

# *“Give Yourself Permission...Stay Curious”*

Exodus 3: 1-15/Matthew 16: 21-28

Part VI of VII in the sermon series:

“For Such a Time as This:

Seven Lessons for Living Through Pandemic Times”

Based on Esther 4:14

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From the Pulpit

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It has been another week, full of things that weigh the world down. For those of you who are tired. For those of you who see the images on the news and who read of the same violence against innocent black, indigenous, people of color in this country, for those who come this morning-tired of more police brutality and lack of legislative action. I see you. I hear you. Today, we gather to offer words of solace and words of hope. I am sorry that for too many years we have failed to live up to our country’s highest ideals. Those are incomplete because we have not built a place that will uphold equality and justice for all. We are left to pick up the broken dreams of people who have come before us and find a way forward. For we cannot go back, but by the grace of God, we will move forward together.

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*Let Us prayer:* Holy God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit as your word is proclaimed, may we hear what you have for us this day. Amen.

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On August 28, 1963, the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, a place where hundreds of thousands gathered in the late summer sun for the “March on Washington for Jobs and Justice.” It was where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech.

It was also, where a young John Lewis called for a serious social revolution and where he made known the impatience of young civil rights organizers like himself. That day, Lewis said that, “We are tired. We are tired of being beat by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again, and then you holler: ‘Be Patient.’ How long can we be patient? We want our freedom, and we want it now.”

This past Friday, August 28, 2020, fifty-seven (57) years later, tens of thousands of people from all over the United States gathered once again to lift their voices on the same steps for “The Commitment March.”

It’s focus was to rekindle the spirit of 1963 and demand police reform and racial equality, and in 2020 words, “Get your knees off of our necks.” The call for racial justice rang out from the steps. The Reverend Al Sharpton of the National Action Network who hosted the event, says “Demonstration without legislation would not lead to change.” And he called on legislators to pass bills on reinstatement of voting rights and the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act.

The event featured family members of Black Americans who have been killed by police or in other racially charged incidents, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin and others whose names have become rallying cries during recent national protests demanding justice.

The cries from the families of Black Americans went up. They are cries for our nation and elected officials to say their names, remember these victims and a call for change.

The father of Jacob Blake said, “there are two systems of justice in this country, a white system and a black system, and the black system isn’t doing so well.” It was a cry to our leaders, to the people and to the heavens to do better.

Jacob Blake is the 29 year old unarmed black man shot in the back by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, just one week ago today. He now is in intensive care, paralyzed after seven gun shots pierced his body at close range.

In response to the peaceful protests on the streets, a 17 year old drives from his house in Illinois to Kenosha. And with an AR-15 like assault rifle opened fire on the streets, killing two protestors, Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, injuring a third Gaige Grosskruetz.

How Long O Lord? How long?

The fight for racial equality is on our hearts and minds of so many of us this day.[1]

The demands Congressman Lewis offered years ago, couldn’t feel more essential or familiar today. Freedom, and freedom now.

If there ever was a moment when we needed a call from God, it is now. In the words of the Psalmist, How Long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? (Ps 13).

I wonder if you would go back with me, centuries ago, when the

Hebrew people were amid their own suffering, enslaved at the decrees of a new king in Egypt.

The Hebrew people are suffering and unable to get themselves out on their own from the hands of their oppressors. The Hebrew people cry out for help, trust in God and hold on for dear life. It is the torrential storm of oppression and slavery that has them fearful of life itself.

God hears their cries, and God is moved to respond.

So God finds Moses. God meets him out in the wilderness at Mount Horeb. God calls out to Moses in the wilderness in the midst of a burning bush. The wilderness in scripture is more than just a place. It is also allegorical. The wilderness is a place of seeking and longing. It's a place of disorientation and God's reorientation. It's a place of discernment and self-discovery.

God calls to Moses out of burning bush. You can imagine a burning bush may stand out in the wilderness. It probably glows a beautiful yellow-ish red, it probably crackles a little, and yet it is only after Moses takes note of the bush and is curious about it, that God calls out to Moses.

In the wilderness, God calls on Moses to sign up for a monumental job. God tells him that he is being sent back to Egypt to free the Hebrew people from their years long enslavement.

At this point in the story, Moses is far removed from his life in Egypt. Long ago, he ran away from that life and escaped to another. He establishes a new life, marries the daughter of the priest of Midian, and is now spending his days tending sheep for his father-in-law.

Compared to life under the unjust policies of a cruel king, compared to a life of slavery and hard labor, Moses is living a pretty sweet life in Midian. And this is when God calls on him to liberate the Hebrews from their life of brutal hard labor.

I can't imagine that the first thing Moses would say is "Sure, God, sign me up for that task! Let's go!" Instead, upon hearing of the devastating nature of the slavery the Hebrews found themselves in, Moses might have said, "Who me? Wait a minute, Me? Who am I to do that? I don't have the words and I wouldn't know what to say. There is no way I can do that, Remember God, I am not very well liked back there in Egypt-land. You should find someone else."

Moses names his fears, his hesitations, and his limitations. He tries to rule himself out to God, but God sees the fuller picture. God claims Moses worthy of the great task and offers this assurance to Moses, "I will be with you."

God knows how desperate the Hebrew people have become, how loudly they are crying out for help. God sees Moses differently than Moses sees himself.

God knows his limitations, his fear and his anxiety, and yet God still sees all the reasons that Moses is right for this calling. God still sees why this is a perfect time for Moses to rise to the occasion.

Moses meets God in the wilderness, and in this place of disorientation and discernment God calls him. What intrigues me in this passage is that **Moses walked toward God in curiosity, not away in fear.**

This curiosity begins the call of Moses to fulfill the promises of God, liberating the Hebrew people out of slavery. For Moses, this

sacred encounter was not just personal and private; it was a time of consecration to serve God in the context of a community, the people of God. For Moses, this moment on holy ground marks the beginning of divinely initiated and orchestrated venture into liberation and new life for the people of Israel.[2]

Skip ahead to modern day. In the pandemic times in which we live, we certainly have had our fair share of wilderness moments in the last five months, as a church, as a city, as a country, as a world. You have been holding on for dear life through a tumultuous time. You may believe you have been in a wilderness, where nothing seems clear.

I wonder if we, like Moses, can hear the call of God to us, in the midst of the wilderness moments of our lives? Are we curious enough to keep watch, to keep alert to the ways God may be calling us? Perhaps, Moses wasn't really paying attention to what was going on around him, until something looked out of the ordinary. But we have to wonder, how many other burning bushes did Moses walk past before this one caught his attention?

**What would it be for us to walk toward God in curiosity, not away in fear.**

If there ever was a moment when we needed to hear a call from God, a call forth to action for and end to the injustices against the black and brown bodies who live in fear in this country everyday, it is now.

On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, on the streets of Kenosha, Portland, or Columbus, the call to change the course and bring racial equality to fruition, could not be more important. The cries of God's people could not be louder.

People of God, wherever you are, stay curious for what God is calling you to do. What action God is calling you to take? How you can learn and assist others in the cause for justice. We have to do our work. Our black and brown community members are tired.

White folk, we need to be as outraged and as vocal in our disgust so that we come alongside and journey with anyone who will stand up and speak out for the issues of racial equality and ending police brutality. We also have to take action to rid ourselves of our implicit bias, to retrain ourselves out of the ways that white supremacy has infiltrated our culture in overt or subtle ways.

Like Moses, we have to let our curiosity engage the difficult push against our fear.

Maybe in the midst of such difficult times, such unimaginable violence in our streets and personal and collective grief, the lesson is that God hears you. God understands what you are going through, God knows your pain. God is already at work laying plans that will bring about your liberation.

Maybe in this wilderness time for you, you have found yourself discerning, seeking new purpose and meaning, wondering what exactly is going on right now, and what your place is in all of it.

And if this is you, keep an eye out for burning bushes. Keep an eye out for how God might be stirring in your heart, and calling you to action. You may think your limitations rule you out, you may think it should be other people who are up to the task, you may have fully justifiable reasons for why this is not a good time to join in God's liberating work.

God may have different plans for you. Even still, God sees the bigger picture. God sees all those people that are in serious storms right now, and God just may be calling on you to help.

The 6th lesson “For Such a Time as This: Living in Pandemic Times”---- “Give your self permission to be curious.” Walk toward curiosity and not away in fear.

May it be so. Amen

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(Grateful for ministry colleague Rev. Trip Porch, Indianola Presbyterian Church, on this sermon.) [1] [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org). Saturday August 29,2020. [2] Galloway, Lincoln E. Connections: A Lectionary Commentary. WJK: 2020: 267.