

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 2, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 410, 496, 310, 306, 422.
Lessons: Exodus 2:11-25, Acts 7:22-29, John 5:43-47.
Sermon Text: Exodus 3:1-15.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of our hymns begins “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” (The Lutheran Hymnal, 514) Today we hear how God chose an 80 year old man to lead his people for another 40 years. Please give your attention as

GOD CALLS MOSES TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE

- 1. At age 40 Moses took matters into his own hands to lead God’s people.**
- 2. However, God humbled Moses and 40 years later finally calls Moses to do His work.**

As you heard in our Epistle lesson, Moses was 40 years old when he fled to Midian. He had been educated at Pharaoh’s court and had learned the wisdom of the Egyptians. He knew that the Hebrews were being cruelly oppressed as slaves. In addition, we read in Hebrews 11:24-26: *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”*

In his act of killing an Egyptian *“Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them”* Acts 7:25, as Stephen declared while on trial before the Jews. Already at age 40 Moses saw himself as a deliverer of his people. But his own people – and God – were not ready for this. When attempting to settle a dispute between two of his own people, they let Moses know that his killing an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew the previous day had become well-known in the land. He realized he was in deep trouble. Killing the Egyptian was an open act of open rebellion. To save his life Moses fled to a remote area on the Sinai Peninsula. There a branch of the Midianite people were living as shepherds.

Already at this time in his life we see Moses as a man who boldly wanted to help the cause of his people. He turned his back upon all the earthly pleasures which he could have enjoyed as an adopted member of Pharaoh’s family. He was convinced that God wanted to use his services in some way to deliver his people out of their desperate situation. But murdering an Egyptian was surely the wrong way to do this. The end does not justify the means.

Moses had to learn patience before the Lord finally chose the time for Israel’s deliverance. The next chapter in Moses’ life was spent far way from Egypt and that chapter in his life lasted another 40 years. He died at 120 years, so the last 40 years of his life was spent fulfilling what God had in mind for him.

In the chapter before our text we read that *“A priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, ‘Why have you returned so early today?’ They answered, ‘An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.’ ‘And where is he?’ he asked his daughters. ‘Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.’ Moses agreed to stay with the man,*

who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, 'I have become an alien in a foreign land.'" Exodus 2:16-22.

Moses' father-in-law was called Reuel and also Jethro. The name Reuel means "friend of God." It appears that later on through Moses he became a convert to the worship of the true God, the God of Israel. Moses learned patience serving as a humble shepherd. God was training, testing, strengthening Moses for the years ahead. Then we read "*During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.*" Exodus 2:23-25. Things got worse for the Hebrews. But God did not forget his people. He had, of course, never forgotten them, but we read of God in human, anthropomorphic terms. He was ready to act in their behalf. When God's hour of deliverance has come, He always sees to it that his people are delivered.

The words of our text report what happened at Horeb, a mountain range which Moses, writing Exodus by the inspiration of God calls "*the mountain of God.*" It was later here on Mount Sinai, one of Horeb's mountain peaks, that God gave the Israelites the law.

This is a strange miracle. Moses saw a bush that did not burn up. At this time taking off their sandals, their shoes, was a sign of deep respect for a place. And then God tells Moses exactly who is speaking to him: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob was speaking to him. The God who had spoken to the forefathers of Israel and who for hundreds of years had been silent was now speaking to Moses out of this burning bush.

God now assured Moses that "*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. 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. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.*" Notice that God again is very specific about exactly where his people will be settled.

And then God said to Moses; "*So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.*" We have here another example in Scripture of a direct divine call to someone to serve the Lord. Today a divine call is issued through groups of Christians, most formally by a unanimous call of the voters of a congregation calling someone to serve them as the servant of the Lord. Moses has been chosen by God as the one to go to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

Moses, who 40 years earlier had been so bold as to take matters into his own hands in trying to help the Hebrews in Egypt, now "*said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' 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.'*" 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?" 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.'*" 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 by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.*"

Moses, overwhelmed by this miraculous appearance of God asks 'Do you want me to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' This is surely a much more humble Moses than the Moses who 40 years earlier boldly killed an Egyptian and then tried to be an arbiter among the Hebrews. These 40 years as a shepherd had taught him humility. We are also reminded of how God repeatedly uses the picture of a shepherd in both the Old Testament and New Testament for those who are to lead his people. God was to make Moses the leader of his people in bringing about their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

God showed and declared his majesty and power to Moses – and to us – here. To deliver his people, Jehovah, the mighty God Himself, comes to the rescue of weak and sinful men. But where God is present and visits His children in his mercy, there the safety of all those who put their trust in Him is assured. God assures

Moses that he will be with him. He even gives a sign to prove this: ‘On the same mountain you will worship me.’

So Moses asks ‘what can I say to the people and how will they know that I am to be your representative?’ God declares his name to Moses. **“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?’ 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.”’ 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 by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”**”

God is a personal being, an “I”. He is not simply an indefinite force or some kind of “power” somewhere out in nature, as many people believe. As a person, a personal being, he compares himself to people who think, who feel, who speak, who decide, who act. Scripture is filled with pictures of God’s power and glory and the fact that he is eternal. Paul speaks of God’s power in Romans 11:34-36 **“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”** In Revelation 1:8 we read: **“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’”** In John 8:58 we read: **“‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’”** Hebrews 13:8 tells us that **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”** And in Malachi 3:6 we read simply: **“I the LORD do not change.”**

In our text God wants to reassure his people in Egypt that the promises of grace and mercy given to their fathers were still in effect. God had not forgotten them now in Moses lifetime, and immediately after Moses death, God was to lead them into the promised earthly land. Even we must be reminded that God wants to reassure believers of all time that the promises of grace and mercy given in the scriptures to believers of old are still in effect.

God calls himself **“I AM”**. **“I AM WHO I AM”**. These are the letters of the word, the name of God we know as “Jehovah”. The Hebrew letters are JHVH, and because this word was never spoken, we pronounce it as “Jehovah”, or some pronounce it as “Jahveh” (jah vay or yah vay)

Then God tells Moses **“The elders of Israel will listen to you.”** Exodus 3:18. They, with Moses, are to go to Pharaoh and request **“a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.”** God, of course, knew that Pharaoh would not let them go, and this was simply to be a first step in approaching Pharaoh. God knew that his people would not go back to Egypt. Of course, when his chosen people later turned their back on God, they thought that the slavery in Egypt looked better than life in the desert wilderness. But looking back on the slavery of Egypt was to be a reminder of the terrible difficulties they had and will have when they turn their back on God. This request was not a deception, but agreed with the plan of God, because the Lord knew the hard heart of Pharaoh. Moses and the elders were, at the beginning, not to ask more than a leave of absence, for Pharaoh’s denial of this petition would then reveal the hardness of his heart. God intended to make Pharaoh an example for all time. They were also to ask for valuables from their Egyptian neighbors, not to simply borrow them, for these things which they received from the Egyptians were to be surely a sort of repayment for the 400 plus years that they were slaves in Egypt.

In the next chapter, Exodus 4, Moses comes up with additional excuses as to why he doesn’t think he is capable of doing what God wants him to do. But God’s course of action has been set in motion in Moses’ life. As we consider Moses, may we be willing listeners and followers when God calls each of us to do his will. Amen.