Last week we started this series of messages entitled “Called.” As we journey through the Lenten season, we will learn how and why God gives us a calling for our lives. In our United Methodist tradition, we believe in the Ministry of all Christians. We understand all believers are called through their baptism to the ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment (BOD, Par. 126). All of us, not just clergy, are called to serve God in the world.

The question is, how do we know what we are supposed to do? How do we discern our calling? God may use our gifts at our jobs to do good in the world and honor God, but God’s calling goes further than any skills or vocation. We don’t pick our calling from a list of options either, but it often comes out of the blue in surprising ways.

As we learned from last week’s message, often, God’s calling requires us to take a leap of faith to discern it fully. We learned from the story of Abraham how God called him to leave everything behind and go into a place where he was going to be established to become a great nation to bless all the families of the earth. Abraham’s calling was incredible, but it also required incredible faith, trust, and obedience to take that first step before God even revealed the path.

So, when it comes to God’s calling, we know it will often take a leap of faith to embrace it. Today, we are also learning from Moses’ calling about how God calls us in response to a need. Moses’ calling story is found in the Book of Exodus. Here Exodus 3:1-12,

“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 Mount 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.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

As we learned last week from Abraham’s story, God made a promise to him about making his offspring a great nation and establishing them in the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1-3). Yet, over 500 years later, Abraham’s children were great in number but not enjoying the Promised Land. Instead, they were oppressed as slave laborers for the King of Egypt.

Without getting into many details, they were in Egypt and not in Canaan (Promised Land) because they chose to settle there when Joseph, son of Jacob, became Pharaoh’s right hand and welcomed all his family there. But after several centuries, “a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph, who said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we.” Out of fear of them, they enslaved them and made their lives bitter with every kind of field labor. They were so afraid of them that they would not let male newborns live. They were ruthless in all manners in which they dealt with them. (Exodus 1: 8-22)

This is the context in which God called Moses to save them. In our reading today, we read that God heard the prayers of the anguish of his people and would not abandon them, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt… The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians…” So, God called Moses in response to the prayers of his people.

But who is Moses? Moses is a descendant of Abraham, which makes him a Hebrew. When Moses was born, his sister took him away and hid him to spare him from being killed. Then she put him in a basket in the Nile River to save him. As baby Moses floated traveling in the river, the Pharoah’s daughter found him and adopted him as her son. Moses grew up in Egypt as a prince for 40 years. However, he knew he was a Hebrew, and one day as he tried to protect a fellow Hebrew man from the abuse of an Egyptian, he killed the Egyptian man. This led Moses to run away as a fugitive, spending the next 40 years in the desert.

By the time God called Moses, he was an 80 years old man. He was no longer a prince of Egypt but a shepherd living in exile, keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro. He ran away, thinking he could escape who he was, trying to erase his past. And after all these years, he had probably given up any hope of doing anything to save his people. But God was just getting started. I guess we can say that when Moses thought he was ready to retire, God decided he was finally ready to carry out his plan. (Are there any retirees here?)

So, God appeared to him most strangely and unexpectedly: through a burning bush that was burning but not burning. As Moses approached the burning bush, he witnessed the presence of God, and God spoke to him, explaining what was happening back in Egypt and giving him a call to free his people, “Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” God was giving him a calling, sending him to rescue his people from slavery. However, as you can imagine, Moses made many excuses as to why he couldn’t.

The first excuse he offered, and the only one we will address today, was: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

This was a great excuse if there was ever one. Why would he want to go back to Egypt? How could he be the one to free God’s people after failing miserably the last time he tried? He had a quiet life and was not eager to return to any leadership position. In fact, it was not even a faint thought for him, even more so as he had failed once.

I am with Moses on this one. After all these years, his excuse was not due to a lack of faith but fear of failing, knowing he was inadequate. He knew he did not have the gifts needed to do the task. His last excuse is recorded in Exodus 4: 10, “But Moses said to the Lord, “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.”

Do you know this feeling of inadequacy when we feel we are not good enough or do not have what it takes? These feelings generally have nothing to do with our abilities but more with our experiences in life that have caused us to have low self-esteem or low self-confidence.

However, feeling inadequate is not necessarily a weakness that should stop us from doing what God calls us. What did God say to Moses in his reluctance? God replied, “I will be with you.” This is very significant. It means that God did not deny the legitimacy of Moses’ feelings (or ours), but he was inviting him to turn his attention and focus on him instead of on himself.

Does this happen to you too? It happens to me. When I feel adequate and strong in my abilities, I am tempted to draw from my strength, not God’s. But when I feel inadequate, I know I must depend on God. There is no other option other than failure. I don’t like feeling inadequate, but that is when I see God working in my life in amazing ways. It is a good place to be, even though it may not feel that way at the time. Why is this? From my experience, we are stronger in our weaknesses because we have no other option but to trust God. This is what God told the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Like Moses, I know we can think of all the reasons why we are not the “best” person for the “job” when God is calling us. We easily fall back to “excuse mode” when we are afraid of putting ourselves out there in ways that stretch us out. We say things like “I don’t have time,” “My life is complicated right now,” “I am waiting for the right moment,” “I need more time to think,” “It is too risky,” “I don’t have the resources,” “Some else will do it,” “I am too old,” “I am too young,” “I am not good enough,” “This is a mistake, I am not capable.”

If God called Moses, God can call anyone. Moses was not a perfect man. He had a troubled past, and he didn’t have the best self-esteem or even the talents. However, God chose him to be a leader and equipped him to do great things, and his obedience and faithfulness led to the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Can you see what is happening with Abraham’s and Moses’s calling? Abraham was called to bless all the families of the earth. Moses was called as a response to the prayers of people who were suffering. God calling is not for self-gain but to make things better in the world. Your calling is to be a blessing and perhaps even a response to someone’s prayers.

My friends, God’s calling is not limited to those who have it all together. God can call anyone, no matter their background or current situation. God’s calling may not always be easy, but it will be worth it. God will be with us through the challenges; we can trust his plan. God’s calling can lead to great things. We may not always see the immediate impact of our obedience, but we can trust that God is using us for greater purposes.

I finish with this: Have you ever heard the phrase, “You are an answer to our prayers!” When we say “yes” to what God asks us to do, we become the channels through which God answers prayers to bring hope and healing to the world. So, be an answer to people’s prayers, not the reason why they pray.

You have a calling, no question about it. As I invited you last week, let’s talk about it so you can find your place working with God and doing good in the world.