

Sermon for Sunday 30 August 2020 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21 ; Matthew 16 :21-28

« *Who ?* »

Moses has gone about as far as one can imagine away from his birth, or his upbringing and young manhood. Now, he's neither with his Israelite people nor the Egyptian court where he unexpectedly grew up and was accepted as a protégé of the Pharaoh's daughter. He has made a home in a distant land, has married, and is raising a family, "minding his own business" and his father-in-law Jethro's sheep.

This classic chapter in the Bible's long story gives us a nudge, no matter where we are or have been --- not even necessarily on the believers' spectrum. I can be quiet for a minute and you can identify the details for yourself. You've gotten this far; you're OK; but you still have your curiosity.

So you fall for the trick, the call, the larger meaning we preachers are always laying @ your feet ...or just off the beaten path you regularly travel.

That's how I got my current car. Some kid drove out the wrong way in a car he didn't belong in... and bam! Nobody hurt, but I loved my car ... and ... Well, you furnish the details. This nice guy, or beautiful woman, smiled, and Now you have three kids, and your life story behind you, and ahead of you.

"Who?" We may think we're believers; but like Moses, when our real career starts, or somewhere along the way, we say, "What?" "How?" "Does this really fit?" and even if it does, when we're confronted with a serious decision inside this surprising career we've chosen, kind of, like accepting an office, or saying "no," or "yes," to something important, we not only want time to think it over, and even THEN still aren't sure. We want to know what this says about life. "Who am I really working for?" Or, as Moses says, "Who shall I say sent me?"

I have to say that I'm at a wonderful stage with my three sons. They all talk to me. They refer me to people I'd never otherwise know about. Last week two of them separately sent me references on "Black Lives Matter" that are still blowing wind in my mind... How did I get this far? How did I get to the point that one of you recently commented about my sermon, "I wish you'd just chill for awhile?"

Where are we headed as a country? I know we're in trouble, but ... and I know I have opinions, based on my loooooong experience and the serious thought I've given to a lot of things... I THINK these feelings come from faith; I think when Jesus says, "He that saveth his life shall lose it," I know what he means, and where I stand ... but I can't help asking, "Who is this speaking to me in the dark of night, and where does this land me when I talk about it in some setting I care about?"

The short of it is, how should I be describing mission to you all? Even if I'm excited, I'm experienced enough to know it will look different to me the next day. Your reaction will change me. I don't know how to speak ...even if God sends somebody better suited to explain and encourage us all than I am. God sent Aaron when Moses objected that he himself wasn't a speaker; right? If you answer this call ... if you really step out and act like you deeply feel you want to ... it sometimes seems like anything in the way just gets pulled aside.

Who?

I've met several young people recently who declare they're atheists. Good people. Worth trusting, even following. I get to thinking how much of an atheist I am myself. Sometimes that's been bad; other times it's made me more truthful, and maybe even more useful. Maybe that's where we are in this country: What served for religion is not needed now. What looked like disbelief is now just honest self-reliance...or genuine listening ... or even the willingness to work on something in an entirely new way because we are a new people. Someone said the other day ... or did I think it up myself?... that no other modern country had accepted human slavery the way we did, or as long as we did, or as recently as we did. We have a lot to work out, across boundaries, leading one another out of captivity...

Why do you think? How should I be preaching? If I've got an idea, how should I present it?

What should be my reference?

After all, I'm not done yet. I've still time, if you'll just let me take off these sandals and stand still while I listen to....

Who? Who sent me? Who's in charge here?

Let us pray. Lord, we've been working at this awhile. It's real still now. We love one another. Work on us. Give us the inner peace from which we can speak truth. Thank you.

In Jesus' name we say,

Amen.