

A sermon preached at St. George's Anglican Church Calgary, by the Rev. Clara King, September 3, 2017.

Proper 22 – Year A

Exodus 3:1-15

Matthew 16:21-28

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

When God called Isaiah, Isaiah said, “here I am, send me!” When God called Samuel, Samuel said, “speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” When God called Moses, Moses mounted a spirited defense against God, arguing that he was absolutely the wrong man for the job.

Moses had a comfortable life, a supportive wife, a healthy first-born son, and a welcoming, wealthy family-in-law. Life was quiet and stable and safe, if a little boring. Why would a person want to give all that up to go on some extraordinarily dangerous and risky mission?

But Moses didn't argue against God because of how much he enjoyed his comfortable, stable life. Rather, he was held back by the fear of his own past, and the fear of his own actions.

Remember Moses' story: he'd grown up in the palace, adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh, eating the best food, wearing the best clothes, waited on hand and foot by an army of servants; with the world at his feet.

Until one day, he went to look at the truth of how his own people were truly treated, and he witnessed a common event: a soldier beating an Israelite slave. Suddenly his eyes were opened to the deep, deep injustices on which all of Egypt was built. He attacked the soldier, and killed him, and then hid his body, and fled to the hill country of Midian.

The years flew by, and Moses lived as if it had never happened. “The past is the past,” Moses probably said to himself every time he was confronted by fears or triggers or nightmares. He had the freedom to escape from Egypt into safety; how often did he repress his sorrow or anxiety or indignation about how the Israelite slaves were faring, unable to escape? But Moses repressed those

feelings sternly, day after day, year after year, convinced he could never – and should never go back.

“The past doesn’t affect me anymore,” Moses said to himself. But it did – and when God called Moses to be the hero of the greatest rescue mission in history, it was his past that held him back from saying, “here I am, send me!”

It was Moses’ past: his fear of his own actions and what he’d done; his fear of the consequences of those actions; and his fear that that sequence of events proved God couldn’t possibly have chosen rightly: he wasn’t good enough; he wasn’t holy enough; he wasn’t righteous enough; and he couldn’t trust himself enough.

Moses’ past held him back.

Lots of us live up there in denial-land like Moses. We look to move forward towards the future, hoping that we can do so without having to deal with our past. But meanwhile, our past holds us back, quietly whispering in our ears that we aren’t good enough, we aren’t holy enough, we aren’t righteous enough and we can’t trust ourselves enough. So when God calls, we’re not ready to say, “speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

It’s not that God doesn’t call; it’s that we’re not ready. And when God does call, we mount these spirited defenses against him: “we couldn’t possibly”; “we’re not good enough”; “I don’t have what it takes”; “what a great opportunity – for someone else with better gifts than me!”

What’s holding us back from saying yes?

All new clergy these days are told straight out: it’s your personal demons that’ll get you. Well, I’m not prepared for my personal demons to sabotage the work we’re doing to revitalize this parish. So this whole year, I’ve been working with a personal coach and counsellor to heal hurts from my own past. It has been a remarkable ride.

I believe so deeply in what we can do here at St. George’s that it is transforming my life, from the inside out. I know from personal experience, some of the hurts that this congregation has experienced – and witnessing your bravery in confronting your hurts, and overcoming the toxic waste those hurts have left behind in your personal lives has been a huge inspiration to me, to take my own journey of healing more seriously.

While it is not the job of this congregation to fix me or pastor me, it has been a beautiful perk of the job, to be inspired to come down from denial-land, and step boldly into reality, knowing that God is with me, that God is calling me, and that God is inviting me to be transformed.

That was God's invitation to Moses: come back down out of denial, and be transformed. God offers this same invitation to each one of us. And God offers this invitation to St. George's. It's already happening: can you see it? can you feel it?

A year ago, the Wardens and I were preparing a pitch to the Diocese, in which we said, "give us three years to see if this baby's got potential," and here we are, not even one year in, and God is bursting out all over the place here. We are being renewed; we are being transformed.

God is ready to transform the lives of each and every one of us, and God is ready to transform this congregation. That much is clear.

The question is: what are we going to say?