us have asked the question, “*Who am I?*” more than once in our lives. It may be a question we never fully answer, particularly when we also wonder who you are. Lead us this morning as we face this question again and study Scripture for the answer and a new way of engaging the question. In Jesus’ name, we pray. **Amen.**

Our Hollywood vision of Moses may cause us to question the timeline of his story.

Charlton Heston did not look 80 years old in the scene with the burning bush.

The text doesn’t explicitly state his age at the various turning points of the story either.

Scholars have tried to use the description of events to say that he was 40 when he fled Egypt and 40 when God called him back.

The significance of the number 40 may be what is actually in play here.

For the ancient Hebrews, the number 40 generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial or probation.

Moses spends 40 years living in Egypt, 40 years living in the wilderness before God's call, and then he stays on Mt. Sinai for 40 days – on two separate occasions, to receive God's Law.

Later, he sends spies to spend 40 days scoping out the Promised Land.

But, for all his testing, trial, probation – preparation, Moses is not ready when God comes calling in the Burning Bush.

At one point, Moses saw himself as the savior of his people.

God tells him that the cries of the oppressed Israelites do not go unheard in heaven.

Yet, his answer to God is: *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”*

With our 20/20 hindsight, we see the obvious answer.

Now, fast forward into your life.

What has God called you to do that caused you to respond, “*Who am I?*”

“*Who am I to help the homeless veterans in our community?*”

“*Who am I to help lead our young people into relationship with Christ?*”

“*Who am I to serve on the Board of Trustees or Finance Committee?*”

The answer for you is the same as it was for Moses.

You are someone who was created by God and prepared to serve God.

You also will have God with you, leading the way, and giving you the right words.

When asked, you too can say that God sent you; the great I Am, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But, is that really enough of an answer to move us from God’s call into action?

Consider this: when Moses encounters God he sees a physical manifestation; the burning bush, the columns of smoke and fire, the smoke on the mountain.

God comes to Moses...*where Moses is*.

Christians believe that Christ is God incarnate, coming to earth...*to where we are*.

When we say that God meets us where we are, the implication is that we are not always where we *should* be.

God adapts and accommodates us wherever we are and guides us to where God wants us to be.

Moses was not where he should have been either, but seeing the burning bush and hearing God's call will bring him out of isolation, sending Moses back to Egypt to lead the Israelites.

It is a moment when Moses is rescued yet again; first he is saved from death as an infant then he is adopted by royalty, then he escapes

Pharaoh's punishment, and now he is rescued from obscurity to fulfill God's plan.

In spite of everything, God gets what he wants.

When we ask the question, "*Who am I?*", I think we have genuine doubts and fears that prompt us.

You may question your own origin story, not knowing all the details of a childhood with absent parents or years spent in foster care.

You may have doubts about your self-worth if you are a survivor of child abuse.

You may lack confidence in the choices you have made over a lifetime and wonder what might have been if you had chosen differently.

There are many factors in our lives that might cause us to wonder who we really are.

I think the take-away from this story is that, it doesn't matter if we doubt our ability, even if we question our identity; God can handle it.

Moses made excuses for why he couldn't go and he even told God to send someone else.

In the end, the reluctant Hebrew boy, turned prince, turned murderer, turned fugitive shepherd, fulfills God's mission by answering his call.

We may not think we can do what God asks; we may not think we are even worthy to try.

We may feel burned out or hurt from past experience, so we are reluctant to serve again.

We may just be tired and figure that it's someone else's turn.

We may just wish that God would ask someone else.

In the end, let us pray that we each have the courage to listen and respond to God.

God calls all reluctant sinners to something; our confidence to commit rests in who God is.

"I AM WHO I AM."

"I AM" has called you.

"I WILL BE WITH YOU," this is God's promise.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**
