

5 August 2018 “Starting Points: There’s a Call a Call for you” Exodus 3:1-12/ Mark 1:16-20

(TITLE SLIDE) Anyone here enjoy a good summer hike? Where’s YOUR favourite trail? The theme for me these days is discovering NEW favourite trails. And when it’s a new trail the first stop is the posted map and finding the starting point.

The first morning after moving in here in Calgary I set out for a run in Fish Creek Park. First thing I did was check the posted map—but I couldn’t find my starting point. My eyes passed over that silver metal starting point—which to this new-by just looked like an ordinary metal screw. I could not find the starting point. —And do you know how many trails and paths there are in Fish Creek Park? (SLIDE—MAP) Do you know how confusing and disorienting it can be when you just don’t have your bearings?

Life itself can be pretty confusing when we don’t know the starting points—those foundational truths that orient us, support us and give us our bearings, purpose and vision as we walk this journey of life. In today’s swirl of massive unrelenting change—unrivalled in human history—without knowing our starting points, we can end up heads spinning, confused, disoriented—**overwhelmed** by the sheer complicatedness of life.

It’s true of churches too? In a time of aging congregations and spiralling decline—“the way we’ve always done it” doesn’t cut it. Congregations can get **anxious**, disoriented,—overwhelmed. In such a time as this, how do we find our bearings? How do we discover that north-star of vision, focus and direction?(TITLE SLIDE)

So here we are at a brand new starting point together. Lots of **NEW** terrain before us! Where is this journey leading? What high demanding terrain is ahead for us to climb? What stunning new vistas are out there for us to enjoy? A little anxiety is **totally** normal. But to journey in faith and trust, we need to find the Kingdom starting points—those foundational Kingdom truths that orient us, undergird us and give us our bearings as we journey—as individuals and families—as a community of faith, as a city and a nation.

In today’s Exodus reading Moses is confronted by the biggest starting point of all—GOD! Right there, during an ordinary day at work shepherding on Mt Horeb—which by the way means wasteland—in the middle of that vast wilderness, **God** shows up. In the ordinary desert bush that’s aflame with fire, Moses is drawn by the extraordinary—the bush stays green. Moses is captivated—amazed. Then he senses it—the presence and call of God, in his life. It’s holy ground and he takes off his shoes. (SLIDE-Starting Point (SP)#1)

Starting Point #1—*Expect God to show up—even in our wastelands.* When we’re disoriented, anxious and overwhelmed we can convince ourselves that we’re on our own—God

has left the building. We can convince ourselves, that God seems just fine with pain and suffering—doesn't really even notice or care. **Yet** God says to Moses, "I've taken a good long look at the affliction of my people...I've heard their cries for deliverance...I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them—pry them loose from the grip of that Egypt—get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide open spaces."

This is a compassionate God, with dreams for his people. God is not satisfied with being aloof in some heavenly realm—Jesus confirms, God comes down to do something about our pain, and with resurrection power. In a time of devastation or discouragement, we can experience that presence in a single word of hope spoken to us. It can be a basket full of gifts (SLIDE-GIFTS PHOTO) in the midst of moving and chaos. It can be a text or message of support. It can be the healing of our deepest hurts. Or after a difficult climb—it can be emerging in awe to soak in an amazing new vista. Suddenly it's holy ground—you sense the presence of God and the voice of God so much more clearly. We can expect God to show up if we're open.(SLIDE-SP#2)

Starting Point #2, *Expect God to have a plan and a call for you.* And sometimes that plan is VERY different from the plans you already have yourself. Flexibility is a spiritual virtue. Moses had become content with lying low, flying beneath the radar screen as an ordinary wasteland shepherd. Yet God has a plan and a call: "It's time for you to go, and lead my people out of bondage into freedom and abundance." Jesus too had a call and a plan for those fishermen in today's Gospel: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

But God's will and call are not always met with universal enthusiasm. Moses is not so excited about God's plan and call: "I'm just not good enough for this. I'm not religious enough. No one will listen to me." And the good old standby, "Could you just get someone else." Eight times in this ongoing dialogue, Moses tells God why he can't. The only well worn excuse that's not there is, "I'm just too busy." For someone who argues they don't have the gift of speech—Moses is able to hold his own pretty well with the Almighty.

Have you ever tried to say no to the call of God. It's not like that pleasant lady who calls to ask if you could take a turn teaching Sunday School or making coffee after worship. And when you say you're just too busy—she politely says "Well thanks dear, sorry to bother you."

God just doesn't give up—he's far more persistent than that. About five years ago I got a call asking me if I might consider ministry here at St. Andrew's. The job description grabbed my curiosity. But, the timing wasn't right and Calgary was a long way from home. Then about 20 months ago I got another call—would you consider ministry at St. Andrew's? This time we sensed God's nudging—but, but, but... Yet God is persistent and so was the Search Team of

St. Andrew's. And here we are... So I'm just saying that if God has a plan for you—don't expect the nudging to go away. Where has God's will been calling you, nudging you toward a need or a challenge, repeatedly? What is that persistent voice asking you to do? What's your burning bush? It may be different than what you imagined, but saying yes to God truly leads us to the life that really LIFE!

Sometimes the reason we say no to God's call is simply because we like control and find it hard to surrender to God's will instead of our own. Other times it's because what God asks seems bigger than we can humanly accomplish—the task too great; our personal resources far too meagre. Are you aware of that kind of deficient in your life right now? Or are you aware of it in the ministry of St. Andrew's (task too great, resources too small)?

If you were here on Wed. evening you know that Dianne Ollerenshaw gave me a "BIG CHARGE"—set the bar high for my call to St. Andrew's. One older minister from presbytery said to me before the induction service—"This is going to be a challenge, you know."

Which brings us to **Starting Point #3 (SLIDE-SP#3)**—*Expect **God** to make things happen—even when the odds are against you.* Here in this narrative from Exodus for the first time the Divine name is revealed. Yahweh. Or in English something like **I AM**. It's a causative verb actually, "He who causes to be." **I AM** points to God as the One who creates and sustains the world and who acts powerfully in it with loving purpose. This is the God who **is** the mover and shaker, the One who makes things happen"—even when the odds are vastly stacked against you.

(SLIDE-Douglas) Western Canadian Baptist Preacher, Tommy Douglas—who was Scottish born—knew what it was like to have a BIG call and the odds against you. With the Great Depression raging through the drought-ravaged West, Douglas witnessed great human suffering first hand and farmers completely unable to afford medical care for their families. In 1932 he joined the Saskatchewan Labour Party sensing the call from preacher to politician to bring relief for God's people. He became one of the first CCF Members of Parliament. In a resounding victory in 1944 Douglas kicked off five terms as Premier of Saskatchewan—bringing electricity to family farms and expanding health care. He was widely denounced as a red and as a communist. But his call to provide universal health care remained strong. Unveiled in 1959 his Medicare Plan would provide every person in Sask. with pre-paid publicly administered health care. It was viciously attacked by doctors and political opponents. However, in 1961 the plan was adopted in Sask. In 1966 the Canadian Government enacted a national Medicare scheme based on the success of Douglas' Sask. Medicare Plan. In 2004 Tommy Douglas was named the Greatest Canadian of all time by voters across Canada.

We serve a dreaming God—with hopes for his people. Where is God's will calling you? Is it time to surrender to that will and say yes. If so, there's no telling what God could do through us together.

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