

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 13th Sunday After Pentecost, Sept. 3, 2017

Accepting God's Call
September 3, 2017

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

As I often do when preparing a sermon I looked through my collection of CD's of sermons and found one dated August 28, 2011, a sermon given by the Rev. Edyth Pruitt at Fairview Presbyterian Church in Lenoir. She used the same two passages of scripture that I am using today.

Fairview is our home church and the church secretary saves CD's of their services for me. I generally do not listen to the CD's when I first get them but I do catalog them by scripture readings and, when I am preparing a sermon, I search to see what Rev. Pruitt had to say on the same text. I did that for this sermon and found the 2011 recording.

Perhaps I should have listened to that CD earlier because I discovered that Rev. Pruitt used me and Jason Myers, another one of several pastors who came from Fairview, as examples of accepting God's call, hence the title of this message.

Would you accept God's call if it came to you?

Would you even recognize a call from God?

Moses and Peter were both called by God but neither one initially recognized that call.

Jason Myers and I sensed God's call to enter the ministry and, upon recognizing it, our lives took a 180 degree turn.

Jason struggled to earn a meager living for his family so that he could attend seminary. It was a real sacrifice for him but he persisted and now is a minister of the word and sacrament at the Purity Presbyterian Church in Chester, SC.

I did not have to struggle but I did resist God's call for a very long time. I kept making excuses as to why I couldn't go into the ministry but God finally won out. God is rather persuasive once you recognize that he is calling you to do something.

Moses was grazing his father-in-law's flock and led them toward a mountain. The mountain is variously called Horeb or Sinai, depending on which documents and Bible translations you read. The name of the mountain however is not really important but

what happened there certainly is. Moses was not looking for anything in particular but out of the corner of his eye he spotted a small fire. He turned to see what was burning. It was a bush, a bush which was aflame but which was not being consumed by the flames.

Then he heard a voice calling out to him to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. What he heard was the voice of God and wherever God is at any point in time becomes holy ground.

The burning bush was enough of a shock but the big shock came when the God-of-the-burning-bush, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, instructed Moses to go to the Pharaoh and get permission to lead his people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

“Hold it there, God, whoever you are. Look, I am a murderer. Yes, I was raised in Pharaoh’s household but now I am a hunted outcast. I can’t go to him for anything. Just who are you anyway?”

“I am who I am.”

“What kind of a name is that?”

“Don’t worry about that. Just go to Pharaoh and when he says it is OK to leave, tell the Israelites that ‘I Am’ has sent you.”

That sounds almost ludicrous, doesn’t it? However it makes sense when you remember that the Jews did not ever speak the name of God so, “I Am” was as good as anything to refer to God. In Hebrew “I am who I am” is abbreviated as YHWH or Yahweh. Another Hebrew word meaning “I am” is Hayah and in Latin we get “Jehovah.” These are all ways of referring to God without actually naming him.

Even we Christians do not have a name for God. We refer to him as Father or Lord or simply capitalize the word “god.”

Whatever God was called back then, Moses accepted God’s call, very reluctantly, but he accepted it.

The task before him was mammoth but in the end he succeeded.

In our reading from Matthew, Jesus is heading to Jerusalem knowing that he would be crucified.

He explains this to his disciples and Peter argues with him. Jesus rebukes Peter and calls the disciples to follow in his footsteps and to take up the cross and follow him.

He tells them that they too may forfeit their lives but that God will reward them in his kingdom.

That is a pretty strong call, isn't it? The disciples accepted the call, although they did waver once the reality of Jesus' crucifixion dawned on them.

Peter even denied three times that he knew Jesus.

Moses was not as wishy-washy. He did as God asked.

The disciples walked away after the crucifixion and had to see the risen Christ to really become fully committed to accept God's call.

Jason Myers and I were not risking our lives to accept the call to enter the ministry. We both had to be convinced but once we were, the way was clear to us.

What about you? Has God called you to do something? He has! Remember Jesus' two great commandments to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. That is your call plus anything else that God may have revealed to you.

Are you doing the work of God in the church and the community? Are you engaged in civic work such as volunteering with the Senior Center, Hospice, Autumn Care, or a youth group?

Are you reaching out to the needy and to help those who need help?

If you are a parent, did you teach your children about God and teach them how to be good citizens?

Do you respect and uphold the rights of those who are of another religion, race, or ethnic group?

If you can answer "yes" to these and similar questions, you are answering God's call.

Amen.