

Sermon on Exodus 4:1-17 – 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church - 10.28.18 – Pastor Nate Scharf

I read Exodus chapter 4 and I think, “Even God himself had a hard time finding volunteers.” Even if this was a paid position God would still find all blanks on the sign-up sheet. What was the big deal, anyways? God told Moses to go back to Egypt. It had been 40 years since Moses left with his tail between his legs. He signed his death warrant by killing an Egyptian. His fellow Israelites rejected him and mocked him and his attempt to help. Now in Midian Moses was alive and had a family of his own that didn't know him back then. Moses worked by himself as a shepherd. But God told him to go back to Egypt to the elders of his people with a message. He told him to go to Pharaoh and make impossible demands. God even told Moses that Pharaoh would harden his heart. Truth be told, this wasn't just a volunteer spot, God chose Moses. God was going to use Moses. God had a plan for Moses. Truth be told, God has chosen you too. God uses you.

God has a plan for you.

Has God asked you to do the impossible when it comes to your work load and the people you have to work with? As a child, a parent, grandparent, friend, spouse, in any relationship has God asked too much considering the people he has asked you to love and serve? In your volunteer opportunities at church or in the community, or just life as you are now experiencing it, are the opposing forces too great and your fellow people too unwilling? Will they listen to you or accept you if you share any knowledge or even the good news about forgiveness in Jesus?

“Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’?” Legitimate point in my mind. Moses' relatives were still in Egypt. They knew who he was, and so did everyone else. Moses left Egypt when he was 40. Now he was 80. You think 40 years will make people forget his failures? Even in New Ulm we still publish what happened 50 and 100 years ago. Are they going to believe that God suddenly appeared to him? Though unnecessary for God to get his work done, God is patient with Moses and gives him 3 signs.

“What is that in your hand?...Throw it on the ground.” “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.” (What happened?). “This is so that they may believe

that the Lord, the God of their fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has appeared to you.” “Put your hand inside your cloak,” “Now put it back into your cloak,” (what happened to his hand?). “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.” One...two...three strikes you're out. These were three amazing signs that would prove the LORD did speak. It's the first time Scripture records that God allowed a human being to perform these signs and wonders. They would believe him, and if you read ahead, they did. God even has Moses practice them. Moses ran from the snake at first.

Are you inadequate for the tasks God has placed in your life? Other people would do it so much better, don't they? In fact, we constantly compare ourselves to others, and though we try more than we let on, we still fall short. There are better workers, better bosses, better moms and dads out there, better friends than we are, better musicians, students, preachers, teachers, farmers, spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, Christians, you name it, there are better options, right? Maybe failure has taught us this attitude. It could also be laziness or just plain sinful selfish attitudes. Or maybe we are right! Others can do it better. But God isn't going anywhere, is he? And the tasks at hand in your life are still at hand, no matter how much we'd like to ignore them, disengage with them, or run away. We are not the first ones to feel this way.

“Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon you servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” If there is one job Moses knew he was wholly unqualified for, it was this. After 40 years growing up in Pharaoh's house with the best teachers and highest privilege in the land, and now 40 more years to collect his thoughts and come to terms with a lot of junk, he wasn't the man for this job. But Moses forgot something – the Almighty Creator spoke to him. The one who formed him and made him (and just moments before enabled him to do the impossible with a staff, his own skin, and with water and blood).

The Lord said to him, *“Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf and mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”* The Lord doesn't disagree with Moses' assessment of himself, and he might not disagree with our self-assessments, but the Lord reminds Moses – I have given you this

work to do. I control all things and I give and take away for my purposes. I am the LORD. *I will help you. I will teach you. Now Go!*

Do you ever find that even if you want to help, and the logic is sound that you should do or say something, your feet were stuck in place? Your mouth remained closed. You were the right person, at the right time to defend your friend, take action, or share the good news of forgiveness in Jesus, however you just didn't. *"But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else." Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses."* Have you feared God's just anger over unfinished deeds, our doubt and faithlessness as we shirked our responsibilities, grumbled about them or made excuses? How many times did I say, *"Please send someone else?"*

God did. That's why God did send someone else. About 1500 years after Moses, God sent a man who never hesitated to do God's will and follow his commands. He always had the right word. He never let fear or anxiety keep his feet from moving to the places they needed to go, nor did he drag them when others asked him, pleaded with him, or forced him to go. He did not need extra signs and wonders for himself. He did not tire or grumble when faced with more people to serve and more thanklessness. He knew God's love for him, that the Lord's plan was best, and that no-matter-what God will get done what is needed even if we can't see how or it looks hopeless or doomed to failure or even death. He too performed signs and trusted that God would use them to help strengthen faith, and it did not stop him when some people rejected him or remained faithless. He continued on and God did his work to deliver his people once and for all.

A couple million people from Egypt and a belligerent and abusive Pharaoh was small beans compared with rescuing all of mankind from certain doom under God's just judgment and an eternity in hell. God did send someone else, and that is why we are here gathered to hear his Word and praise his name with our whole being. God rescued us through this perfect man named Jesus Christ. He was true man to live under God's Law and true God so his work would count for all mankind. He did. He went.

Fear and anxiety did not stop Jesus from following God's commands and his plan to its completion. He willingly went to the cross bearing our excuses, our sins and failures, our false humility, our doubts, our faithless fears and needless worry, missed opportunities and unrighteousness. And he took the blame. He paid the price. God's anger burned against him and God did not hold back or be patient. He gave Jesus what we deserve. And we are forgiven by his sacrifice.

We are shielded from God's wrath by his holy precious blood. We are accepted because of his perfect life, obedience and work. God purchased and won us and made us his own and enlisted us in his work by his own choosing. *"So Now Go!"*

The Lord has given you work to do with your family, with your vocations and avocations, with your church and community, in all parts because he wants you and has chosen you. **God has a plan for you.** And he has given you signs and wonders in his Word to remind you never to doubt, and to keep Christ at the center of all you do. He has given you the gifts he wants you to have. They may be more than others. They may be different. They may be far less or ones that you don't even know you have. He has created you, saved you, loves you and will be with you and teach you. In mercy and patience he even gives you helpers just like with Moses.

"What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you and he will be glad to see you." God has given you a family of believers to help you, support you and encourage you. God has given you his Word. He will use the gifts he has given you to do his work.

Moses was right in a sense – who are we? In and of ourselves – not enough, in fact nothing. But God has redeemed us by the blood of his Son. He has set us free from the bondage to sin, Satan, death and hell. We are set free to live and breathe in his forgiveness. We are called to follow him and to serve and to use our gifts for his goals until he calls us home. He will be with you. He will teach you. **God has a plan for you.** *"Now go."* Amen.