



Exodus 2:11-22  
 Journey to Freedom: Exodus  
 "Grown Up"

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So today we continue our Summer sermon series in Exodus called, "Journey to Freedom" which is appropriate in light of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July last Sunday, and also the freedom we all have from Covid thanks to the vaccine, including in worship. It's so great to be here without a mask. Although I was not here with you last Sunday, I did attend church last Sunday morning in a very small Episcopal church (maybe 20 in worship) up on Orcas Island where we were camping for a few days. And they, too, were grateful for the freedom that July 4<sup>th</sup> means each year and this year coming out of the pandemic.

Anyway...today we continue our series in Exodus. And there is a leap in the timeline of Moses' life that is summarized for us here in verse 11: "One day, after Moses had grown up..." We don't know exactly how long that was, but in the verses just prior to this, Moses is still a baby. Clearly, quite some time has passed, however. Maybe he's in his early 20's or something like that.

But there's a sense in which he'd "grown up" that seems to be more than just physical or chronological. **Moses has "grown up" in the sense of realizing and being aware of the plight of his people, his blood relatives, the Hebrews.** As we heard last week, Moses grew up as Egyptian royalty, but that as an adopted son. His flesh and blood people were the Hebrews.

But this was not likely the first time he'd ever gone out and watched them doing their hard labor. In fact, the Hebrew words for "went out" and "watched" are in the imperfect form, indicating that this is an ongoing thing, a regular thing, that he did.

And you may recall from chapter one that the Egyptians worked the Hebrews "ruthlessly." The Hebrews were "oppressed" by the Egyptians, treated as slaves with "slave masters" put over them, and their lives were made "bitter" with "forced" and "harsh labor" (1:11-14). Moses had to have seen all of that before. He was well aware of how the Egyptians treated the Hebrews.

And yet this time, when he goes out to observe things, something snaps. You kind of wonder: **Why had he not acted before? Had his own ease and palace lifestyle simply blinded him to what was going on, or caused him to figure that it wasn't his problem?** Certainly the Egyptian version of the historical narrative was what was engrained in him, and so maybe he even blamed the Hebrews for their plight?

This is so easy for us to do – to dismiss or overlook the challenges that other people face, and how we might even contribute to their situation. Let me give you a light-hearted example that is in no way intended to be put on equal footing with what we read about here, but I think it makes it more accessible for us.

So, in my household growing up, we cheered for the University of Washington. My parents graduated from there, one of my grandmothers did as well...it was just who we rooted for. And as most of you know, that's where I went to school and graduated from as well. So, the tradition continues in our household.

And the narrative for me growing up was that the UW was superior to all other universities, with an underlying current of “why would you even attend somewhere else or root for some other university?” None of those things were actually ever said...but the attitude was there, even if it was all light-hearted, college-rivalry fun. It started with athletics, but kind of spilled over into the academics. And I know that kind of thing is common at many universities and with their alumni, so we Huskies aren't the only ones.

But: At some point, we all “grow up” as Moses did. So, while we may still root for a particular university, we recognize that there are valid reasons to attend another school, and that there are real people created in God's image who do so. **We learn to differentiate between the “institution” of the other (which we might root against or even mock), and the “individual” of the other who we can befriend and love.** That's why a Cougar can marry a Husky, for example, but still root against the rival school in the Apple Cup.

We've got that in our family. Blake has been at SPU this year. That's great. I love that school. I will admit: it does help that it's a local school because I love Seattle and the surrounding communities, and it helps that they don't generally compete against the UW in athletics. Hailey about to start her Senior year and she is looking at Universities right now. This week she attended a virtual tour and presentation on the University of Southern California. Now, if she ends up *there*, I might have to disown her, but that's just the consequences of a bad decision. ☺ (Just kidding!)

You see, we tend to think that this kind of “air of superiority” toward others is something that only other people struggle with; but it's easy for any of us to fall for. It might be fun and games with university allegiances, but it gets downright serious and problematic in other spheres of life, such as nationality, politics, skin color, gender, age, or any other element of being human that we use to divide. The fact is: regardless of those things, we're all humans, created in God's image; each person is someone who Jesus loves and went to the cross for. And: **This division and sense of superiority (or inferiority) can become a part of who we are – at the core – as we hear and live the narrative of “us” and “them” from the “us” perspective.** Of course, the “us” perspective is the natural one and the one we tend to hear the most. Unfortunately, this tendency to listen to just one side of the story has led to serious damage and sin throughout history and around the globe by non-Christians and Christians alike – and we're still not out of the woods.

So, Moses grew up hearing the wealthy, powerful, royal family, Egyptian version of things that undoubtedly justified the Egyptian treatment of the Hebrews.

But something in him snapped on this occasion when he went out. His sense of injustice overwhelmed him. Now, this is not to say that his response is justified. Murder should not be considered as an option in any response like this – though German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was involved in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, believing that the loss of one man's life was better than the loss of millions in the holocaust. So, that's a deep topic. But as a rule, murder is not an option.

What we see, though, is that: **Moses finally was “grown up” and realized the pain of his own people. He saw things from their perspective, rather than the perspective he’d always viewed them from.** And even though his reaction might not have been morally proper, he was moved to stand up for the oppressed and do *something*. He didn’t let history, tradition, his own status, apathy, or anything else stop him from taking action.

Quite frankly, we need more Moses-types in our world. We need mature Christians – Christians who have “grown up” – who are willing to do something about the injustices of the world. Jesus himself said, “Whatever you’ve done for the least of these, you’ve done for me” (Matthew 25:40). **Who are “the least of these”? Jesus says they are those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, poor, in prison...and the stranger/foreigner (Matthew 25:42-43).** The word for “stranger” is “xenos” and is the root for our word, “xenophobia,” which is the fear of the foreigner and leads to barriers and division. Jesus implores us in this parable to welcome in the “xenos.” So, when I say we need people in our world who are Moses-types, what I really mean is we need Christians to be Christ-like, have the humility to listen to “the historical and present narrative” from the viewpoint of those who have been marginalized...and then stand up for them.

The next day, Moses enters into another situation that could have gotten ugly very fast. **This time, it’s between two Hebrew guys, and rather than responding in violence, he used words.** We get the sense that while he still has a heart for justice, he has very quickly realized that the way he went about fighting injustice the day before was not right, and there’s a better way.

Through that conversation he realizes that what he’d done the previous day was not done in secret as he seems to have believed it was. In fact, word gets to Pharaoh, who tries to kill Moses (v. 15). But Moses flees out to a region called Midian. Scholars believe Midian bordered the North East end of the Red Sea. If you know where the Suez Canal is – which after the Evergiven got stuck there a couple months ago we all ought to know where that is – then you can find Midian, because it was about 200 miles East/Southeast of that, in present-day NW Arabia.

**And there, Moses encounters yet another case of someone being wronged (Exodus 2:16 ff.).** This time, it's a couple of girls, or young women, who are sisters and who are harassed by some shepherds as they tried to get water for the flock they were watching for their father. So, Moses steps in and helps them to get water – presumably without killing anyone this time.

Apparently, the gals suffered from this kind of harassment regularly, because their father – Reuel, also known as Jethro – notes that they have returned home earlier than usual from watering the flock. In other words, they normally had to wait for these other shepherds to water their flocks before these young ladies could take care of theirs; but this time thanks to Moses, they weren't forced to move to the back of the line. Moses made sure they got their water in the order in which they arrived at the well.

Reuel, we're told, is a priest, a religious leader. We might wonder, "What religion? What God or gods did they worship?" Well: **The Midianites get their name from their ancestor, Midian, who was a son of Abraham.** So, the Midianites trace their lineage back to the same guy that the Hebrews do, which means their religion gets its roots there as well. In other words: they worshipped the same God that the Hebrews worshipped, unless they'd had some outside religious influences they'd allowed in along the way. But there was definitely common ground with Moses (who probably also had some Egyptian religious influence in him). But they've got this common lineage and faith tradition thanks to Abraham. So when Moses saw Reuel, they started singing: "Father Abraham, has many kids, many kids has Father Abraham! And I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord!"

So, Moses sticks around and ends up marrying Zipporah, and they have a son who they name Gershom. For those of you with kids, I'm sure "Gershom" is a name that you wish you'd named one of your children. In fact, if you're done having kids, this name is worth reconsidering that decision and having one more, just to use this name, right? But Gershom is very similar sounding to the Hebrew word for "foreigner." And Moses has been a foreigner all his life, so there's meaning to it for him.

There are a couple of things for us to take away from this passage. I've already touched on the first one, but I'll just return to it briefly. Each of our perspectives on the world has been shaped by the people we're surrounded by: our family, our friends, other cultural influences, and so forth. **Is it possible, like Moses, that viewing the world from a different perspective might help you see the world more clearly and therefore help you live your faith in a way that connects more deeply with the people around you?** My guess is that it would. Listening to others and understanding where they're coming from will help you

Someone recently reminded me of a quote, "Don't judge someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes." We can do that by listening in conversation, or reading books and articles, listening to their music, viewing their art, and seeking to understand other people's perspectives as best as possible. 3 years ago or so, I started listening to Christian hip-hop and rap music. I wanted to understand a different perspective on faith and life. It's been transformative. So, we can learn from others in a variety of ways. Doing that helps us to move past an "us" and "them" (or worse: "us vs. them") view of the world. People who are hungry, thirsty, poor, in prison, sick, and foreigners or strangers to us have a perspective that we need to hear; and perhaps our pride and selfishness has caused us to be more like Moses was before he was all grown up. Let's hear and see life from their perspective so we can be more present to them as Jesus-followers.

The second point I want to highlight comes from Moses' encounter with the two Hebrew guys the day after he killed the Egyptian. Even though what Moses did benefited their fellow Hebrews (and maybe even these two), they turn against Moses here. **It's a foreshadowing of Moses' relationship with the Hebrew people throughout his leadership.** As He leads them, he wants to do what's right. He wants to be in God's will. He's not perfect in it but he's awfully darn good...and he wants the people to grow close to God and follow God's leading as well...and yet the people rebel against him. He was constantly rejected by those he was leading, even as he was faithful to God.

I don't know all that God has called you to do, or the places he's called you to lead: work, family, neighborhood, church, non-profit...the list could go on.

But **Moses shows us that spiritual leadership is tough.** Sometimes the very people who would benefit the most from your leading, and sometimes they've even asked you to lead or have at least agreed that you're the right person for the role...sometimes they'll still reject you or ridicule you or undermine your leadership. We kind of expect that when living out our faith in the secular world though it's still hard, for example, when our friends who are far from Jesus keep their distance; what's harder, though, is when other believers reject you. Moses experienced that – right in this passage from his own kin, and then throughout his leadership as he brought them out of Egypt and to the cusp of the Promised Land.

The Apostle Paul came along nearly two millennia later, but he writes these words that are so appropriate: **“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1).** What's the calling you've received? Where has God put you to live out your faith and help others be in relationship with Jesus as well? Whatever God has called you to, then be faithful to it. Don't try and be faithful to someone else's calling. God called Moses to lead the Hebrews. Eventually, he goes back and does exactly that. He doesn't compare his calling to others. He's not called to lead the Midianites. He's not called to lead the Egyptians. He's called to lead the Hebrews.

**So: What has God called you to?** It may not be what you thought it would be. When there's grumbling and challenges and questioning by others like Moses experienced: It can be really tempting to throw in the towel or start wishing your calling was more like someone else's where it seems easier or appears more successful. And sometimes, there is a right time to move on. But moving on, or not stepping into a role to begin with, just because things are difficult, is not a good reason. Jesus would never have gotten anywhere near the cross if He'd had that attitude. The cross was his calling. It's a difficult one, but he was faithful to it. Praise God, right? Maybe your calling is difficult, too. Live into that calling. Live a life worthy of that calling, as Paul says.

That doesn't mean you have to be perfect. Moses himself shows us that. He murdered. Later, in anger, he smashed the stone tablets with the Ten

Commandments on them. He had other moments that were less than glorious. But that just goes to show that God can work through imperfect people to bring about his perfect will and purposes.

**So, like Moses, let's "grow up" – not just physically and not just chronologically – but let's grow up spiritually, so that God could work through us and through our church.** There's a calling upon your life to listen to others, stand up for the marginalized, love our neighbors as ourselves, so we can lead people to the freedom that Jesus offers, and bring glory and honor to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's what God invites you and me into, even if it's hard to do. So, let's live into that calling. Let's pray...Amen.