

**“Liberation Leaders Called Out of the Old and then Sent Back There!”
based on Exodus 2:9-3:15, David Jahnke, 8/31/14**

Quick note about how our gospel passage was changed. The passage that we read was actually the lectionary passage set apart for this week. I thought about reading this difficult passage about having to take up our cross and sacrifice our lives if we want to gain life. But I decided to flee from it, wanting to focus on something more positive. But I could not escape. I kept thinking about it and when I picked up a Dietrich Bonhoeffer book Thursday night, the page of my earmark had the entire passage on it. That is when I gave in.

So today we continue looking at Moses and how his NO to his culture and to Pharaoh as the foundation of his yes to God. And next week I promise to focus more on the wonders of God’s Yes to us.

So Moses was brought up in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house. His Hebrew mother, however, got to nurse and raise him to a certain degree. So in quiet times together, I am sure she spoke to the baby about the God of Israel and the ancient stories about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But Moses grew up an Egyptian-- receiving the best in Egyptian education and trained to become a leader in the most powerful nation in the world.

This is similar to most of our stories. We are raised in the most powerful nation in the world; most of us with a standard of living similar to the elite in Moses’ day. We have had loving parents, pastors and Sunday school teachers who told us ancient stories of God. We are well-educated and trained to become American leaders.

But Moses saw something troubling. The people his mother had told him about were being mistreated. He felt a connection to these poor enslaved people even though he was privileged. And when he saw a guard beating a Hebrew slave, he stood up to the guard and ended up killing him. Moses saw that there were deeply troubling aspects of his own culture; within his own house; within him as he reacted to violence with violence. Moses was saying No to evil and this was the foundation of his eventual encounter with God and his becoming the leader God was calling him to be, rather than pharaoh.

I watched a wonderful documentary about Amish dissidents this week. It is interesting that this popped up in my netflix recommendations the week after I made my first visit to Amish country in Pennsylvania. But I need to qualify this illustration by saying there is much in Amish culture which is beautiful and holy.

The young people who left their culture were all filled with a striking innocence and righteousness and that is due to their roots. The Amish are very much aware of the holy ground that Moses walked upon. They are in touch with the land and their own humanity. They know that Jesus' blood has sanctified the whole earth just as Abel's blood defiled it. They know that the Spirit fills every breath and every breeze and they seek to honor God in all they do.

But all of these Amish dissidents also saw things in need of correction, just like Moses. One man said that he now felt like a missionary to his own people which is our primary calling to our fellow Americans and even our fellow Christians.

Another woman spoke of an experience she had during communion. "When I went to my first communion service, the Bishop said, 'Each individual grain of wheat must give up its individuality to become a part of this loaf of bread. And in the same way, each of us must give up our individuality to become a part of the community.'" She said, "I remember thinking to myself, 'I hope I am one of those grains that falls off of the grindstone. I don't want to be ground up.'" [from PBS' American Experience, [The Amish: Shunned](#)]

First off, we do not lose our individuality when we join body of Christ any more than Father, Son and Holy Spirit lose their individuality in the trinity! Community is where we find how blessed and beautiful and powerful we are as uniquely gifted individuals.

But the main point of this illustration for today is that even that most sacred of events, communion, can be corrupted. So we have to look at ourselves and the patterns of living in which we have been formed; we have to look at the practices of our religion, our workplaces, our institutions and see, just as Moses and this woman did, what has been corrupted and is in need of sanctification.

And only you can look deep within and find the particular places which you have to say no to. But our gospel passage about bearing our crosses and losing our lives points to a couple of things that apply to all of us.

1. First, the most basic thing that we need to say no to is the belief that I am all right without God or living as if we do not need God, even if we do not believe it. More than anything else, this keeps us from receiving the wondrous Kingdom life God wants to give us. Accepting our need for God is where our encounter with God begins.

2. And if we know this and try to live this way, Jesus will call us to lose every aspect of our life that is not aligned with his life. This is painful because there is so much alignment required and it involves loss and change. We end up in the desert with Moses who gave up the privileged life he was born into when he would no longer accept the status quo. The only way to gain more and more of the eternal life that Jesus wants to give us is by way of the cross— giving up our lives to Jesus and his little ones. And while sacrifice is hard, the rewards of a growing relationship with God are so worth the cost.

I started to watch a documentary Friday about young lawyers with 6-figure debts working as public defenders for years and years. They were not naïve; they understood that most of their clients were guilty but they also understood what brought them to this point and that the system sometimes gets things wrong. And they were willing to work crazy hours for little pay in order to give the 50-200 clients they are serving at one time at least a somewhat fair shot at justice. And by the way, the same sacrifice goes for most prosecutors, assistant prosecutors and police officers who give up higher paying jobs in order to protect society and fight for justice and stand up for victims of crime. [from the movie “Gideon’s Army”]

Speaking of work on this Labor Day weekend-- do we remember who called us into our work? Do we see the tremendous blessings in it despite the toil? Do we work really hard to build God’s Kingdom in and through it? And do we give a good percentage of our income to advance God’s purposes?

This brings us back to Moses’ encounter with God. At first it was mysterious and wonderful. The great I AM— called Moses into being and true life. Moses reply to I AM was “Here I am” and he stepped onto holy ground. He stepped into the eternal life God was calling him to. But then God let him know what that entailed. He would have to return to the land where his people were oppressed and tell Pharoah to let his people go.

One of the public defenders from the video spoke to one of her mentors at a continuing ed. support group about how her return to work would be a return to Hell due to the bad people she often had to defend, the uncertainties, the injustices, the amount of time and effort. And her mentor said that her purpose was to save people from Hell. And in order to save people from Hell, you had to go into it.

I do not know if this guy was a Christian but this was excellent Christology. That is exactly why Jesus came to the Hell humans made of the earth and why he descended into sin and death. He did it to save us and show us how to be a part of His saving others from the powers and principalities that enslave and condemn.

Moses' response to this call to return to the Hell of Egyptian tyranny? His "Here I am, Lord" upon first hearing the Lord turned into a "Who am I, Lord?! I cannot do what you are asking! I cannot speak well and anyways, people would not believe me." God said he would do miraculous things through him and that he need not be afraid to speak either to Pharoah or to his own people.

I want to conclude with a kind of miracle I experienced here on Thursday morning at Rosanne Parrett's memorial service. It is a bit more subtle than the ones I heard last week at Evangel Church! When there was a chance to share a brief remembrance of Roseanne, three of our deacons got up and spoke poignantly and powerfully of why Roseanne was a blessing to them. One spoke of what a wonderful sewer Roseanne was; another spoke of the sewing machine Roseanne donated to her and the Needle Nite ladies and how she remembers Roseanne whenever she uses it; and the last spoke of Roseanne's strong mind and how much she spoke of her son and loved him. I do not believe that any of them would say they have a particular call to public speaking. But they got up and spoke powerful words of love, compassion and hope to the powers and principalities of darkness and lifted up a grieving family. It was a very moving thing to behold.

May the words of our lips, the meditations of our hearts and the work of our bodies be more acceptable to Lord; may they break down oppressive powers and principalities and build up the Kingdom of God on earth. And God's people say...