

Lectionary 22A (Pr 17)
Grace Lutheran Church
Lakeland, Florida
August 30, 2020

Exod 3:1-15
Psalm 105
Rom 12: 9-21
Mt. 16: 21-28

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two of our readings today – the first reading from Exodus and our Gospel reading involve two giants of faith – Moses and Peter. Moses – the one God called to lead God’s out of slavery in Egypt, led them through the Red Sea into the wilderness where they wandered for 40 years, no longer the “Hebrews” but instead they were being shaped and formed as the people of God. And they finally came to the Land of Promise into which they crossed and lived and came to flourish – until they didn’t, but that’s another story. And then there is Peter – impetuous, outspoken, walking on water Peter. Peter the Rock on which the church will be built. Peter and Moses. Two giants in our faith. Both called by God for amazing work in God’s kingdom.

Call. What does it mean to be called as Moses was and as Peter was? I have been called to serve this flock. But you see, a call does not come only to those of us called to professional church work. Each of us has a call on our life. Each of us gathered here has a call on our life AND we as a community of faith also have a call on our collective life – a call to serve and a call to bear the kingdom into the community around us, the community in which we live.

You might wonder – who? Me? I have a call on my life? That seems like it ought to be for the professional folks – those we call Pastors and Deacons and Vicars. But my friends, please consider if there is not something that stirred your very being such that you felt compelled – dare I say, Called – to do something.

Take a moment and consider when in your life you have felt called to a particular task or vocation or ministry. Please know this – Not all calls are monumentous. Some are very ordinary. Legend has it that Mother Teresa said that we may not be able to solve the problem of hunger in the world but we can feed one person and that makes all the difference in the world to this one. She beckoned us to do “Small things with great love.”

And not all calls are ordinary – some are monumentous. Some are life-changing.

So let’s look at Moses and Peter again, lest we say – no, not ME Lord. This is what we know about Peter – impetuous, walking on water Peter – could also be called Denying Peter – the one who however fervently he spoke, this one who had a number of failures – his faith wavered when he was walking on water, he was one who fell asleep when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying – can’t you just stay awake for a little while Peter; Peter, the Rock on which Jesus would build the Church – Peter called a stumbling block in the next breath; Peter who avoided the very thing that Jesus called him to – deny your Self, deny your desires, put the mission of Jesus first.

This is our call.

And now, Moses. This is what we know about Moses – he was a murderer who ran from the law. He did take off his shoes as God directed and as God spoke to him about what the call was on his life, Moses – barefoot Moses – quarrelled with God – no, not me, I’m not good enough, I don’t speak well, really?? Isn’t there someone else?? And who are you God anyhow to ask this of me. And God said, “I Am. I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We are Peter and we are Moses. Each one of us. Each of us called to ministry and service that exceeds our understandings. But let us turn to one small detail – Moses was barefoot. Take off your shoes for you are standing on holy ground.

I have often understood this as prostrate yourself, humble yourself, you are standing in the presence of the most Holy of Holies. And that is not wrong. And in addition to this, let me add another read of this. One I learned from a theologian who spent several years in Japan – where the practice upon entering a home is to remove one's shoes, even in one's own home. When asked why people do this, two reasons came to the fore – the first, cleanliness – keeping shoes near the door stops the ordinary sidewalk and parking lot dirt from coming in to the rooms of the home. And the second, more importantly – personal comfort. With one's shoes off, one relaxes and patters about, one can tuck one's legs up and into any number of comfortable seatings, one can stretch one's toes and flex one's ankles. When we are barefoot, we may be at one of our most vulnerable and honest spaces. And THIS is Holy Ground.

And on this Holy Ground I stand, unadorned. Because in that call, God is not preoccupied with God's holiness. Rather God beckons me into a space in which I am fully "me" and God calls you into a space in which you are fully "you." Warts and all. You – one who will be sent forth for God's purposes.

So, we need to look again at Peter – you gotta love Peter. Peter who just a short time ago said, "YOU ARE THE CHRIST, the Son of the Living God!" now said, Jesus – all this talk of suffering and dying and all of that – that just doesn't line up with what I understand. May God forbid it! And Jesus said, "Get behind me." This was not a shaming that decried what Peter said. It was a reminder that Peter was to be a follower after the way of Jesus. Jesus saw who Peter was, warts and all, and held him close.

Dear Ones in Jesus, each of us are called to ministry. Each of us are called to bear the kingdom. Some are called to big tasks. Some are called to small. Some are called public ministry. Some are called to ordinariness. All of these are valued in the Community of Faith, in the Communion of Saints.

You are not called to do that which is not "YOU".

An old Hasidic story shows awareness of the importance of being one's self: Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, "In the world to come, they will not ask me 'Why were you not more like Moses?' Rather, they will ask me, 'Why were you not more like Zusya?'"

Dear Ones, you are not called to be Moses or Peter. Yet we can learn much from their grapplings with God's call on their lives.

Be who you are
Beloved ones
Baptised ones
Saints and sinners
Look to see what it is that God is calling you to.
And then
Take off your shoes
Be who you are
Be fully who you are
And Stand
On that Holy Ground

Knowing that the love of God enfolds you.
Amen