

Message: Holy Troublemakers: Moses (Exodus 3: 1-14)**Rev. Brian Kirk****April 17, 2016****First Christian Church- St. Joseph, MO****www.fccstjo.org**

Have you ever had that moment when you were confronted with injustice--it was staring your right in the face, and you realized: I have a choice here. I can do nothing...or I can do what's right and speak up?

When I was eighteen, I was employed at a convenience store for the summer. I hated every second of that job. It literally felt like my life was being sucked out of me every minute that I was forced to be there, stocking shelves and mopping floors and trying to make sure I gave the customers correct change. For some people, that would be a great job. But not for me. And my boss didn't make the situation any more bearable. He was the owner's son, likely to inherit the whole business some day, though he was only in his thirties at the time. What I remember most about him was how often he would tell racist jokes while we were working a shift together.

Here I am, still a teenager, with a boss who thinks it's okay to tell racist jokes to his employees. I remember thinking at the time: "How should I respond. Does he just automatically assume I am racist? Does he just assume all white people are racist?" I knew what he was doing was wrong, and I knew I should saying something to him. Call him out. Call out his prejudices. But I was just a kid. I was worried about losing my job. I was worried about confronting authority. And maybe, I just didn't want to be a troublemaker. And so... I said nothing. I still regret that decision.

Now, I imagine that there are some of us relish being known as a "troublemaker." That label is a badge of honor you carry around with you. But I also imagine that most of us don't exactly jump at the chance to be troublemakers in our daily lives. Stirring the pot, speaking out, calling people to justice -- that's a quick way to complicate our already complicated lives. Most of would rather avoid being labeled a "troublemaker." Or, at best, we are willing to be reluctant troublemakers.

So here's the good news: If you are willing to be even a reluctant trouble maker for the sake of the Kingdom, for the sake of the Gospel, then you will find plenty of kindred spirits within the pages of our sacred story. You will

find plenty of examples of individuals who are courageous and bold enough to live out God's justice, often against their better judgment, often when they are the last person you would suspect to do so. And we begin this week with the old testament figure of Moses.

Our reading today picks up Moses' story somewhere in the middle, so it might be helpful to take just a minute to back up and remember how he gets to this point. Moses is born in Egypt in a time when the Pharaoh is concerned that the Hebrew population, the slaves, has grown too large. So he concocts a plan to murder many of the Hebrew's baby boys.

Moses' mother, in order to protect him, places him in a basket and floats him down the river where he is discovered by none other than Pharaoh's daughter, who adopts the boy and raises him as her own. So Moses, Hebrew slave becomes Moses, Egyptian prince.

All apparently is good for him for a long time. But as he grows up, Moses can't help but notice how terribly the Egyptians are treating his fellows Hebrews. One day he sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave and Moses kills the man. Then fearing his crime will be discovered, he runs away, escaping to the land of Midian, where he marries the priest's daughter and eventually settles down to a quiet life as a shepherd.

And this is where we find him in our narrative today. Hiding out, living a quiet, safe life, incognito as a shepherd...when he suddenly gets a visit from God by way of a burning bush!

Do you ever wish sometimes that God's call on our lives would be as clear as a booming voice coming from a burning bush? Wouldn't it be great to have such a clear calling on your life, such a concrete moment when God just grabs a hold of you and tells you what to do? "Here I am! I'm a burning bush! You can't ignore this."

Wouldn't it be so much easier if we received signs from God like people in the Bible seem to so often? A sign that says: "This is it. This is your life's purpose. Go and do this thing!"

Wouldn't that be great?

Or would it? Maybe not. Because it sure would be hard to refuse that kind

of sign. It would be hard to pretend you didn't notice it.

Moses sure can't . Here's this burning bush right in front of him. And it's probably the last thing he wants to see that day.

Because Moses has it pretty good. Hiding out amongst the sheep. He has a wife, a family. A quiet life where each day is just about doing his job, keeping his head low...AND STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE.

And here comes God saying: "Hey Moses. It's God. I'm glad you are doing well. I'm glad you got out of slavery in Egypt and your life is good. And I know that you have no earthly reason to stir the pot...BUT those people that you left behind in Egypt...YOUR people: they are still in slavery. It's great that you're free, it's great that you found liberation, but what about the others? I want them to be free, too. And I need your help in order to do that!"

And here comes my favorite part of the story: Moses tries to get out of this whole situation. He says to God: "Who am I to go and confront Pharaoh and try to lead the people out of slavery? I'm nobody. And even if I do somehow manage to pull this off with Pharaoh, what if I go to tell the people all this and they don't believe me?" (Can you really blame the guy for trying to weasel his way out of this? Like me with my racist boss, how often in life do we come up with perfectly rational excuses for avoiding the call to be holy troublemakers?)

Moses even goes so far as to say: "At least tell me your name so I can tell them who this God is who has sent me."

Now, in the ancient world, it was believed that if you used the name of a supernatural being or a deity, you would have some power over it. But God is too smart for him answering: "Here's the only name you need to know: A am who I am. I will be who I will be."

And we will learn, throughout the totality of the scriptural text, just who this God is. This God is a God who sees the suffering of the people, the oppression of the people, the sadness of the people, and cannot stand by and let it happen. This God cannot remain silent.

This, we will learn, is a trouble-making God.

A God who again and again will challenge the status quo and the powers that be (even when the status quo and those in power happen to be God's people or the church).

In fact, I think that one reason we have seen a decline in the American Church in the last fifty years, and a decline in church membership, is that for far too long in our culture, the Church has given up its "troublemaker" role. The church for too long has too closely allied itself with the powerful, and too comfortably settled for being part of the privileged status quo.

The God of scripture is very rarely the God of the status quo, particularly because too often in history the status quo represents status for a few and oppression for many.

And as one biblical figure after another will discover, the only way to truly know this God, to follow this God, is to take risks, to take part in shaking up the status quo, to be willing to confront the powerful and stand in solidarity with the oppressed and the outsider. We will see this truth in coming weeks in the work of the prophet Jeremiah. We'll see the truth of this in the ministry of Jesus confronting the Roman Empire. We'll see the truth of this in the Syrophenician woman confronting Jesus, and we'll see the truth of this in the efforts of Peter to expand the church's welcome to all people, not just the Jewish community.

As for our story today of Moses, it seems there are two major take-aways that I cannot shake personally.

1) That the God of scripture desires to bring all of us out of our own personal Egypts into freedom. However you understand God (entity, idea, love) that God desires to help us find freedom from that which enslaves us, that which keeps us from being fully who we are created to be.

2) And on the other side of the coin: once we find freedom in God, we have a challenge, a call placed on our lives to help others find freedom too. It's not enough to say: "I'm glad I'm free. Great. Now let me just live a quiet comfortable life. Best of luck to the rest of you in finding your freedom. " This God is calling us to help others find freedom, and more often than not this call to help free others is going to require us to be, at the very least,

reluctant holy troublemakers for the sake of the Kingdom. We'll have to confront the powers, privilege, and status quo of this world to help others find freedom too.

So, this all leaves us with two questions: Are you still living in your own private Egypt? Are you still enslaved to something from which God's love and grace can help you find freedom?

Secondly, where do you think God is calling you to take a risk, to stir the pot, to stick your neck out, to confront the status quo? Where is God challenging you to play the role of troublemaker for the sake of justice in order to help others find freedom and liberation?

Amen.