

August 18 2013

Scripture Lessons ~ Exodus 3:1-15

Luke 13:1-9

Sermon *You Can't Be Too Sure!*

One of my greatest joys when I was growing up was working outside in the garden. When I was in high school in fact I used to do this on a regular basis for my grandmother because she wasn't able to do it, for one thing, and my grandfather didn't care about plants. All he wanted to do was to mow.

So does that sound familiar to anyone in the congregation today? One spring grandmother and I planted a start of an old fashioned rose which she called a Gypsy Rose. Now properly cared for a Gypsy rose has beautiful clusters of yellow blossoms blooming on some branches and an orange colored blossoms blooming on other branches. Unfortunately this particularly Gypsy Rose was a disaster. The first year we had a late frost nipped all the buds off and we didn't see a thing. The second year the neighbor's goats got loose and nibbled on the blossoms off. And then the third year we got orange blossoms but we didn't get any yellow blossoms.

By the fourth year my grandfather was pretty impatient, as you can image. The bush was in a spot where he had to trim instead of just mowing through. He figured that if it wasn't going to bloom any how we should just rip the thing out and get it over with. Now that does that sound familiar to anybody out ther?

But grandma talked Grandpa into doing something differently and talked Grandpa into giving that little bush a second chance. So we really took care of it that summer, we watered, fertilized it, cultivated it and locked the goat up so he didn't get away again and we were a little apprehensive through the winter and as spring approached and as soon as the weather warmed we saw our labors had born fruit. The bush was covered not only with orange blossoms but yellow blossoms as well interspersed all throughout the branches.

You know there are many times when we are not really sure whether our lives or the lives of others around us will ever bear fruit for God either and so we think about that bush as we think about those things. Our Old Testament story for this morning does tell us about a person that who does blossom; does tell us about a person who bears fruit all because God gives that person a first, second chances and takes a little time of cultivating that person's gifts and talent.

I think from childhood most of us hear remember hearing about mighty exploits of Moses who was the central figure of the Old Testament. We remember hearing how his mother saved him from death from the hands of the Egyptians by

setting him adrift in a bulrush basket. We remember how Pharaoh's daughter finds him and raises him up to manhood as her son and into power. We also remember how his life takes a turn in a kind of different direction when Moses kills an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave and he flees into Median to herd sheep with Jethro his father-in-law.

And of course we want to skip over the rest and go to the good part. The part where God sends the plagues on Egypt and how Moses leads his people through the Red Sea to freedom; freedom in a land flowing with milk and honey and we want to end of the story.

But the thing we forget is Moses did not get from the herd of sheep in the wilderness to the Promise Land just like that. There was pain, there was struggle, doubt, the pain, struggle, and doubt is reflected in the story this morning which Joan shared. The story of Moses and the burning bush. People who bear fruit. People who accomplish something in this life for God and for others don't do without a lot of blood, sweat and tears. You know that as well I do. For a lot of downright hard earned faith and Moses is one such person who overcame these odds with God's help lived his life, I think to fullest potential.

At the point where we pick up the Exodus story, Moses is a man who has had a past which he would just as soon forget. Like my grandmother's Gypsy Rose, Moses was a man who had a rotten difficult life to that point filled with problems which he wasn't exactly responsible for. Now certainly he had been given a chance for himself in the Egyptian world but that didn't work either. So it seemed then Moses had little to look forward to except for herding sheep in a barren wilderness accomplishing nothing much for God or for anybody else for that matter.

Like so many of us, Moses had become a victim of his own past with its fears and with its doubts. And Moses did not believe he had what it took to accomplish anything for anybody. So with everything that Moses had going for him he hid out in desert with those sheep. But God had other plans for Moses as God does for all of us. As my sermon titled do not indicate, neither You Can't Be Too Sure about God nor can you be too sure about the people chooses to do God's work. From the story of the burning bush we learn about God's persistence in reaching out to each one of us. It is the story of God who sees the potential in each one of us; the story of God who wants the very best for us and won't take no for an answer.

Like the fire in the burning bush God's love and concern for Moses and his people could not be quenched. For our God is not only a God that gives second chances but a God of third, fourth and fifth chances sometimes. There is so much we can learn from interchange between God and Moses not only about the reasons we often shrink from those things that God wants to do in our personal

lives, in our church, in our community, and in our world but also about the way that God seeks to encourage and empowers us for service in the world around us.

If you remember from the story that God calls Moses to do is not small, he is to confront the very king of Egypt and convince him to let the Israelites go and free them from slavery. Moses first reaction was is common one that often hears from those asked to do much smaller jobs than this one. “I am not worthy to do it ““I’m too flawed”,”“I don’t have the fuel” “Get somebody else”. Moses does more than feel just uneasy; he panics in the face of what the Lord God asked him to do. Because of his rotten past he feels he has nothing to offer in a job like this so fails to live up, at first to the potential that God has called him to do. And to this God says, “Of course you are flawed, of course you are imperfect but I, also, gave you many gifts to use and the greatest sin in life is not using those gifts or talents. God doesn’t tell Moses he will make him worthy of the job, Instead God tells Moses you are already worthy of the job and I am going to be with you.

Moses next objection is another familiar one. “God I don’t know you will enough and I don’t know your plan well enough to help you out”. “Get someone else who knows you better.” And God responds by giving Moses God’s name but it is a mysterious name which is difficult to understand. God says, “I Am who I Am”, God says, “I will Be Who, Who I Will be.” God then reveals only a small bit of himself in the face of Moses’ fear. But only in revealing part of him to us God asks us to rely on faith to venture out when God calls us to do difficult things, like Moses we don’t always know the full story when God’s calls us. We called to do in faith, the best we can with the gifts and the knowledge that God gives to us.

Moses’ third objection is a classic, too. I don’t have the authority. I am no leader. It’s true that some of us are better leaders than others and you know that as well as I do but none of us will ever know if we never try. God’s response to Moses was given authority for that day; the ability to change a staff into a serpent; the ability to turn water into blood. Of course, we can’t always expect those kinds of signs and wonders. But what we can expect, if we give leadership a try, God will help us to develop our skills and gifts for leadership in the church and the community around us.

Now Moses’ final act of refusal to God was one that keeps many of us from positions of leadership as well. I am a poor public speaker, the implication being that people with limitations have no business for being leaders at all. God’s response here is a very interesting one. When Moses keeps on refusing for this reason, God is angry but God gives Moses a concession; he sends his brother Aaron to do the talking for him. Being a good leader, serving the Church, serving the community does not mean we have to do everything ourselves or be good in everything ourselves. Instead sometimes it means admitting our limitation and delegating our authority to others who are better handle the job.

Like Moses many of us here today are unable to answer God's call to service in the church or in the world around us. But also like Moses despite our fears, our past failures, despite our lack of ability we can do what God asks to do here if we accept that second change that God gives life victory that is told us in Luke's Gospel for today. When we say we are unworthy, God says, "In Jesus you are forgiven." When we say we don't have the knowledge and skills, God says, "I am going to meet your need." And when we say we are deathly afraid of what God calls us to do, God says "simply have faith because I am with you." Because you can't be too sure and you can't be too sure about God and you really can't be too sure about people when God is involved. And together we say Amen.