

Proper 17A  
Exodus 3:1-15  
The Reverend Bonnie Underwood  
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### Our True Identities

Jess and I have been waiting for news of the arrival of our newest granddaughter. She would be our 4th grandchild, the daughter of our oldest son David and his wife Emily who live in Tuscaloosa. The baby was due in late August, and we've been anxious to get that special phone call.

So when I received those wonderful initial pictures of our sweet new baby girl, my very first question — after hearing that both mom and baby were both doing great — was about her name. Names are so important: the very beginning of our identities. And I'm happy to announce the arrival of Mae Estelle Neder, born last Monday and named after two of her great-great grandmothers.

Names matter. Identities matter. Who we are and how we understand ourselves can define how we live and act in our day-to-day lives.

Today we hear about Moses, a man with an evolving identity.

Born a Hebrew boy and destined for an early death because of Pharaoh's decrees, Moses was miraculously saved and raised by the Pharaoh's sister after his mother took the risk of placing him in a basket and sending him, literally, down the river. He lived for years as a prince of Egypt until he was forced to flee after killing an Egyptian overseer for mistreating a Hebrew slave. And then he became a shepherd, keeping the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro.

Then Moses had an encounter with the Holy One: the One who called him by name, having drawn him to a holy place by a holy fire and Moses responds to God's voice, saying "Here I am!"

An 80 year old Moses discovers that he is called to do more. Although he's lived in exile in the wilderness of Midian for 40 years and Egypt was a lifetime ago, he's asked to stretch himself beyond his daily rituals and routines, and face what he has been running from for so many years. The Almighty tells him he's to carry God's light back into the world, bringing hope to those who are **suffering, enslaved, and oppressed**. And Moses argues with God. He doesn't feel that he's the right guy, not adequate for the task.

But God is at the center of this story, just as God is at the center of all our stories.

With God's help, Moses finds his identity, his purpose, and **everything** is changed. Moses will discover that his past and his present, the good and bad — all that he is — will be transformed by God into unimaginable possibilities for both Moses and his community. Moses as messenger, prophet, and leader will stand against the powers and principalities of his time, and by faithfully following the great I AM, he will lead his people out of Egypt and into the land of promise. For God works through us, through humankind, the small, intimidated humans God loves.

Our identities shape how we interact and relate to others, how we live in relationship and perceive the world. How do we live into our purpose and hear God's call? Are we willing to allow our Lord and Savior *help us to evolve and grow* into our identities as Christ's own?

It all begins with listening, by taking the time to hear God's voice and seek God's presence, discovering how we too are called into participating in something greater than ourselves. In worship, in prayer, in study, we can discover more about our *identities as beloved children of God*, and how we are called to *interact differently* in the world.

As a Parish we will have a chance to journey together, beginning next week, as we focus much of this year's Christian Education and Bible Studies on *The Path*. We'll listen together to stories of God's deeply relational love for God's Creation, opening ourselves to discover the ways that God accomplishes God's purpose through humankind. A chance for us to grow together in Christ by learning more about how to live into loving God and loving our neighbor.

We can listen to one another's stories and our diocese helps make some amazing opportunities available. Last week our youth had the opportunity were able to hear from 4 teenage girls — refugees from Burma, Afghanistan, and Iran — during a Youth Diocesan Service Day. We heard about entire families escaping war and oppression by walking barefoot throughout the night and sleeping in caves during daylight; of girls who were refused an education; of families leaving everything behind and bravely traveling across the world to a place where nothing is familiar — not the culture, the language, or even the food— in the hope of starting a new life. Stories that can remind us of why our own ancestors came to this country, stories that help us see our common humanity. I wonder if everyone *could all see one another as **Christ sees us*** — not as labels, stereotypes, or statistics, but as beloved children of God — how much easier it could be to have civil dialogue and find real solutions to complicated issues, enabling us to for both secure our borders and provide a reasonable, timely, and humane way to welcome the suffering to our Nation . . . for we are called to welcome the stranger and compassionately care for the oppressed.

As we open ourselves to listening to God and listening to the voices of *the other*, we open ourselves to the movement of the Spirit, helping us to discover that ***we are*** God's hands and feet, carrying Christ's light in the world.

How are we called to help in times of crisis? This week, we've seen a disaster unfold with the rising waters from Hurricane Harvey. But we've also seen so many willing to offer help and assistance, cutting across those lines that can so often divide us, as we reach out as our better selves. I expect we'll continue to hear stories of hope within this great loss, over the upcoming weeks and months. We can continue to pray for those suffering, and if you are able, Episcopal Relief and Development is an excellent resource for our giving, as they not only help during the immediate crisis, but also provide assistance throughout the long road to recovery.

How do we live into our identity as Christ followers and seek to serve Christ in others? In two weeks, we'll have our Ministry Fair and you'll be able to hear about how you can participate in existing ministries like the Panty, In-stitches, Family Promise, and others, as well as new ways to serve. One of those new opportunities begins this week, as Mentor Me offers homework & reading help through it's REACH program. Elementary grade students will meet with their mentors in the Parish Hall each Thursday during the school year and there are still openings for both additional mentors and substitute mentors.

We are all called. As God's own, we are known and loved, and *called by name*. While we may not see a burning bush, the Holy Spirit does place that ***burning desire*** within our hearts. It could be the curiosity to learn more about that new ministry; or an interest in hearing someone's story; or a growing passion to be an active part of seeking justice, respect, and dignity for all God's beloved people; or perhaps taking that time to be present one-one-one, helping a child learn to read or encouraging someone in need.

No one can do everything, but we all can do something, and it's never too late to start. With God's help, we have everything we need to strengthen and empower us to carry the good news of Christ into the world.

God is always with us, at work in our lives — as individuals and as a community — for God is faithful, full of grace and mercy and love. The God we worship and follow, the Great I AM, is our hope. Hope for our life journey, hope for creation, hope that we can be transformed into our true selves, our identities in Christ, as we are led by the Spirit to fulfill God's purpose. *Amen.*