



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost November 10, 2019

“You Do It”
(Exodus 3:1-15)
Rev. David K. Groth

*Exodus 3:1-15 (The Lord sends Moses to Egypt
and reveals His name.)*

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone,...sharing
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

Collect: Living God, Your almighty power is made known chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of Your grace to lay hold of Your promises and live forever in Your presence; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

It made me chuckle a little, reading this lesson for the first time on Monday morning. I had never noticed it before. The Lord says “I have **seen** the affliction of my people . . . I’ve **heard** their cry . . . I **know** their sufferings, and I have **come down to deliver** them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to **bring** them up out of that land to a good land . . . flowing with milk and honey.”

Moses must have been thinking, “Great!” The LORD is doing all the action words there. He’s doing all the verbs. He has seen, heard, knows, will come down, deliver and bring.

But then just two sentences later the Lord says, “Come, I will send **you** to Pharaoh that **you** may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” In other words, “You do it.” It must have blindsided Moses; he’s just been conscripted to do a lot of the work. But if you think about it, this is the usual way of things. Every chance the Lord gets, he uses people. Whenever he can, the Lord delegates responsibility and shares the joy, meaning and purpose of work.

For example, consider that a glass of wine poured for you at a wedding reception. God’s extraordinary way of doing that happened just once that we know of, in Cana of Galilee, when Jesus turned water directly into wine. But that’s not how God usually makes wine. Normally he starts with a plant he created that will take water, soil and sunlight and make grapes out of that (already an impressive little miracle if you think about it, but one we hardly notice because it’s so predictable and common). But then God starts using people to propagate these plants and plant them in nice, orderly rows. He uses people to build trellises for their branches, people to install irrigation systems, people to prune and harvest and press the grapes and people to build enormous stainless-steel vats to store up the juices so they can ferment. Then God uses still more people to bottle up the wine and to design and produce the labels and pack the cases and still more people to transport the wine to wholesalers and retailers and more people to stock the wine on

shelves and finally the person to pour that wine into your glass at a reception. It's all very labor intensive, even before we begin to think about the people used to build the roads on which to the trucks haul the wine, or the trucks! One wonders, "How many people did God ultimately use to bring a single glass of wine to your table?" How is God using you in your vocations to bring products or services to others?

Sending Moses down to Egypt to free the people of Israel, God is doing things in his usual way. He's engaging people in meaningful work. It's standard operating procedure. "You go down. You do it" the Lord says to Moses. I'll help. I'll be there. I'm not so much sending you as taking you with, but you're still going to do most of the talking."

Another example. In Jeremiah 30, the Lord says, "I will restore you to health and heal your wounds." He makes it sound like a hands-on, instantaneous, miraculous intervention. But no. Most of the time he heals us using lots of people over long periods of time.

A couple of years ago, when a dangerous fever sent Gail to the emergency room at UW Hospital, I actually counted how many people had some sort of professional interaction with her and there were sixteen, to say nothing of those who designed, engineered and produced the high tech MRI's and other machines, those who researched, produced and shipped the medicines, those who built the hospital, those who clean the facilities, those who work behind the scenes in hospital management, insurance, and in the education and training of all those people. That's God's ordinary way of helping a woman with a dangerous fever—using all kinds of people. Only once that I'm aware of did God take a woman (Peter's mother-in-law) directly by the hand and assist her out of bed. With that touch the fever immediately left her. That was God's extraordinary way. But his ordinary way is to use lots of people as masks of his care.

You know some people who are sick. If you allow him, God will use you to help care for the sick. How can you be a mask of God's compassion and grace?

Psalm 147 says, "The Lord heals the broken hearted." Again, it sounds like the Lord has his hands on us directly, somehow dabbing balm on our broken hearts, swifiting away our

sadness. I cannot rule this out. I can only say I never perceived the Lord working directly on me these last couple of years. I've never felt his hands touch me directly. However, I do know that he sent lots and lots of people who have done all that and so much more, many from this church family, and I'm so grateful to you. But I'm also grateful to the Lord who usually uses people to walk with you through the valley of the shadow of death.

You probably know someone who recently lost a loved one. How can God use you to help heal that broken hearted one? It's not too much of a stretch. He said to Moses, "I will send you to bring my people out of their slavery in Egypt."

I'm thinking now about artists—singers, songwriters, sculptors, poets, potters, painters, novelists, actors, musicians. . . . Is it all just human creativity, human skill? Or does God give certain gifts and talents and training to people? And then does God use those same people to entertain us and teach us and at their best, bless us, and remind us we are not brick making machines enslaved in Egypt? We are human beings, created in his own image. Because God delights in music, so do we. Because God delights in beauty, so do we. Because God delights in well-chosen words, so do we.

Years ago I was listening to an interview on NPR. One of the Beatles was being interviewed, I think it was Paul McCartney, and the question posed him was something like, "As you compose music and lyrics, where do you get your ideas?" I was expecting the answer, "From life, from experiences, good, bad, and ugly." But he didn't say that. Instead, he said, "I always feel grateful, as if I have been given the music and all I did is write it down." I thought that was really insightful, even when spoken of secular music, and humble. Similarly, I was watching the Ken Burns documentary on Country Music, and singer, songwriter Hank Williams was once asked, "How do you go about writing country music?" He answered, "I don't write it – I just hold on to the pen and God sends it through." God uses us to participate not just in care of God's creation, but also in his ongoing creative work.

When God sent Moses to Egypt, it would require every bit of creativity Moses could muster, or, better said, that Moses could draw from God, so that he would choose the right words,

the right tone and inflection and timing to convince Pharaoh and to convince God's people Israel that it was indeed time for them to leave. How might God use your creativity to bless others, your creativity in the kitchen, or the office, or the machine room, or the laboratory or while dialoguing with a stranger on social media?

We're talking, of course, about the theology of vocation, how God uses us in our vocations as moms and dads and plumbers and pastors and as nieces and nephews and even as strangers on social media— he uses us in our vocations to care for others. Whatever you do, it's all important work, and the Lord uses all of it to serve others, so it behooves us to do it well.

Mike Leckrone, former director of UW bands, liked to tell us to have fun, for sure, have fun, but there is no fun without a commitment to excellence. Think about that: When's the last time you've enjoyed doing shoddy work? The fun in our vocations begins when we commit to excellence. The apostle Paul put it this way, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as for the Lord and not for men" (Col. 3:23).

Moses thought the Lord was going to do all the verbs, and there is a sense in which the Lord does do all the verbs. But he likes to engage us every chance he can and share the work with us! He gives us the gift of meaningful, rewarding work. In partnership with him, we get to serve others . . . also when young, also when retired. "Come," God said to Moses. "I will send you to free my people."

Of course, there is one place he does not send us. He never says, "Come, I will send you to pay the price for your own sin." He never says, "Come, I'm going to send you to be brutally flogged by soldiers and then crucified." There are some areas where we cannot help, where the Lord cannot use us, and indeed, where our participation would not be welcomed. When we try to save ourselves, through the accumulation of good works, or when we try to build a case for our own righteousness, we're only getting in the way of the Lord saving us. Only Jesus can make atonement for our sin. His blood alone can pay the price, not your blood, not your money, not your works, not your righteousness. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; you don't get to participate in that. His sacrifice

alone is pleasing to the Father; there's no sacrifice you can make that can contribute to your salvation. Jesus alone is our Savior. He doesn't share that vocation with any other, not even his mother.

One last thing. At one point, Gail's oncologist in Johnson Creek sent us to a guy at UW-Hospital whose job it was to match end stage cancer patients with experimental treatments. He came in, sat down and warmly introduced himself. (A young man. All of a sudden they all seem to be young!) He asked, "How can I help you today? What would you like from me?" And Gail replied, "Well, I don't need another Savior. I already have one."

He smiled. We talked about cancer and chemo. And at the end of that lengthy conversation, he said, "By the way, I'm a Christian too." And he told us all about his Catholic parish. Clearly, he was very active and devout, and he was just the right person at the right time with the right words for us, and somehow, I think Gail's words were just the right words for him too. Those two pointed each other to Jesus. Gail didn't need another Savior, nor did he need to try to be a savior.

When it comes to serving us and others, God does all the verbs, all the action words, but for most of them, he engages people in that work, using you in all your vocations. He doesn't so much send you out to do that as he does take you with. But there's one vocation where we stand back and are still. As he told Moses to take his shoes off, for it was holy ground, so also, when it comes to earning our salvation, we take our shoes off. That's holy ground. It's the Lord's work, and only the Lord's work. Thanks be to God. Amen.

