

“Ready and Able”

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Exodus 3 & 4

Rev. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church

A man was seen fleeing down the hall of the hospital just before his operation. A security guard stopped him before he could leave the hospital and asked, “What’s the matter?”

The man said, “I heard the nurse say, ‘It’s a very simple operation, don’t worry, I’m sure it will be all right.’”

“She was just trying to comfort you,” said the security guard.

“What’s so frightening about that?”

“She wasn’t talking to me,” exclaimed the man.

“She was talking to the surgeon!”

I love the story of Moses that was read earlier, when God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Moses was not a young man anymore, and taking on the ruler of Egypt was probably not on his bucket list of things he hoped to do before he kicked his bucket.

Moses has an interesting life and story. From the beginning you have a sense that he was born and saved for a reason.

Last week we talked about Joseph who went from prison to becoming the Prime Minister of Egypt. Joseph saved not only Egypt, but also his own family and the nation of Israel when he brings them to Egypt to escape the widespread famine. Long after Joseph has died and no one really remembers him anymore, the Israelites are still in Egypt — only now they are slaves. They were getting too numerous, and Pharaoh and the Egyptians were getting nervous.

At the time Moses was born, a command was given that all Jewish male babies should be killed.



Moses’ mother hid her son for three months, and then she had the idea of putting him in a basket in the Nile where the Pharaoh’s daughter might find him. She saved him from the water and raised him as her own, and Moses grew up in privilege and prosperity.

But he was clearly aware that he was not an Egyptian but an Israelite. We can tell by a life changing incident that is described in four short verses in Exodus chapter 2. *“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched*

them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” (Ex 2:11-12 italics added) The next day Moses intervened again. This time he tries to break up a fight between two Hebrews. Instead of being grateful for his leadership and intervention, it becomes clear that they don't trust Moses at all. The Hebrews saw Moses as an Egyptian and not as a fellow Hebrew. They were afraid and probably jealous of his position and status and one said to him “*Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?*”

This is of course tremendously ironic because the answer to the question ‘Who made you a prince and judge over us?’ is ‘God’. God did. Prince and judge is exactly what Moses became and was born to be.

You too were born for a purpose and for a reason. You also are alive for a purpose and for a reason. And for some of you, it's against all odds that you are still here today. Believe me, it's no accident. But perhaps you haven't quite figured out what it is you're called to do.

When you begin to catch a glimpse of it, don't listen to the negative, fearful people around you, even if they are your own family. It's a strange thing, but sometimes the very people who least want us to grow into the person we were created to be are the ones closest to us. I don't claim to understand this phenomenon, but I know it is true and quite common. Sometimes, when you have a hope in your heart and you think it is from God, you need to ignore fearful, negative advice and walk on.

Those words from Moses' own kin, his own family, cause Moses not just to question his true identity, but to totally throw it away. You can imagine the negative and insecure thoughts that probably started going around and around in his mind. He was probably saying to himself: “Yeah, what was I thinking?! I'm no leader. I don't even belong. I don't belong to the Egyptians and I don't belong with the Hebrews.”

It's not just the negativity around us. We too become captive to our own negative thinking and to our fears and feelings of insecurity.

Moses got so stuck in his fears and his shame that he fled to the wilderness. In the meantime, he got married, had some kids, and spent his time looking after his father-in-law's sheep. My hunch is he was okay, but deep down not truly happy or satisfied. That's the annoying thing about a call. You can run, but you can't hide. He's haunted by his past and wants to get away from it, but he is hard-wired to lead people from bondage to freedom. I'm guessing that no matter how hard he tried to convince himself

that it was a pretty good life and that he really shouldn't complain; I'm guessing that leading sheep just wasn't cutting it.



Then we come to that wonderful encounter with God in the burning bush. God identifies himself and says he's seen the oppression of his people, and then God says: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Ex 3:10 Moses' answer goes right back to the belief he held in his heart after the accusation of his fellow Hebrews so many years ago. "*But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'*" Ex 3:11.

How does God answer that question? He answers it by telling Moses that he, God, will be with him. Over and over Moses says, "but...but... they'll never follow me, but I'm not a good speaker, but Pharaoh will never listen to me". Moses keeps trying to convince God that he's got the wrong guy; that he's just a shepherd and no more.

The interesting thing is that God doesn't respond by trying to convince Moses that Moses really is great — instead God points to himself. When Moses says "But who am I that I should go?" God turns it around and essentially says, 'Stop looking at yourself and look *at me*.' The answer to Moses' and our question of 'but who am I?' is: "*It's not who you are that counts, it's who I am*".

God says: "I'll be there with you". God says "I Am". God's answer when Moses asks him what his name is, is fascinating and a great mystery. It is commonly translated "I AM WHO I AM". But it could be translated "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE". He uses the verb "to be" as his name. In other words, God's name is a verb. God is being. God is "am"ing. The book of Revelation says: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega*", says the Lord God, "*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*" (Rev. 1:8). That's what I believe God was saying to Moses. Clearly who God is; is beyond the abilities of language to comprehend, but the closest thing we can say is that God is. God is creator and life, not as a noun or an object, but *living, moving, breathing, action, past, present and future, almighty, mothering, and full of power and compassion and love*.

Instead of looking down at ourselves and at our weakness and fears and limitations, we are to look up at God. God is the one who created you. You were born for a special purpose, and even your parents or your children may not understand what that special purpose is, but God knows. Look up to God and you will live and soar.

When bad things happen in life or when you are put down, you can start to believe the lie that you are no good, not smart, that you could never do this or that or be something. There's that old story you've probably heard before in one form or another. One version goes like this:

One day a neighbour came to visit his friend the chicken farmer. He was surprised to see an eagle strutting around the chicken coop, pecking at the ground, and acting like a chicken. The farmer explained to him that he had brought the bird to the coop as an abandoned chick, and only later discovered that it was an eagle. He further told his friend that since the bird had been raised a chicken that the bird actually believed himself to be a chicken.



The neighbour knew there was more to this noble bird than his behaviour showed as a chicken. He was born an eagle and had the heart of an eagle, and nothing could change that. The neighbour reached down and lifted the eagle onto the fence surrounding the chicken coop and said, "Eagle, you are an eagle. Stretch your wings and fly." The eagle only looked blankly at the man and clucked. He jumped off the fence and continued doing what chickens do. The farmer was satisfied. "I told you - he thinks he's a chicken," he said.

The neighbour couldn't sleep that night and returned the next day to convince the farmer that the eagle was born for something greater. The man took the eagle from the dirty coop and carried him to the top of the farmhouse. Setting the bird down on the roof, the neighbour spoke to him: "Eagle, you are an eagle. You therefore belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch your wings and fly." The large bird blinked at the man, clucked, and then jumped down into the chicken coop.

After another restless night, the friend returned the next morning to the chicken farm and took the eagle and the farmer away from the chicken coop to the foot of a high mountain. They could not see the farm nor the chicken coop from this great height. The man lifted the eagle on his outstretched arm and pointed high into the sky where the bright sun was beckoning above. He spoke: "Eagle, you are an eagle! You therefore



belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch your wings and fly." This time the eagle stared skyward into the bright sun, straightened his large body, and stretched his massive wings. His wings moved, slowly at first, then surely and powerfully. With the mighty

screech of an eagle, he flew away.

When you discover your life's purpose and have the courage to live it, it will feel so right. But it's never just about you. Imagine what might have happened if Moses had said "No thanks. I just can't". Imagine what might happen if you say "No thanks. I just can't".

Of course we can't imagine because we don't know. Even when you live the life you were created for and are called to live, you still don't know the impact you will have.

A woman called me in distress a little while ago. At the end of the call I asked her "Why did you call us?" She said, "When I was a teenager my parents split up one night and it was ugly and I left the house. I spent a night on the street in the rain. In the morning I walked by a United Church and I knocked on the door of the house next door where the minister lived. The minister and his wife took me in, gave me breakfast and dry clothes. They washed my clothes and then after lengthy conversations and prayer they drove me home. I'll never forget what that United Church minister did for me, so I knew I had to call the United Church." I don't know if that United Church minister and his wife are still alive. She didn't remember their names, and I wonder if they would even remember that day. I wish I could call them and tell them that their simple act of grace and kindness was never forgotten – they made a difference.

You were meant to fly. You were born to fly. And when you do, others will look up and have hope—others will catch a glimpse of the One who is calling them to spread their wings and fly too. *Come and I will send you.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.