

12<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 2014

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Sometimes when we hear the stories of people like Moses and Peter, who have become heroes of the faith, we think that they were special...more special than you or I.

But is this true?

If we begin by comparing ourselves, our lives to theirs, or with anyone else's for that matter, we then limit our own unique gifts and life experiences.

Moses was going about his daily routine, looking after sheep. He wasn't thinking he was special, or out that day expecting to have a mountain top experience!

God came unexpectedly and maybe not as one would expect...within a burning bush...

Curiosity got the better of Moses as it would probably most of us and so he went to have a closer look.

His name was called. Moses, Moses. And God spoke saying this is holy ground and God introduced himself as the God of his ancestors. God then explains that he is aware of the sufferings of the Israelite people and wants this ordinary fellow, Moses to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

This was just another day like any other day and Moses was tending the sheep. I'm not sure if Moses even knew God at this point before...not well anyway...he was an adopted Egyptian but then fled to Midian and married into a priestly family. So he may have only a little knowledge of this God.

The unexpected voice calling his name would have been a terrifying/awesome experience and then this voice was sending him on a mission. Well, he responds 'who am I, that I should go to PHAROAH (you've got to be kidding!) and then bring the people out of Egypt! You've got the wrong guy. I can't do this.

God says: I will be with you: then come and worship on this mountain.

But Moses still is unsure: scared. But, what if the Israelites ask me your name-how can they (or I) be sure, it is you.

God said to Moses, "I am who I am". I am has sent you.

We are ordinary men and women who go about our daily lives, probably not expecting the extraordinary to happen.

Who am I? who are you? You are not Moses. You are ...Betty, John, Carol, Charles.....you are named and God knows who you are and in our ordinary lives, we need to watch out for the unexpected.

When we get a nudge unexpectedly, how do we know that this is from God? When we hesitate, question and wonder why ask me? The answer usually is followed by divine reassurance. Words to the effect of 'I am with you'. this may not be as big as bringing a whole lot of people across a desert, but it will be something you may intuitively feel you need to do...write that letter, confront injustice, change your vocation, a relationship commitment, volunteer work in another country..we all have different nudges!

Of course, this is no guarantee of success with whatever path we have said yes to. It is God saying I will commit myself to share the risk with you. We are never alone, even though we may feel that sometimes and sometimes may fail.

Moses in fact was only partially successful –he led Israel out of Egypt but didn't bring them into the land of Canaan.

Biblical characters are evaluated not by their successes but by their courage (faith) in following.

Let's now turn to the story from Matthew's gospel. Last week we heard the story of Jesus asking his disciples 'who do people say that I am? And then Jesus asks them 'and you, who do you say that I am?

Peter responds with 'you are the Messiah, the Christ, the son of the Living God' and by all accounts he got it right..but not fully comprehending who this Messiah, the Christ really is.

So when Jesus began to show who he is: ie that he will go to Jerusalem, will suffer, die and be raised, Peter responds and says: "God forbid it! You are the Messiah! You've got it wrong! This is not what's supposed to happen.

Peter has his own ideas of this Messiah's path. He now wonders who is he following? Peter is confused, anxious, and possibly angry at Jesus for thinking about going down the wrong path.

Did Jesus wrestle with God about his path? Who would want to take such a difficult path if you could avoid it?! He was fully human; he would have wrestled with God but had come to the conclusion that this was the Way that will bring salvation for humanity.

So, Jesus turns straight around and looks at Peter and says "get behind me, Satan"...he is angry at Peter who is trying to tempt him to change his mind. But as with the temptations in the wilderness, Jesus keeps his mind on what God wants. He holds the bigger picture.

So Peter at this point is a stumbling block...not long ago, Jesus commends Peter...he just doesn't seem to get it right! Jesus, you are confusing!

He says to Peter to get behind him...assume your place! be the follower... remember what I have taught you, how you have seen me interact with people, how I have kept my prayer life going so I know what God wants. It is so easy to set our minds not on divine things but on human things. But Jesus, you are supposed to be different...

Many Christians today would want Jesus or God to come and fix all the troubles in our lives, in our country, in our world. Why? Why, we ask, do you seem so far away! We don't like pain and suffering for ourselves or for others. And we can feel powerless.

These past couple of months, as I sat day after day in the family room often in silence and alone, I wondered some days where was God. In the early days, I was exhausted, at times in pain, and taking a goodly number of painkillers! There was an emptiness that I hadn't either acknowledged or experienced before and that made me sad.

It was a time of deep reflection and has led me on another path of discovering who I am and who is God.

Like Peter, I have been challenged with my thoughts about who is this Jesus for me.

Like Moses, I have questioned and taken up challenges even when I didn't have faith in myself, not always been successful. But God was with me.

Moses struggled. Peter struggled. I struggled.

And although I am still wrestling with God, (God and I have wrestled so much my hip popped out!) there is an exciting sense of expectancy of something new happening within me, which is deepening, changing my relationship with God, known through Jesus the Christ.

Today Alexander will become a part of God's Christian family. He will be loved and cared for by his family and extended family which includes the godparents and many others he will meet along the way. His journey will be unique. Like all of us, he will wrestle with his faith and hopefully know that God is with him all of his life, although he may not be always aware of God's presence.

May we all, in our daily lives, doing what we do each day, keep an eye open for the unexpected still small voice that nudges us to see a bigger picture in which we are a part of.

The Lord be with you