

“ORDINARY PEOPLE DOING EXTRAORDINARY THINGS:
I – MOSES”

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Exodus 14:10-31

Last week when we were in Nashville on the Classic Christians’ Bus Trip, we saw the “Batman” building. Have you ever heard of it or even seen it? It’s one of the tallest buildings in the city and the top of it looks like Batman! For real!

Of course, looking up at that, thinking of Batman, conjures up thoughts of super-heroes. Batman, Spiderman, Superman, Wonder Woman – all of them.

Well, I imagine that today’s sermon title, and the main character who is a part of it, conjures up thoughts of super-heroes as well – spiritual superheroes! If I asked you to make a list of them surely Moses would be on it, along with Abraham, Peter, Paul, Ruth . . . well, the list goes on and on. And I would agree with you that all of these folks are incredible, they’re a rich part of our faith history.

But you know what? They didn’t start out as super-heroes. They started out just like you and me – plain, ordinary children of God.

Granted, Moses did have a pretty interesting start in life. You remember his story – how he was born in Egypt, but born a Jew, at a time when Pharaoh was so threatened by the Israelites that he ordered all Jewish male babies to be killed at birth. Moses was born at that time, and out of fear for his life, his mother kept him hidden away and then put him in a basket and set the basket in the reeds near the bank of a river. Someone found that basket – and that someone was the daughter of Pharaoh himself – and she took the baby in as her own.

Fast forward some years, and Moses has grown up, and one day he sees an Egyptian cruelly treating a Jew, and Moses steps in, defends the Israelite and in the process kills the Egyptian. Well, old Pharaoh hears about that and is livid, and in fear for his life, Moses leaves and starts life on his own.

And it turns out to be a pretty normal life. He marries, has children, and makes his trade as a shepherd. Like I said, it seems like a pretty normal life, albeit not terribly exciting. His days are spent watching sheep, guiding them to safe places, rescuing them when they get in trouble – it’s a solitary, quiet life.

So it appears Moses is doing what the rest of us do, living life day in and day out with pretty much the same people doing pretty much the same things. Until one day, one seemingly ordinary day, when he's up on a mountain tending his sheep, suddenly a bush right in front of him is on fire – just like that! And then, just as suddenly, but shockingly, a voice calls to Moses out of that bush. And it is God!

And thus begins a conversation that will change the course of Moses' life. And it's an interesting conversation, to put it mildly. Let me paraphrase it:

“Moses, it's me, God. The God of your ancestors. Your God. I've been watching, Moses, and I see terrible things happening. I see my people suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. I hear the cries of my people. So I am going to save them, Moses, and I want you to be the one to do it. I'm going to send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.”

You know what? I'm surprised that the first words out of Moses' mouth aren't “What? Excuse me?” Instead he says something like that. “Me? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Me? Are you sure?”

And God replies, “Don't worry Moses, I'll be with you.”

“But, if I do this for you God, and the Israelites ask me who sent me, what am I going to tell them?”

“Tell them I AM WHO I AM sent you. The God of your ancestors, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

“But what if they won't believe me?”

“Moses, I'll give you some signs you can show them.”

Still, Moses is quaking, so he tries another tactic. “Look God, you've forgotten something really important. I'm not a good speaker.”

“I'll speak for you, Moses.”

Moses has nothing left. “O Lord, please send somebody else.”

To which God replies, “I'll send your brother Aaron with you, he's a good speaker. Now, let's go Moses. My people are suffering. On your feet. You are the one I've chosen. You'll be fine.”

So Moses gets up and he goes. Even with all his self-doubts and insecurities on his back, he gets up and he goes – trusting what God has told him – that He is with him and it’s going to be okay.

And today’s lesson from Exodus that Rick read is one of the high moments in his story – the parting of the Red Sea – sending the Israelites to freedom and the Egyptians to their death. This is Moses’ super-hero moment, surely bringing to our minds a picture of Charlton Heston with his arms open wide commanding the waters.

This ordinary man – Moses – doing an extraordinary thing for God and God’s people. Moses’ story is an incredible story, and I dare say, it’s way more dramatic than most of our stories. I’m not sure how many of us would want God to call out to us from a burning bush and call us to lay everything aside to do something huge for him, but I daresay that all of us would probably love to have God speak clearly to us.

One preacher, Joanna Adams, says that we’re probably longing for something that God has already done. Listen to her words: “I know what you’re saying: ‘God’s never spoken to me from a burning bush.’ Well, I respectfully disagree that God has never spoken to you. I believe that there is not a single person listening to whom God has not spoken, some way, somehow, about where God wants you to go, what God wants you to do in the next chapter of your life.

How does God speak? (she continues) Sometimes, God’s voice is heard in the form of an ‘A’ in your favorite course in college. Sometimes, God can speak through the ‘F’ as well. Here’s the deal: God has not left you alone to find your way. The question is whether or not you and I are listening to the ups and the downs in our lives, listening to the people around us who believe in us, listening to the surprise developments that come, truly, out of nowhere.”

She finishes, “We do not have to go away to a designated sacred place to have a divine encounter. You do not have to be standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon at sunset. You have to keep your eyes and ears open where you are.” (On-line, “Clarity About Your Calling,” The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams, 2/12/06)

She’s right. Listen, and God will point you in the right direction. Listen, and watch, and you’ll see places you should be going, things you should be doing, lives you could be touching.

Listen, and know that you don’t have your act all together, you don’t have to be the perfect candidate and have all the perfect skills – that God can take your heart, take what you offer, and make it enough.

Listen, and say yes, and go and do what God is calling you today – whatever it is. Actually, maybe that would be a great prayer for all of us to pray at the start of every day – “Lord, tell me/show me what you want me to do for you today.”

When you listen, don't be surprised when he enables ordinary you to do some extraordinary things – oh, maybe not part the seas, but extraordinary things nonetheless.

Have you ever heard of Alexandra Scott? Actually, most people know her by Alex. Alex was a little girl born in New England to doting parents, and who, at a very young age, was diagnosed with cancer. Her life consisted of going in and out of the hospital for treatment, and one day, when she was 4, getting ready to leave yet another stay in the hospital, told her parents that when she got out she was going to have a lemonade stand and raise some money for the hospital that was taking such good care of her.

A little girl setting up a lemonade stand on the sidewalk in front of her house – rather an ordinary story, wouldn't you say? Well, that four year old made \$2,000 that day, which is extraordinary enough, but lemonade stands set up in her memory since that day on sidewalks all around the country and maybe even the world, have made over \$120 million dollars that has gone to cancer research and supporting families of children battling cancer. An ordinary life that did an extraordinary thing.

But let me tell you about something closer to home, something that's a little less “stellar” but nonetheless extraordinary. A child walks into Thomson Estates Elementary School at the start of the school day in threadbare clothes, hunger in his belly, having slept on the floor with no beds in his house. Sometime during that school day, his teacher tells him he has a visitor and he goes to meet with his mentor from this church. That mentor spends an hour a week with him every week of the school year, and when that little boy sees the mentor that day, his eyes light up and a smile crosses his face. Because in a home where no one pays him much attention, and he is treated like he's not worth much of anything, this mentor who is committed to him, and reads with him, and plays with him, and compliments him, is a life saver, a ray of hope, a beacon of light. Mentors are ordinary people doing extraordinary things – things that can change the course of young lives for the better – from hopelessness to hopefulness and possibility.

All of you ordinary people – God has a plan for you to do something extraordinary with your life. If you don't know what that is, ask him, listen for him, watch for him – for he will guide you to that place where he needs you. You have a gift that no one else has, and God knows it – so listen, watch, and see where he wants you to go. I guarantee you, if you follow, it will be a great adventure, and your heart will be full.

So as you come for communion today, may your prayer be “Lord, what do you want me to do for you today, tomorrow, and all the days to come? Speak Lord, for your servant is listening. I’m ready to do something extraordinary for you.” May it be so.

Amen.