

All Saints Talk 07 May 2023

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Sermon Title: **'Receive your calling'**

The 2nd in our new series 'Journey to the Promised Land'

Reading: *Exodus 3:1-15, Luke 4:14-21* Moses and the burning bush

The reading is from Exodus chapter three. And I've asked for it to be read in three sections. Moses and the burning bush.

3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. **3** So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

Thank you, Joan. For the reading. I've asked her to break up the reading into three chunks this morning, partly because I suspect it's a passage that's really familiar to you. And sometimes I knew when I read parts of the Bible I've read lots before, I sort of skim over it. And I wanted us to delve into the details this morning, so that's why we're doing it like that. Tom gave me the title for this talk of 'receive your calling'. And I think it's interesting that Charles the Third was crowned yesterday at 74. Moses was in his 80s, we think, when he has this moment with a burning bush. So whatever your age this morning, whether you are three or 133, I hope there's a message for you about receiving your calling afresh from God.

Moses, we sometimes think of as this great hero of the Old Testament, but actually, when we encounter him this morning, in his verses that Joan read us, he's a washed up, shepherd. And a shepherd was not a great calling. At the time, it was a pretty low ranking profession. They're not even his sheep. There his father in law's sheep. And I

wonder whether Moses sort of felt the burden, the disappointment, of a life that had not gone as he had planned. All the early promise of his life, you remember that? He was rescued as a baby from the river. He was rescued by the princess and brought up. He had a palace education. He was a prince of Egypt. But where had that brought him? Really nowhere. He's wandering through the desert and I wonder if he had really felt that he had been saved when so many others had not. His life had been snatched from death. And what was he doing with it? And interesting as well, at this point, he isn't particularly seeking God. I think he's just trudging through his messed up broken life. But it is there, where God meets him. And God calls him. Moses, Moses, he calls from the burning bush. And I believe this morning, he calls your name to, he calls the name of this church, he knows us. And he calls us by name. And also note, he does that right in the mess of wherever we find ourselves. God is not waiting for us to clean up our act, to get things together, to get more churchy and then he meets with us. No, God comes to us and meets with us right where we are. And then he loves us too much to leave us there and he'll transform us. But he meets us right there. And one of the things I love most about this passage is the way Moses responds when he just says, 'Here I am', to me, that just sounds wonderfully confessional, like. 'huh! Here I am'. And I just invite you this morning and every morning, wherever you're at, just to meet God with those words. Like 'here I am'. On the days when everything's going well and the things in life are brilliant. And you're like, here I am. Everything's good. And also on the days when you just feel absolutely broken down. On the days when you can't even pray and you can't get beyond. Here I am. Because that in itself is so filled with faith and commitment and honesty. And I just believe God really honours that. So if you take one thing away, 'here I am'. Joan, would you mind reading towards the next chunk

⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are

oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

So this God, this loving, caring God who approaches us, Seeks us, calls us, loves us, is also Holy, and Mighty. Moses has to take his shoes off, this is holy ground, he can't just look straight at God. We mustn't forget our God is not just a buddy, he is bigger than that. I love the way CS Lewis puts it in the Chronicles of Narnia. When someone's asking about Aslan, who represents Jesus, and one character asks him, Is he safe? And the reply is safe? No. But he is good. And I think that really captures our God, our God is awesome, and mighty and holy. And actually, that's really reassuring for us, because that is where the power is. Louie Giglio in his book that's beautifully entitled for this passage, 'I am not but I know, I am'. As in 'I am Yahweh'. I am not but I know I am. says we are infinitesimally small, and God is huge. And to have a relationship with God, is the greatest achievement of our lives. Everything else pales in comparison. I think that's really powerful if we've ever felt like Moses, like where has my life got to, and we're feeling this weight of disappointment. So I remind you of that message of Louie giglio's , 'we are infinitesimally small, and God is huge. And to have a relationship with God is the greatest achievement of our lives'. Everything else pales in comparison. Also, in this passage we see how this God sees and hears and knows and cares. I'll just read you some of these words from verse 7 on: I have indeed seen, I have heard them crying out, I am concerned, I have come down. The Cry has reached me. I have seen the way and then I'm sending you. God knows and sees all those situations across the whole world where we're crying out for his intervention. Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Sudan. Interesting also, that he's seeking hands and feet: his church to go. Joan is going to come up and read as a final chunk. As she does, I just wonder if it's good for you to reflect again and commit to God again, those places where you are really calling out for his intervention. It might not be on the geopolitical stage. It might be within your family, within your workplace, within your friends, where are the places where you're longing for him to intervene.

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you[Ⓜ] will worship God on this mountain."

¹³ Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM.[Ⓜ] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD,[Ⓜ] the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'

"This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.

This is the word of the Lord.

Do you notice how Moses wavers and in fact, so we've read the first chunk of chapter three, but the whole of chapter three and half of chapter four, is Moses wavering. Moses going, Are you sure I'm the person you want to send? Really, because I'm not good at talking? And I don't really want to do it. In fact, by chapter four, he's bluntly saying, No. It's interesting. Because Moses wrote this. And I gotta say, Moses must be a more humble and honest person than me. Because if it was me, that was writing up my summary of my encounter with God at the burning bush, and I'd react in the same way as Moses, I'd have condensed it a bit into 'my name came out from the burning bush, and God said, go and rescue my people from the Egyptians. And I went, Okay, God, whatever you say'. So Moses is brilliant in his honesty. It's not flattering to him, the next chapter and a half. But I think there's a really powerful truth that God gives us here about how He equips us for our calling, even when we ourselves are deeply unwilling. The other interesting thing about Moses having written this is that Moses is the writer of the Torah, the first books of the Bible. How did a slave nation get their oral history written down? Well, that's God, using an Egyptian education, to write Israelite history. Isn't that amazing? But when Moses wavers and says, I don't think I'll be any good at this, and I've got a beloved old, good news version of the Bible, and in that the translation, Moses says, 'I am nobody'. I've got nothing. God doesn't do what we often do when we're trying to build up the self

esteem of a friend. You know when you've got a friend going for a job interview or something, and they go, Oh, think I'll be rubbish. And you know, you'll be great. You're brilliant. So when Moses does this, I'm nobody, God doesn't respond with no, Moses, you'll be great. I've been rooting for you for 80 years. This is your moment. God doesn't bother with any of that. God's reply is simply, I am with you. Because it's never about our skills and aptitude. Anyway, it's not about how great or how useless we are. It's about a God who is with us the same God yesterday, today, and forever. And actually, if we are ever to be effective, it will only be because we're doing it with God, in God, through the power of God. And it simply starts with saying, Here I am. It's put like this into Corinthians. Paul says, 'we have this treasure, in jars of clay, to show that there's all surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed.' And if you are feeling weak this morning, remember God loves choosing the weak: David versus Goliath, the boy Samuel, that baby Moses and Jesus born a baby in a stable, quickly a fleeing refugee. Another baby spared a genocide, but to go on and save the world. And Moses, our washed up Shepherd, as we saw him before he's encountered the burning bush. He was about to pull off what David Dawson calls the biggest escape in history. Because it was 2 million plus slaves freed from one of the most highly fortified nations in the world. That's not bad for a washed up old shepherd is it? But as I finish and as we think about our calling, I wonder, do we want a burning bush moment? A sign like that? Do we want a 'God breaks through' kind of moment, a kind of 'God's torn down the barriers between heaven and earth' sort of moment, a kind of 'God meets me face to face' kind of moment a sign of the deep, indelible, unfailing love of God and his desire to work through us. Do we want our own burning bush? Because we've got it. Our burning bush. And it's called the cross. The cross is for each and every one of us, is a moment for all of us and for all time, and we need nothing else. It was an endless picture of our Holy God of 'I am', of Yahweh, humbling himself to meet with you. Take off your sandals, you're on holy ground. And yes, he's calling. Jesus has a calling, a message of vision, a purpose for your life, and for the life of this church. He calls us into His mission. The New Testament reading for today, which is perfectly picked Tom, thank you, is this, so I'm just going to read it to you is Luke chapter four and verses 14 to 21. 'Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth where He had been

brought up. And on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And rolling it he found the place where it is written. The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue have fastened on him. He began by saying to them today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

What is your calling?

Are we freeing people from the Egyptians? No. But I think it is about freedom. Jesus says now free my people. Free the people of Weston. You're friends, your family, your work colleagues, free them. Free them from the slavery of this modern self centered culture. Free them from the oppression of a life of consumerism. Free them from all consuming work, Freedom from the burden of performance related everything. Free them from a world that says you're not good enough, not thin enough, not clever enough, not worth enough. Free them from lives filled with the flood with the threat of futility. Free them from meaningless monotony. Free them from the deep, deep hurt of broken relationships in a broken world. Free them from cynicism, free them from self loathing free them from everything else that this fallen world binds them up with. Yes, set my people free. One by one. Tell them about Jesus and show them through the miraculous changes in your own life. Bring them to the God of the burning bush. Bring them to the cross.