

Last week, we left Moses at three years old growing up in Pharaoh's palace with Bethiath, Pharaoh's daughter and his adopted mother, who rescued him out of the Nile River where his mother Jochebed had placed him in a basket when he was only a few months old to save his life. Now Moses is grown. Living in the palace all these years, we realize that everything about him looks and sounds like the powerful and elite in Egypt. He no longer resembles the Hebrew people of his birth but he knows that is his true identity.

Living as a member of Pharaoh's family has not only given him the best of the known world but it has literally saved his life. Since before his birth, Pharaoh had become threatened by the Israelite people living in Egypt because of their number and strength. So he forces them into oppressive slavery to build city upon city with brick after brick. When even that does not stop them increasing in strength, he launches campaigns to kill the male Hebrew infants, since his slavery work initiative was not breaking their bodies or souls. From this Moses was saved but the Pharaoh's oppressive deadly slave campaign against the Hebrew people had only grown in intensity.

One day, Moses goes into the Hebrew part of town. He sees one of the Hebrews being beaten mercilessly by an Egyptian. Moses seeing no one else in sight, moves in and kills the Egyptian burying him nearby. Moses thinks no one witnessed what happened but the next day when he tried to break up a fight

between two Hebrews. They asked him, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Are you going to kill us like you killed the Egyptian?” Realizing his secret was widely known, he ran away and once word reached Pharaoh, a bounty was placed on his head.

So Moses ran not just to the next city but across the Red Sea into another country, the land of Midian, outside of Pharaoh’s reach. When he is near the village well, he steps in when the local priest’s daughters are being harassed by a group of men. For his saving help, their father Jethro invites him to stay with the family and eventually Moses marries one of his daughters, Zipporah, as well as becoming the shepherd of their flock. Back when Jacob and all of his family must relocate to Egypt because of the famine, we are told that shepherds were so offensive to the Egyptian culture and society that the Israelites had to be located in Goshen, on the other side of the tracks.

So now we have Moses – born as a Hebrew, saved from being killed by living secretly as Pharaoh’s grandchild, who then commits murder to stop a Hebrew from being beaten, and who must then flee the wrath of Pharaoh, relocating in a land so far away that no one looks or sounds or acts or thinks like a Hebrew or an Egyptian, spending his days tending a flock of dirty and wandering sheep. This is how Moses lived for many, many years and until our Scripture today: Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.' " God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors,

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

I can't imagine anybody who would not be humbled and awed standing before a burning bush that is not consumed, hearing your name spoken in the crackling of the fire, and receiving an unbelievable job to do. That Moses feels inadequate to accomplish this impossible impossibility doesn't require much imagination on our part. What does take us out of our normal calculations is why was Moses the one God chose out of all the possible candidates?

Moses had been gone from Israel for up to 40 years according to Stephen in Acts. 7. No matter the exact years, Moses was in Midian long enough to marry, to have children, to create a new life. Also remember, the ancient world did not have the United States Postal Service, able to deliver a message anywhere in the world. When Moses left Egypt, he left behind any and every way to communicate with his people.

Moses may have been born a Hebrew, raised and educated as an Egyptian but now he is a Midianite shepherd. No one even knows about Israel's God in Midian. Then there are those of his own family he left behind. How well did he even know his Israelite family? Did he spend much time with his brother Aaron or his sister Miriam? Many years have passed and what we know for sure is that Moses has lived in safety and Aaron and Miriam have lived every day under the oppression of Pharaoh in fear of their lives and their children's lives.

This past Wednesday night athletes from the NBA, WNBA, MLB and MLS did not take to the court or the field but instead took a pause in a stand against racial injustice in our nation. One commentator remarked that many of these professional players now have children. Not only do they not feel like they are safe, but neither are their children. As a parent, you fear and worry for your children in ways you never worry for yourself. LeBron James is one of the most celebrated and accomplished NBA players with a net worth of \$480 million. What he confronts every day is his wealth and success cannot protect his children from racism because of the color of their skin. It is the fear of every person of color faces no matter what they do or who they are. If our skin is white, that is a fear we cannot understand; that is an oppression for which we have no experience.

Moses was going home to free a people whose oppression he had never experienced. When people saw him, listened to him, they saw and heard an Egyptian, not a Hebrew. When his life was threatened, Moses had the resources for an escape route. When his children were born in Midian, they were born into safety not into slavery. Now, God has chosen him to lead the Israelite Exodus Initiative. God is sending Moses back to Egypt to the palace where he grew up to a new Pharaoh with a message from God to let his people go and with a message to the Israelites to hold on, freedom is coming.

As Moses stands on holy ground, listening to God roll out the plans for this mission, he begins to think like we do that he is probably really not the one for the job. He says, “You know, God, speaking has never really been my forte. I’m not quick on my feet. I often say the wrong thing at the wrong time or I don’t what to say at all. I just have to believe there is someone out there more qualified than me.” God is not pleased with his self-assessment but also God is not unprepared for the moment. God says, You know, Aaron your brother, is gifted with words, a top-notch communicator. He’ll be glad to see you and glad to help you out, to be your voice when you need him. The two of you will make a great team when you take on Pharaoh.

Out of excuses, Moses agrees. I’m not sure what else you can do when the God of all creation speaks to you in an unconsumable fire. When Moses asks God his name, God says my name is I am. This Hebrew word that we transliterate as Yahweh can mean so many things at once. It is simply the verb “to be.” It could be translated I am who I was, who I am now, and who I will be. It helps us understand Jesus’ self-identification in Revelation 22:13 when he says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” God is the One who is before all, above all, and beyond all. God is I AM but God is also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is the One who chooses to be our God, to be in

relationship with us from generation to generation, to be our help and salvation when we are in need.

Sometimes when the world, when our world, is unraveling and we are crying out in frustration and anguish and pain, we can lose sight of God. We can feel alone and abandoned to the world's worst devices and desires. We can feel like God is so far away He can't hear our cries anymore and He can't see our troubles. But God says to Moses on top of a mountain that cannot be seen from Egypt, "I have heard the cries of my people and I have chosen you to lead them to freedom." I have never lost sight of any of you, not for a moment. Wherever my people are, there I am also. Wherever you go, I will be with you and you will have my power and my strength to overcome.

We might wonder how history will tell the story of our time, of this week, in the midst of an historic pandemic, an historic Category 4 hurricane, an historic boycott in professional sports against racial injustice, and an historic election season where norms and traditions have been bypassed and rewritten. In this time that has knocked us off our bearings, our truest hope and our greatest faith is that God is with us and God has a plan to lead us all to freedom, to the promised land ahead.

We need to be ready to say "Here I Am," when God speaks to us from our own burning bush. We each have our role to play in the work of freedom and

justice and goodness for all people, even if we have not experienced the same fear or oppression. This week, we learned the story of Anthony Huber, a white protester in Kenosha, Wisconsin who ran to tackle the 17-year-old gunman after he fatally shot a man. The gunman then turned his aim on Huber and fatally shot him in the chest. Who knows how many others Huber saved through his courage and sacrifice? Anthony Huber did not himself experience discrimination or fear or violence because of the color of his skin, but he knew the fight to end racism was his fight as well. We all brothers and sisters of one another and we are all called by God to freedom's work. If we think we are not up for the task or that our contribution won't make a difference, we should remember it is God's specialty to choose unlikely people from unlikely places for unlikely plans. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Moses, Miriam and Aaron, of you and me. God says to us, "I am who I am. I will be with you to the journey's end."