

20.05.17

John 14:15-18

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees her nor knows her. You know her, because she abides with you, and she will be in you.

Exodus 3: 1-4

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.'...

SERMON:

This I believe...no,

This I know... not just believe, I know it somewhere deep within myself.

I know that the God who called Moses by name is the same God who said the Advocate would be with the disciples, IN the disciples.

It began in Exodus with Moses choosing to turn aside and look. He was out, way out, beyond the wilderness, just doing his job. It was probably a day like any other day, scanning the landscape for bears or wolves or whatever might have harmed his sheep. Looking, always looking for danger. He looked and what did he see? A bush, on fire - on fire but not consumed. It was in that moment - that moment that transformation began. Moses was curious, "I must turn aside and look at that great sight and see why that bush is not consumed"... his response to seeing something out of the ordinary was not to dismiss it and continue looking for what he expected to see, but to turn aside. And then what happened? When God saw that he had turned aside he called "Moses, Moses!" Twice God calls his name. That's important. Moses, Moses! The repetition of the name shows how specifically God directed the call and knew the person - it's used when Abraham is about to sacrifice his son - "Abraham, Abraham", it's used when Samuel is wondering who woke him up in the middle of the night - "Samuel, Samuel". Here it's Moses. It's Moses' attention the Lord is wanting, and he calls him by name.

## **God knows us by name and calls us.**

Let's jump ahead to the gospel story. In the gospel stories, the disciples, each in their own way, turned to the One who said "follow me". They were each called by name. The God who called Moses, who called the disciples to that most challenging commandment of all - to love - that's the same God who calls us today.

Now maybe you've heard God calling you by name. While I've never heard my name called, I have felt some pretty strong tuggings of my Spirit that have called me to act. And so I resonate with the Beuchner quote we began with this morning:

*The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger coincide.<sup>1</sup>*

Where does our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet? For when we find these moments, whether they're little or big, that's a response to God calling us. Some are fortunate enough to have that deep gladness turn into their profession, but for many the meeting of one's deep gladness and the world's need comes in other ways.

I want to introduce you to Ron Finley.

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<sup>1</sup> Buechner, Frederick. 2004. *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith*. Harper One.

Mr. Finley, a former personal trainer and fashion designer, doesn't use language of being called to gardening, no, for him it simply started when he was frustrated, as he says that " he could walk five minutes in any direction from his house and get liquor, but, he says, we can walk ten miles in any direction, and we aren't gonna get an organic banana."<sup>2</sup>

**(START SLIDE SHOW)**

So Ron set about changing that. In the little strip of land between the sidewalk and the front of his house in south central LA he sowed pumpkin, kale and sunflowers seeds, planting those and other fruits and vegetables that he couldn't buy in his neighborhood.

After he caught some of his neighbors taking the produce, Mr. Finley helped start a nonprofit that plants gardens in vacant lots, open spaces and even abandoned shopping carts in areas known as "food deserts," urban areas that lack grocery stores and access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

That was back in 2010. That small, 150 foot by 10 foot plot of land was where Ron's deep gladness and the world's deep hunger met. And it's transformed into something he probably never imagined. This model has spread - teaching, feeding, nourishing communities all around the world. God calls us by name in the most unusual of ways, inviting us to turn our gladness into service. **(END SLIDE SHOW)**

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<https://www.papermag.com/how-ron-finley-turned-a-parkway-garden-2466201323.html?rebellitem=6#rebellitem6>

I wonder, did Moses ever imagine what lay ahead when he turned aside to look at that curious bush? Did Ron Finley when he planted those first seeds?

How about you? How about us?

To what are we called, as a body of faith?

The God who called 'Moses, Moses' is the same Spirit Jesus gave to live in his disciples. *This God knows our names and calls us, too*, to be his disciples.

We are in a strange time, aren't we? Today we have a congregational meeting which includes affirming volunteer positions. Many of the positions assume our meeting together, in the flesh, in our building. Someday we'll be there, but probably not anytime soon.

As of my writing of this sermon, on Friday afternoon, there were still plenty of open slots. Maybe after this service you'll feel inspired to take a look at that form, notice if there's a place for your willing heart to meet the needs of this community. So yes, this is a pitch in a way, but much, much more than that.

For our gladness, whatever it looks like - whether it's caring for children, at home and at church, or mowing the lawn, maybe sewing a mask for someone, or simply greeting a stranger with an eye smile - that's the Spirit of Christ living in us, through us.

*The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger coincide.*

We might not hear our name called aloud like Moses, but when we choose to turn and follow the risen Lord, we are promised the gift of the Spirit, who lives IN us.

God knows us by name; loves us for who we are. As followers of Christ, we are called to live into the command to love Jesus - for us, today, that's through loving one another.

Where might you find your gladness meeting the needs of your community?

LEAD INTO VIDEO AND SONG...

As you listen, and perhaps sing along to this next song, notice some of the ways our congregation share their gifts with the world.