

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, amen.

Several years ago, President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney were walking down the street when President Bush thought he saw Moses walking in front of them. He hurried up to catch up with him and tried to get his attention. He asked the man if he was, in fact, Moses. The man just stared off into space as if he didn't hear the president. So, "W" asked him again, "Are you Moses?" The man continued to ignore President Bush. Finally in frustration Vice President Cheney grabbed the man by the shoulders and asked if he was Moses. The man looked right into Mr. Cheney's eyes and said, "Yes." Dick Cheney asked him why he ignored the President of the most powerful nation on earth, to which Moses answered, "The last time I spoke to a Bush I spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness..."

Today's scripture is the familiar story of Moses and the Burning Bush. I'm still not sure why we call it by that name when the Bible clearly says the bush was on fire, but was *not* being burned up... Some have called this the call of Moses or the commissioning of Moses. This is the beginning of God working through a most unlikely person to accomplish God's purpose.

In today's scripture reading God has heard the cries of his people. These were the people God had promised to Abraham and to Isaac, and to Jacob. These were the descendants who were supposed to be as numerous as the stars in heaven or the grains of sand on the beach. Yet, here they were in the bondage of slavery and not fulfilling their God given potential. The cries of these chosen people of God got God's attention and God remembered his covenant. Ever since the fall of humans from grace in the Garden of Eden, God had denied access to His direct presence, what I call Sacred Space. If you recall the story of the Garden of Eden, God walked with the humans and the entire place was sacred space simply because God was present in that place. After the fall, God evicted the humans and put a flaming sword around the Garden to keep the humans out... They were no longer allowed into the presence of God. The sacred ground had become off limits. Now, after all this time, God, who never gave up on this human project, decided it was time to bring those chosen people back into relationship. He chose Moses to do his will because Moses had a keen sense of justice and also because Moses noticed things, things like a flaming bush that wasn't being burned up... As interesting as this call story of Moses is, that's not the main point of this story. This is a story about a faithful God who remembers his promises and will stop at nothing to redeem his people from their deepest troubles. In the case of these Hebrew people, their greatest trouble at the moment was their enslavement. They spent their lives

serving Pharaoh. In God's world, God's people should never be enslaved, but rather freed from their bondage in order to know and to worship God. Freedom, yes, but free for the purpose of loving and worshipping the great I AM.

I hear a lot lately about how we're losing our freedom. Since 911 Americans have been more than willing to sacrifice some of the freedoms we enjoy in order to be safer from the evils of terrorism. It's much more difficult to travel by airplane now than it was the first time I got on an airplane. It took me about 20 minutes to process through security in order to enter into the "sacred" departure area of the airport. I literally had to remove my shoes, and my belt, and take out all my electronic devices. They even dumped out my water bottle... After the x-rays, I still had to be patted down before I was allowed to get dressed and proceed into the sacred space. The boarding and loading area at the airport is probably the closest thing non-religious people might know of as "Sacred Ground".

All that processing I went through was to prepare me for the journey I was about to embark upon. In a similar way, this entire conversation between God and Moses is God's way of preparing Moses for the journey he was about to undertake as well. God was patient with Moses, answering all his objections as to why he shouldn't be the one to carry out God's plan. Some of these objections might sound familiar to you when God calls your name and gives you a task to accomplish. I know I tried all of them and a few others as well.

God always provides for His people. He provides the most personal thing he has, his name. Yahweh. The most powerful thing God gave to Moses was his name. Knowing God's name allowed Moses to call on The Lord in times of trouble. Calling out God's name, just like if I called out your name, gets God's attention. That's why Jesus instructed his disciples to begin prayer with, "Our Father who art in heaven." We normally shorten that to Dear God or Dear Jesus, but the idea is still the same. When you know the name of God you can call on Him. Moses also objected to his commission on the grounds that he was not an eloquent speaker. Who of us is? God said to Moses, I will be with your mouth. I will give you the words to speak. I will be with you, and you will not be facing the enemy alone. I think it's a curious thing that Moses was worried more about the Israelites than facing Pharaoh. His objections are geared toward how to convince the Hebrew people their God has sent him to lead them out of slavery and into the promised land. Moses doesn't mention things that would have worried me. For example, God, what if Pharaoh kills me on the spot for what I did all those years ago? What if he puts me in jail and I rot in prison the rest of my life? What if I never get to see my lovely wife and children again? No, Moses didn't raise any of the objections I would have brought up to God. Instead, he's worried about what to say to his fellow Hebrew people. How is he going to convince them he is God's instrument? Today, when a person believes they are called to lead God's people,

they must undergo a rigorous vetting process. A Candidate Selection Committee interviews the person and then watches and guides them through the candidacy process. This includes several retreats and workshops where the committee members get to know the candidate. The candidate is also put through rigorous training and instruction to ensure they speak the true Word of God and not the latest heresy. All of this is to help ensure that when the person is finally ordained, the people of the congregation to which they are called, will in fact listen as if their Pastor's voice was the voice of God. We're talking about leadership. Without leadership the people will flounder. Moses was unsure about his leadership skills, but God wasn't. God said he would be with Moses's mouth and even with the mouth of Aaron, Moses's brother, who apparently was a much more eloquent speaker. Yet, God didn't choose Aaron, he picked Moses, the one with the speech impediment... God also gave Moses a physical object for Moses to use to focus God's power. God gave Moses the famous staff. Later, God, through Moses would use that staff to turn the Nile River to blood and to part the Red Sea. God uses people and physical objects to carry out his purpose for all of creation. He even still uses physical objects to help us focus God's almighty power. In Holy Baptism God uses ordinary water to cleanse us from our sin. In Holy Communion God uses the bread and the wine to remind us of His salvation and to ingrain in our minds just how much God loves us.

Now one quick Gospel minute on God's name. The Great I AM. Of all the other gods, there is only one true living God. All others are created by humans. In his very name God is proclaiming He is the one true and living God. This is a God who is willing and able to love every human being because that same living God also created them in His own image. That's why God never gives up on us. He looks at you and sees a reflection of Himself. It's no wonder God became human in Jesus Christ. He did it to accomplish what Adam and Eve and every other human being could never accomplish. Jesus is the new Moses who brought all God's people out of slavery, not slavery to Pharaoh, but to sin, death, and the devil.

So, now what are we to do with this story. It's a story meant to help us to be attentive, like Moses, to see where God's presence is and what God is asking of us today. May we never be afraid to raise our fears and objections to God, but humble enough to listen when God answers our fears. May we step out in confidence, knowing God is with our mouths and with every other part of us when we go to the Pharaohs in our own lives and say let my people go. Let my people go from lying. Let my people go from oppression and racism. Let my people go from addiction. Let my people go from greed. Let my people go from poverty. Let us go and worship God on His Holy Mountain and offer our lives to God that we might lead ourselves and others into the freedom of living for God and for His Kingdom on Earth. Amen.