

Exodus 3 : 7-12

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorrites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Hebrews 5 : 1-10

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this i

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I Could Never Do That!

I think that most of you know that I used to be a special ed teacher. One year, in January, I got a new student named Jackie. Jackie was a happy, giggly sort of girl. When she came into my classroom she entered the Land of the Boys, the first girl I had had in a while.

Everything in my class that year was geared around the interests of boys---cars, trains, dinosaurs, legos. The only way I was able to get those boys to be interested in what I was teaching them was to use the kinds of toys boys liked, so those things became my teaching materials that year.

Into this pseudo macho world, came Jackie, every inch a girl! And Jackie decided that girls couldn't do much of anything there in Boy World, so she just sat and giggled whenever I asked her to do anything. She only had sisters at home, so she didn't know about cars and trucks and things that go. She couldn't relate. She didn't know how to begin.

The boys just turned up their noses whenever I tried to do anything girl-oriented or even gender-neutral. It was already January by then and they were used to the way things were in the days BJ--- Before Jackie.

So what could I do? I couldn't spare an assistant to work one-on-one with Jackie. I couldn't change my whole approach to teaching without losing the boys' interest, actually without triggering a whole slew of behavior problems!

And all Jackie would do was giggle. Her attitude was "Oh, no! I could never do that!"

"I could never do that!" Is a hard attitude to have, and a hard attitude for someone else to change.

We heard this morning the passage from Exodus where God calls Moses to go down to Egypt and convince Pharoah to let the people go.

Moses, too, thought he could never do that! He asked "Who am I to go to Pharoah and end the captivity of the Israelites?" And God told him who he was, and how he could do just that. And just like I did not give up on teaching Jackie, God did not back down from calling Moses.

God worked with him, stayed with him, led him, directed him. When one thing didn't work to convince Pharoah, God had another idea for Moses to use.

Moses went from making excuses about not being a good speaker to being the leader of the great exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Amazing what a person can do when God is leading!

The Book of Exodus is filled with the story of God and the Israelites--- how God, through Moses, saved the Israelites from slavery and led them to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey---in other words, a place where God would provide abundance for them.

It also tells us about the many times the people fell away, how they failed time and again to have faith, and how they kept having trouble believing that they could do what God was saying. It is also the story of how they struggled to believe that God could do what he said he would do!

And still God was with them. The whole story of the Old Testament, in fact, is how God was with the people, faithful to them, loving them, even when they were not faithful to him!

One thing that God kept telling them was the same thing he told Moses---every time they said they couldn't do that, God told them they could, because he was with them and he would show them how, and he would help them.

God doesn't expect us to be able to do things without him, without his help. God wants us to trust him enough to do what he calls us to do WITH HIS HELP!

And people throughout all ages and times have kept on trying to refuse God's help, trying to be independent and strong and self-made.

We forget that we didn't make ourselves and we cannot survive by ourselves.

In this country, especially, we have a culture of independence. We are proud of it. We don't need help, thank you very much. Our history began when we realized that we didn't need England or a king, and we went out on the frontier and we homesteaded, made our own way, and lived the way we wanted to.

This attitude continues today. We deny our need for each other and worse, we deny our need for God.

This past Thursday morning I woke up with a headache and feeling very sluggish. I went on Facebook trying to find some motivation from my colleagues to do the work I needed to do. Instead, a friend sent me a message. "Get some rest," she said. And so Thursday became a day off.

And when I let go of feeling like I needed to do everything, that so much depended on me, and that I needed to do everything RIGHT NOW, amazing things happened.

Before the day was over I found a way to start this sermon, and it came easily. Just like the Holy Spirit was whispering in my ear! Other small things happened. A big thing, too! Namely my headache went away!

The most exciting thing that happened was that I got word that we have been awarded a \$2000 grant to help the youth and young adults get to Mississippi! Suddenly, I was energized and feeling fine!

And I hadn't DONE anything. God had done it all.

I had let go and given the Holy Spirit space and time to work. Somehow Thursday had become Sabbath for me, and as I rested, God took over.

Yesterday I spent the day with some of you, talking about our future together, talking about making some changes that I hope will help our ministry in this place be more effective, more alive.

Change isn't easy. I know that. I've been through a few changes myself! But God doesn't call us to do things and then step back and see how we do.

God calls us to do his work in this world, doing his will on earth as it is in heaven, and then he helps us do it!

We have to listen. We have to be obedient. We have to rely completely on God! We have to stop thinking it's all up to us, but we also need to be where God wants us to be and to do what God wants us to do.

God speaks. We respond.

God calls us to go to see Pharoah, so like Moses we get a substitute sheep-sitter and go.

And God goes with us.

Yesterday I proposed some ideas for our future. We made some additions to my ideas and now we are ready to go.

Packing our bags, and going to Egypt. Knowing that God is with us.

And if the first idea doesn't work out, we can ask God for another idea, and another, and another. Sooner or later one of us will come up with the idea that will work, that will make Pharaoh say the words, "Let the people go!"

And we will no longer be facing life with the attitude "We could never do that!" Instead we will be watching the Kingdom of God become visible among us, between us, within us, as we move with God into the future.

In the second scripture reading this morning, the reading from the letter to the Hebrews, we heard about priests, and how they don't choose to be priests, but God calls them. They are chosen for that honor to glorify God.

And even Christ did not choose the priesthood for himself, but was appointed by God to be our highest of high priests, in the tradition of Aaron, who was the brother of Moses, and according to the order of Melchizedek, who was the ancient king of Salem, later known as Jerusalem, and who was also a high priest.

Christ is our King and our high priest. Our ruler and the one who connects us to God.

Not that we cannot approach God on our own, but that we don't know how, we don't understand how, without Christ we don't know enough about who God is or what he's like to approach him.

So Christ is our priest, our example, our intermediary, our guide. Appointed by God. To glorify God.

We are also appointed by God to glorify him. We each have a calling. There is a lot of talk in Hebrews about priests and high priests, but God called Moses, not to be a priest but to do God's work in the world.

And God calls us to different ways of working, to different ways of building the Kingdom of God.

And we need to stop saying, to stop thinking, "I could never do that!" and start learning to rely on God.

We need to stop relying on our own strength and start trusting God to take care of providing whatever we need to answer his call.

So what are you called to do? What are the gifts God has given you? Teaching? Music? Gardening? Hospitality? Prayer? What?

And then I need to ask the next question----

If you're not answering God's call, why are you still saying "I could never do that"? What is it that you're afraid of? And WHY are you afraid of it?

Can you ask God to take that fear away, to help you trust him to take care of that concern? Can you pray, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief" so that you can take that next step?

This struggle to answer God's call is part of the reason that we are called to be the church. Together we can find strength to overcome our fears, to encourage each other, to help each other figure out our individual calls, to help each other see more clearly.

Together we can also figure out our call as a congregation, as a church, and that's what we worked toward yesterday. I want to continue that kind of conversation, that kind of work together, and so I want to continue the meetings in people's homes to continue this discussion.

I will soon be sending out a letter to explain the plans I have proposed and incorporating the additions we made yesterday. The way we ended our meeting yesterday was to put sheets of paper on

the wall and brainstorm our wishes, hopes, and dreams for Linda Vista UMC.

I have posted those papers in the Fellowship Hall and I invite you to read them and add to them if you want to. The ideas are good ones, and some of the artwork is beautiful!

Together we can STOP thinking that we could never do THAT!

Getting back to my sweet Jackie, eventually she learned how to use those cars and trucks and trains and she stopped giggling and learned what she needed to learn. She stopped thinking that she could never do that and made real progress.

And we can make progress, too, when we stop thinking “we could never do that” and start following God’s call for our lives.

Together we can grow in spirit and in the light of Christ. Walk with me as we follow the call of God.

Amen.