

Standing on Holy Ground

Exodus 3:1–6

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. **3** Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” **4** When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” **5** Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” **6** He said further, “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 at God.

The purpose of a transition pastor is facilitating the congregation to examine their call to ministry. That is, how best to use their strengths and gifts to follow the ways of Jesus, at this particular time and place. There are many steps to the transitional process. Questions like what are our gifts, challenges, needs of the community.

FPC’s call resulted in the following mission and vision statements:

The Vision Statement: “The First Presbyterian Church of Alma is, and will be, a church that experiences and shares God’s love and compassion”.

Mission Statement/ the doing part is: “The First Presbyterian Church will collaborate with Alma College to feed the body and soul of its congregation and the surrounding Community.”

The story of Moses and the burning bush is a story about all. It’s a story of God **calling someone into God’s service, to do something.**

Several stories in the Bible are considered call stories—the calling of Moses, the calling of Isaiah, the calling of Jeremiah, the calling of the disciples and the calling of Mary. **They**

are considered call stories, not only because they are about God calling someone into service, but because they all share similar characteristics. They all have the same common elements. I think they are clues- to help us understand our own call.

The root of the word *call*, in Latin, is *vocare*. It means “to call.” And it is linked to the word *vocation*. In some ways that is an unfortunate linkage, because today we link the word *vocation* with whatever a person’s job is.

But for some people, their job is that—a job, a way to keep food on the table. For a lot of folks especially these days a job is simply what you have to do each day in order to survive.

Other are fortunate. They happen to have jobs **that link up to their sense of God’s deep calling on their lives.**

But even for those of us who say we have been called, like pastors, there is much in **our “jobs” that doesn’t line up with what God has called us to be and do in the world.**

God’s call on your lives—on all of our lives—is beyond whatever job we may or may not have. **God’s call on our lives is what God wants us to do and be in the world—sometimes for a lifetime and sometimes in the moment.**

Frederick Buechner puts it this way when he speaks about call: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the worlds deep hunger meet” (Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life*.)

In other words, “call” has something to do with your purpose, your interaction, your impact on a deep need that the world has.

Call is not just about being fulfilled or feeling good. But call includes doing in the world, **what God is doing- in this world.**

I think God puts a call on your life—all of our lives—to be a part of God’s saving action in the world. Sometimes in little ways. Sometimes in big ways.

As the CDC rules relaxes mask rules and more folks are getting vaccines people are starting to go back to work or too many looking for employment.

Many folks are asking what purpose does God have for you now? What are you supposed to do - that God really wants you to do in this life?

Not all of us are called to go to Egypt to free God's people from misery. Most of us won't make the pages of the history books. And it's too late to make the pages of the Bible.

But we want to know right? We want to know that the gifts we have are valuable to God. In my tradition, we talk about **that —all of us—**are a priesthood of believers, all capable to doing ministry, ministering in the world, spreading the news of God's good news. We are called.

If you struggle with knowing how God calls you or what your sense of call is, say a prayer asking God to show you. Say that prayer in the morning before you start your day and see what happens during the day. Notice the situations that are placed before you. **Where does your deep joy or sense of accomplishment or fulfillment intersect with the world's deep needs?**

We aren't all suited equally for dealing with all of the world's deep needs. So, pray, and see what God shows to you.

But also note what catches your attention in the world. What are those burning bushes for you—those things that really grab your attention - like the burning bush that made Moses stop and look?

Because those things that grab your attention and won't let you pass by -are often how God speaks to you. What needs in the world raise your fury, tear at your heart over and over and over again? Sometimes those things are clues to what your calling might be.

I tell my adult children as they look for jobs - Where are your passions and what does the world need today?

A blog appeared on Facebook that was titled "Feel angry, then do something." Here's what it blog said,

“For all those that who are angered, sickened, saddened, devastated, or outraged by the gun violence, racial inequality, and the latest political scandals. Then good. Feel that. Feel anger. Feel sick. Feel sad and outraged. Feel it all. Shed a tear. Punch a pillow.

Do whatever you need to do to feel what you need to feel.

Then, when the emotion settles, do something. Do something for children. Do something for victims. Speak about abuse. Talk to your children about their self-worth, and teach them to not allow anyone to violate them. Write letters to lawmakers. Donate to local shelters.

Take that energy that you are feeling right now - **and use it.”**

[\(fatpastor.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/feel-angry-then-do-something/\)](http://fatpastor.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/feel-angry-then-do-something/)

And **ff you doubt you are called to do something in God’s world, pray for God to** show you, take note of what happens, look for where your heart is triggered, what causes you pain or anger or a sense of indignation in the world— Because I guarantee you have been called to do something in this world.

Moses’ story has some clues to call – to do something. To serve.

“Then Moses said, ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not being burned up.’” One clue in these call stories is an announcement, a divine confrontation, something that makes you stop and take note. What causes you to stop? To take note? To wonder? To feel deeply? **Maybe that is what God is doing - to catch your attention.**

This last year and half - there have been times during this endless pandemic, sickness and death - **I have questioned God’s actions and purpose.**

And at the same time, I do believe the questions even those full of doubt—is God’s way of tapping us on the shoulder, making God’s presence known in our life.

And that is how God gets your attention.

When did you find yourself in such a place of deep **questioning all of a sudden?**

I think it is God trying to get us to pay attention, and I believe it was God who was initiating those questions.

So, the first clue from Moses to call is a divine confrontation.

“When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’”

The second clue to being called - is like an introduction. Moses! Yeah? Here I am; it’s God.

And then God invites Moses to take off his sandals. In the ancient Near East, it was common for the host to invite the guest to take off his sandals before he enters the house. What if taking **off our sandals** is what we are supposed to do, a wonderful detail that shows **God’s hospitality to us, a wonderful part of the introduction. (Pause)**

Or perhaps, Moses is asked to take off his sandals because it is about awe. *There was an old religious practice of baring oneself or parts of one’s body in the presence of the divine.* For me, it’s both-and: awe and welcome, awe and grace.

And so, when you have experiences of God in your life —a felt sense of God’s presence, a sense that God really cares what we do, a sense that God knows you personally in some way—your first reaction may be not to believe it, because the awe is too great.

The third clue from Moses’ God calling : Is when he heard the Lord say: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt.” God calls us to do work that is saving work, healing work, life-giving work, loving work, work that will help heal this world.

Your call might be something you are called to do on a certain day or for a certain piece of time.

Then, there’s a next part everyone talks about: objection. “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’” Maybe you feel unworthy, ill-equipped, often not understanding of why the call.

When I was struggling with my call to seminary, I couldn’t even use the word *call*. It felt presumptuous to me. **Who am I, I thought, that God should be calling me to ministry?**

Moses goes through all the objections he can think of, ending with not being public speaker. **Have you felt that way**, that God is demanding something of you, asking something of you, even if it's as small as making amends, or making peace between you and someone you love - or stating a firm conviction - **because you think God wants you to do it**

The fourth clue is reassurance. God does this with Moses over and over again. "I will be with you." "Tell them I AM sent you".

I don't think we always have the sense if what you have done is what God's wants you to do.

I don't think you always get a sign. And while all sorts of disease, brokenness, injustice are still in this world, step back and see that the long arc of justice continues, slowly but surely, in the right direction.

A Catholic Benedictine sister, Joan Chittister, says it another way: "How many snowflakes have to gather on the limb of a tree before it breaks and falls. A lot. And I just want to be sure I'm one of those snowflakes, doing my part" (Joan Chittister, *On Obedience and Action*, podcast, *On Being*, NPR).

God has called each one of us into God's saving activity in the world. A call is placed on our lives as believers. It's not easy to discern. But the call is placed on our lives because God needs us, and the call is placed on our lives because God values us, even with our inabilities, our doubts, our imperfections and failings.

We are standing on Walking on Holy Ground, And we know that there are Angels all around. Let us praise Jesus now. We are standing in his presence on Holy Ground. **Go and do that holiness in the world. Amen.**