

Text: Exodus 3:1-10

Moses: by birth a slave, born into a Hebrew family, in Egypt. Protected by his mother, sister, and two Hebrew midwives from the deadly persecution of Pharaoh. Taken in by Pharaoh's daughter. Raised in the royal household as an Egyptian. As an adult, he murdered an Egyptian who abused a Hebrew slave. He escaped from Pharaoh, who was out to kill him for the crime. He took refuge in far-off Midian, married a Midianite wife, became a shepherd. Moses had a complicated history, like us; a winding road and a mixed bag of moral performance. Like us, he was many things, and was by no means remarkable when God called him from the burning bush: Hebrew, slave, Egyptian, raised in privilege, murderer, fugitive, immigrant, without roots, permanent outsider, Midianite, husband, shepherd. We, also, are many things – father, mother, daughter, son, grandparent, grandchild, American, Canadian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Taiwanese, Japanese. There are all kinds of angles, many different stories. We carry all kinds of hopes and dreams, triumphs and tragedies, victories and losses which define who we are today. Who we are as our story is intercepted by God.

Out of the bush, as he drew closer, being curious about the bush, in flames but not turning into ash, he heard God call his name, "Moses, Moses". Can you imagine God calling you by name, not once but twice? Calling forth and summoning the real you?

On our sign, out front on Ajo Way, as required by the county, on the top line of the marquee, are permanently printed words: Holy Way Church. By county code, a sign like ours must always display the name of the establishment. The leaders from our church at the time, who purchased the sign and got all its official approvals, decided we could post more words on our sign if we opened up that top line. So they blocked the visibility of the words – Holy Way Church – our name, so we'd have the freedom to post more of a message. It's there, but you just can't see it: Holy Way Church.

God saw Moses, up close and personal, beyond the cover of heritage, crime, escape, his past, his present. "Moses, Moses". Can you imagine God calling you, clearly, knowingly, beyond all pretense, without any cover, no protection, no filter, the real thing? Just you, with God.

Moses replies, "I'm here." On the surface, that may seem rather obvious. But on the other hand, we've all been in places, been in conversations, even driven down the road, but that's **not** where we've really been at the time. "I'm here." Can we say that at this moment, in worship, in the presence of God: "I'm here"? Not just the church me, not parent, child, brother or sister me, not elder, deacon, or minister me, not the appearance of having it all together me; but the real me? "I'm here".

The Lord said to Moses, "Don't come any closer!" There is clear distinction maintained between God and person, between Creator and creature, between holy and human. There is difference, separation, there is an intrinsic otherness that holds constant, no matter who we are, even with Moses. Hold it right there! And then, "Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." As a show of honor and respect, in

this awe-inspiring place, on this holy ground, remove your shoes. We get that. But there is also another meaning, noted by the translator of Exodus in the Common English Bible. Removing one's shoes is also a custom when entering someone's home. Make yourself at home. Untie your shoes. Relax; you're home. Be you. Moses: immigrant, refugee, fugitive, life-long outsider, without roots. Moses discovers home in the presence of God. All of him, and all of us. Lord, we're here.

God speaks. "I am the God of your father, Abraham's, Isaac's, Jacob's God." God opens up, revealing his plan, his heart, to Moses. "I've clearly seen my people are oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cries of injustice at the hand of their taskmasters. I know their pain. I've come to rescue them and bring them to a land full of hope and promise, brimming with milk and honey." Moses came near, removed his shoes and learned who this God, who our God, is. This God knows, clearly, all that the people are going through. Our God knows their pain. Their cries for justice impact and move God to counter their life-diminishing reality, bringing justice and rescue, taking them to an alternate place where they can be at home.

It's a powerful image: Moses, the restless, rootless wanderer, told by God to take off his shoes on the holy ground. In the very unlikely desert spot, beside an extremely unlikely flaming shrub. Finding home there, in God: how utterly unlikely. Moses, with his story: delivered from slave life, delivered from death by mother, sister, midwives down the river, escaped Pharaoh's death sentence, twice. Now called by God to deliver all his people. The one whose rootless wandering kept him alive, is called by God to uproot his people from slavery and misery to wander in the wilderness. His real name is uncovered, his identity revealed. It was always there.

Our minds are filled with wilderness images of homes besieged by flood water, all kinds of uprooted people being rescued, in Texas, by thousands of helpers, answering the call to move people from their damaged homes to temporary safety. Not knowing what their home is like right now, or where their home will next be. Uprooted, enduring misery from Hurricane Harvey.

Perhaps, some come to a table like this, in a church, this morning. Or some find welcome in a stranger's home for a meal, for a bed, to get through the storm. Each person with a name, and a story, being valued for who they are, no matter what the crisis, no matter what they have left. All is not lost. "Take off your sandals, you're standing on holy ground." Home.

Home, at the table: the table set, with a place for each one of us. We are called by our names: the real us. "I'm here". Who we really are is uncovered, revealed. "Take off your shoes". Pull up a chair. The Savior feeds us, and rescues us, at this table; at many tables. We stand on holy ground.

It's a nice place to be, but we can't stay here. There's work still to be done. Pain to be alleviated. Justice to be won. Freedom to be delivered. God says to Moses, "So get

going. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt." Put your shoes back on. We've got rescuing, saving, delivering, justice-making labor to do.

Called by God. Knowing where we are our rooted, finding our home in God, through all of life's storms, all of life's heartbreaks, and all of life's losses. That's our story; that's our common story. Offered a place of comfort and rest, but not a life of ease. Given purpose, and called to speak and live the peace and freedom of God: it'll be back to work when we leave here. Bringing communion to those not here with us. Supporting the unselfish work of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Interjecting God's words of love and grace into conversations with our families and neighbors. Speaking mercy, healing, and justice for all. Take, eat, drink, remembering, and giving thanks to our Savior Jesus Christ. Indulge in home-made menudo and Mexican bread. Enjoy anniversary cake. Then leave the table, with your shoes back on. We've got God's work to do; so get going.