

## **“Moses: The Reluctant Leader”**

Date: August 6, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Exodus 2:11-25; 3:1-20

Occasion: People of the Bible, series

Themes: God’s call, leadership, qualified, equipped

Have you ever been called or asked to do something that you felt totally unqualified to do? It’s an uncomfortable feeling, isn’t it? We don’t want to disappoint the person who asked us, on the one hand. And on the other hand, we don’t want to look like a fool trying to do something that feels totally out of our league.

Moses gets such a call, out in the desert. The encounter in the desert must have shocked the sandals right off old Moses. I wonder what amazed him more – that God spoke to him in a burning bush, or that God spoke at all.

You remember his story. His mother hides him in the bull rushes of the Nile to escape the cruelty of the Pharaoh. He gets adopted as nobility – an Israelite reared in an Egyptian palace. His countrymen were slaves, but Moses was privileged. He ate at the royal table and was educated in the finest schools.

But his most influential teacher had no degree. She was his mother. A Jewish woman hired to be his nanny. “Moses,” you can almost hear her whisper to her young son. “God has put you here for a purpose. Someday you will set your people free. Never forget, Moses. Never forget.”

Moses didn’t forget. The flame of justice grew hotter until it blazed. One day, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. Moses killed the Egyptian. The next day, Moses saw the Hebrew. You would have thought the slave would say “thanks.”

But he didn’t. Rather than express gratitude, he expressed anger. “Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” (Ex. 2:14)

Moses knew he was in trouble. He fled Egypt and hid in the wilderness. Call it a career shift. He went from eating with the heads of state to counting

heads of sheep. Hardly an upward move. And so it happened that a bright, promising Hebrew began herding sheep in the hills. From the Ivy League to the cotton patch. From the Oval Office to driving taxicab. From swinging a golf club to digging a ditch.

Moses thought the move was permanent. There is no indication he ever intended to go back to Egypt. In fact, there is every indication he wanted to stay with his sheep. Standing before the burning bush, he confessed, "I am not a great man! How can I go to the king and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11)

I'm glad Moses asked that question. It's a good one. Why Moses? Or more specifically, why 80-year old Moses? The 40-year old version was much more appealing. The Moses we saw back in Egypt was brash and confident. But the Moses we find four decades later is reluctant and not as assured of himself.

Had you or I looked at Moses when he still lived in the Pharaoh's court, we would have said, "This man is ready for battle." Educated in the finest system in the world. Trained by the ablest of soldiers. Instant access to the inner circle of the Pharaoh. Moses spoke their language and knew their habits. He was the perfect man for the job.

Moses at 40, we like. But Moses at 80? No way. Way too old. Too tired. Smells like sheep. Speaks like a foreigner. What impact would he be able to have on Pharaoh? He's the wrong man for the job. And Moses would have agreed.

"I tried that once before," he might say. "Those people don't want to be helped. Just leave me here to tend my sheep. They're easier to lead." Moses wouldn't have gone. You wouldn't have sent him. I wouldn't have sent him. But God did.

How do you figure? Would *you* choose a wanted murderer to lead a nation out of bondage? Would *you* call on a fugitive to carry the Ten Commandments? Not me. But God did. God called him, of all places, right out of a sheep pasture. Called his name through a burning bush. Scared old Moses right out of his shoes.

Why? What did God know about Moses, now, that Moses didn't have or know before? What had Moses learned in the desert that he hadn't learned back in his days in Egypt? Well, the ways of the desert for one. Forty year old Moses was a city boy.

The 80-year old version of Moses now knows the name of every snake and the location of every watering hole. If he's going to lead thousands of Hebrews into the wilderness, he better know the basics of desert life. Now he does. *Now* he's prepared to do the job.

Moses might have thought he was unqualified. But God saw something in him that even Moses didn't know about himself. God wasn't finished with Moses. And guess what? God's not finished with you yet either.

The voice that whispered from the bush is the voice that whispers to you. It reminds you that God is not finished with you. Oh, you may think He is. You may think you've peaked. You may think God's got someone else in mind to do the job. If so, think again.

God has an uncanny way of calling people who feel unqualified for the job God calls them to do. Moses goes on to make up excuses as to why he couldn't be the man for the job. He was too old. He wasn't a good speaker. He stuttered when he talked. He didn't even know God's name; who would believe him? - Certainly not Pharaoh.

Well, if you've ever been tapped to do a job and didn't feel qualified, know that you're in good company. Most of God's prophets felt the same way.

Moses did. But hear the good news. God does not always call the qualified, but God always qualifies those God calls.

God always equips the people God recruits for ministry. So remember this – your setbacks in life, your time spent “in the wilderness” may very well be a season of preparation for something greater God wants you to do.

God uses our wilderness experiences, like Moses tending sheep, to mold us and shape us into people who can accomplish God’s purposes here on earth. God uses all of our life experiences to shape us for the next thing God has in store for us.

And remember this – God can use us at any stage of our lives. We are never too old or too young to fulfill God’s will. Keep an open heart and an open mind. Be willing to hear God’s voice speaking to you. It may come as a whisper. It may come as a lightning flash. It may come in a burning bush. Be open; be ready to listen. Let us pray:

“Holy God, thank you for entrusting us with a role in your plan. Thank you for seeing in us what no one else can see. Maximize our potential and give us the wisdom and perseverance to recognize our “desert experiences” as training for the work that is to come. In Jesus’ name we pray. en.”

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Ten Men of the Bible* by Max Lucado; Nashville:Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2015, chapter 4 “Moses – A Glimpse of God’s Glory,” pp.67-71.