



## Proper 22, Year A – August 28.11

Exodus 3.1-15, Matthew 16.21-28

### A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

It's easy for saints. It's easy for them to not only listen to God's voice but to follow the commands they receive. Yeah, they may put up a bit of a hassle but saints always end up doing what God tells them to do. It's different for me. They, those who we hear of in the bible, had more time to devote to God. They, those we heard written about in the Psalms, could easily make time for praying seven times a day. They, those we hear about who left one way of life and embarked on another, didn't have responsibilities or obligations like we have today. My bank would be very upset if I just walked away from the mortgage I worked so hard to qualify for and the PTA just couldn't get along without me.

And besides, they were just better people than us. Saints are, after all, saintly. Right? Saints never waiver in their faith and never question what's being asked of them. That's not us; that's not me. And saints are saintly in that they have lived good, honest and pure lives and that's why God calls on them by name. That's not me; that's not us; we know that God knows that we're not perfect. So God would never choose me for a monumental task. God would never choose me to save people or to carry Christ's cross because God knows that I am not perfect and therefore, I am not a saint.

Well, let's back up a bit in the story of Moses. Last week we heard of his birth, how his life was spared by two midwives, he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and suckled by the woman who bore him. He was brought up as prince with all the privilege that such an upbringing entails. The missing bit, the bit just before the story that we heard this morning at the end of chapter 2 is, Moses commits murder. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave and he kills him dead, looks around to ensure that no one saw him and buries the body in the sand. But alas, he is found out and hears the next day that the story of his conquest is raging like wildfire so Moses, like all good criminals, boots it out of town. A wandering Bedouin shepherd takes him in as a helper and Moses, the boy who was to be king, finds himself in a meagre tent with no servants to take care of his needs, with no doting mother to fawn over his every accomplishment. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

So in today's reading we understand that he is haplessly wandering without a home when God speaks to him. Saintly? I think not. He's a murderer with blood on his hands? Perfect? Certainly, no. And then, so unimpressed is he with God's voice booming out of a burning bush, one that is never consumed by fire, he says, eh, pick someone else. Imagine arguing with God! And then, he's really pushing the limits of decorum now, Moses says to God, so who will I tell them sent me. There is power in a name, power in the use of a name and power in just the knowledge. So God tells him, I AM. That's it. Not I was at one time and will be again, but I AM, right now and always.

After some cajoling Moses agrees to put himself back into danger, to head back to a place where he is surely will be killed for the murder of an Egyptian. He takes with him the confidence that this great I AM is indeed the God of those who went before him, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all who were reluctant saints themselves.

And then we have Peter. A saint to be certain, but perfect? I think not. As Jesus begins to tell the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, be crucified and die and then to rise again Peter says, no way! That can't happen! You are way too

important to me, way too crucial to all of these Jews who are now persecuted by the Romans not only for being Jewish but also for being Christian. No way, Peter says to Jesus, you still have too much work to do. We can't get along without you. You can't leave us.

Saintly? Peter did not just submissively nod his head in acceptance. He, like Moses, said, eh, I'm not so sure about this. Both of them, questioning God! Imagine.

Jesus' response to Peter is to call him Satan or, the deceiver. Peter was allowing himself to be distracted with earthly concerns rather than with the greater purpose in Jesus appearance in humanity. He was allowing himself to be deceived into thinking that things must never change, that their ministry must always remain the same. Listen to Jesus' invitation.

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

What will you say? How will you respond? Will you, like Moses say pick someone else? Will you, like Peter, be so caught up in the way things are right now that you are not willing to work towards a different future? Or will you, as some of you have said to me, say I have no idea what it would be like to hear the voice of God? I suspect that God's voice does not often come in the form of a burning bush but rather in the request of a friend. I suspect that God's voice feels something like a flutter in your chest when a story of someone in need touches your very soul. I suspect that God's voice sometimes rebukes us when we have strayed from what we know to right, and truth be told, we have to hear that through our conscience as much as we need to respond to the requests that speak to our heart.

Certainly part of what we are called to do is to stop seeing our day to day commitments and obligations as so important that the world will end if we stop attending every PTA or creating enough time in our day to pray seven times. Really? It's seven times, not ceaselessly day and night. A small thing to ask, I think.

The church, not as defined by the walls of this building but rather by you and me, is offered no easy path to success. Doing right by God doesn't depend on any special spiritual talent. Cross-bearing levels everyone, whatever their education, class, economic status, or religiosity. And God through Jesus is saying to us through these lessons, "Let my people go." Moses rescued the people through God's covenant. Peter did, after being rebuked by Jesus, continue with the ministry that had to be done even though his saviour died. He kept God's covenant. Jesus tells us that we are called to be outside our buildings, called into danger, even if that danger is no more than the mockery of friends. We are called to walk through the Cross into a new life, one to be shared, one sustainable despite our arguments with God, because God is "I am," the ever present help at all times and in all places. We were not meant to attempt the life of religion alone. Religion in us becomes possible when we trust God and trust each other enough to be the church. God wants to do great things through the cross-bearing church. God wants us to see that being holy is all about freeing ourselves and freeing others from sin, oppression, and death. God wants us to know that those prophets and saints of whom we read are no different than you and I. We are called, each and every one of us, to answer the call to the great I AM. Do you trust God enough to be a saint? Do you trust God enough to respond with a yes?

Here I am.

Thanks be to God.