

“Moses Didn’t Go it Alone”

This sermon was preached by Pr. Sarah Semmler Smith based on Exodus 4:10-17
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Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI

Grace and peace to you from God our creator and our brother Jesus Christ.

When I was in Kindergarten, I distinctly remember how I chose my best friend. She was THE clear choice: she had dark brown hair like me, and brown eyes like me, And, she liked My Little Ponies just like me. During elementary school, she and I were a force when we were together-- like one girl with two heads and a bunch of gangly limbs between us. I loved her fiercely—for all the fun we had. I also kind of feared her. Multiple times in 3rd grade, she took back my half of our “bff” necklace and gave it to Angela Olson. And once, she convinced me that I should dump my 4th grade boyfriend because he said swear words, and then went out with him the very next day! Hers was my first impactful friendship, and when she moved away in 5th grade, oh how I cried.

Our need for friendship is deep, the power of God-sent companions, profound...

They say a true friend is the one who will tell you about spinach in your teeth, or risk being honest when you ask just how those jeans look on you. They’re the ones who celebrate with you when times are good and stand by you when life gets hard. Many times, our good friends are people who are a lot like us—they’re near our age, have similar values, and may even look like us. (*After worship, scroll down your top 10 contacts in your phone; check out that theory for yourself.*) But sometimes, we are blessed with a companion who is enough *not* like us, to bring us to unlikely places of wholeness, and even foster in us a new boldness toward answering God’s call for our lives.

Moses teaches us this. Moses teaches God, this too, actually, in our first lesson today. Remember, Moses is one of the big-hitters in the Old Testament— Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph...Moses. These are the ancestors and heroes of the Hebrew faith. None of these guys were perfect: but they were called by God. And the lesson about the power of a companionship for us to learn this morning comes right at the tail end of Moses’ call story, part of which we just heard.

Backstory: Moses was Hebrew/Israelite born in Egypt--in a time when Pharaoh was a bit insecure and crazy about the number of Hebrews. But Moses, in a series of events that saves his life, ironically ends up growing up in the palace of the Pharaoh. But then later, he has to flee Egypt as a fugitive, into the countryside, where he meets his wife, and someone else: in a burning bush.

Here’s the part you may be familiar with: through a burning bush, God tells Moses that he needs to go back to Egypt and help free all the Hebrew people from Pharaoh’s oppression. But did you realize that Moses— Big Beard-stone-tablet-carrying-Moses himself-- doesn’t want to go. Not right away. Not at all. In this next

part of the story, Moses actually reminds me of teenage son, one Sunday morning, whose mom yells at him to get up and get ready for church. He grunts and rolls over. Mom a few minutes later again yells, "Come on now, it's really time to go!" Half asleep—the son yells back down this time, "Give me three good reasons." She tells him: "1. I don't want to go alone. 2. The 3rd commandment to honor the Sabbath day. 3. You're the pastor!"

Moses has a similar conversation with God, recorded in Exodus chapters 3 and 4. After God commands Moses to 'Let my people go,' what follows is a series of excuses on Moses' part and rebuttals from God: God says—'*Moses let my people go.*' Moses has a first excuse. He says, '*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? I'm a nobody. Just tending some sheep here.*' To which God answers, '*I'll be with you. Don't worry about it.*' But Moses comes back with, '*What if they ask what your name is. What am I supposed to say?*' To which God replies, '*Tell them it's Yahweh, the God of your ancestors.*' Then Moses says, '*But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, "The Lord did not appear to you."*' His insecurity is showing through here. God answers, '*Here are some wonders I'll help you perform—one with water, another with a snake, a third with your hand.*' But Moses is still not convinced (this is where our reading picks up today). He says, '*O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.*' To which God says, '*Who gave you that mouth? I'll give you my words-- Just move your lips, I'll do the talking!*' To which, we get Moses' final (pathetic) plea, '*O my Lord, please send someone else.*' And now God is ticked, but God relents! God says, '*Ok, plan B it is. You're still going, but take Aaron with you! Your brother. He'll do the talking. You can be a team.*'

I love this dialogue for the truth it tells about human nature, and about God's persistence despite it. And I find God's responses telling, as God is just 'trying to get Moses to go to church with him.' In this whole series of back and forth, notice: Moses' sense of inadequacy is not met with an assurance of adequacy, but with the assertion that God will be present. Moses' protests about poor speech are not met with the promise that he would magically be able to wax poetic, but that God would be his voice.¹

And, most interestingly Moses plea to send someone else does not make God give up on Moses and send someone else, but it does get God to alter God's plans a bit—and for God, that's pretty big deal. God moves to a second plan and allows for Aaron—Moses' brother—to go with him, and do all the talking. And that's what happens. And the people are freed.

The need for companionship is so deep, its power so profound, it is able to affect the very mind of God.

Moses didn't go alone after all. He was given Aaron. Aaron, was his brother, but not raised with him in a palace. Aaron didn't herd sheep but was raised perhaps to function as a priest. Aaron was apparently eloquent where Moses was perpetually

tongue tied! Aaron was different enough from Moses to make up for what Moses lacked.

Sometimes the friends we need, come from really different places from us. But often, these different kinds of friends are the ones that are going to grow you; going to bring you to an unexpected place of wholeness; going to help you answer God's call for your life. Sometimes, church is a good place to find such companions. Listen to author Barbara Brown Taylor as she reflects on this:

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/establishing-who-is-right>

“Churches are still good for bringing people together who would not choose to be together.” Where else in your week, do you come together with a group like this—who are card carrying members of enough different groups to make us look (red/blue/green) purplish brown—where it's not as important to be right as to be together, the body of Christ--where you are made stronger with the spiritual companionship of individuals you might not otherwise chose to be with. Society is divisive enough. Just like Moses needed Aaron. We need each other. We too are called.

“Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God” – Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

God's call is waiting in that bush around the corner for you. That call might disrupt your life. It might also bring you to an unlikely place of wholeness, as you work for the liberation of your neighbor: liberation from loneliness and hunger, anger, fear, addiction. As with Moses, God is the initiator of this call for our lives, but God is equally the sustainer. Often, God's provision comes through people, friends, some of whom, God-willing, are very different from you. Church can still be a good place for that, *is* still a good place for that here.

A Challenge for 2014: Look for one friend whose life doesn't look anything like yours. You just might end up finding Christ.

ⁱ Paraphrased from, Walter Brueggemann. “Exodus,” *New Interpreters Bible. Vol 1. General Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus* (Abington Press, 1994).