

This morning we begin a nine-week series on Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament. “Exodus is central in Judaism. It is recounted daily in Jewish prayers and celebrated in festivals such as Passover”

([Wikipedia](#)). And Exodus is also important to Christianity as it “teaches us what we should expect from God and gives us a reason to trust God in difficult times. Exodus shows how God is at work to save the world from sin and death” ([link](#)). During this series we’ll be specifically looking at various pivotal moments in the lives of Moses and the Israelites, God’s people, as they journey from slavery under Pharaoh’s empire to deliverance and covenant in the wilderness. Some of you may be asking, “So Pastor, what does this have to do with my life?” Always a great question! “These signs of God’s liberating agency have sustained oppressed people seeking deliverance over the ages” (Christine Roy Yoder, back of Brueggemann’s *Delivered Out of Empire*). Are you one seeking deliverance these days? If so, listen closely for the Good News. But before we approach the second book of the Bible, we have to first review the very end of Genesis that leads us into Exodus. **If Genesis is the story of a family, Exodus would indeed then be the story of a nation.** At the end of Genesis, if you will recall, Joseph, one of Jacob’s twelve sons (the 12 tribes of Israel)- the son with the coat of many colors, was sold into slavery, trafficked really, by his envious brothers. Jacob, twin to Esau, was Isaac’s son- you know Isaac, the son of Father Abraham?! Well, that makes Joseph the great grandson of Abraham. Joseph eventually ended up in Egypt at Potiphar’s house. Then prison and finally, after rising to power, he became one of Pharaoh’s governors. Joseph’s story links the ancestral promises given by God to

Abraham to the Exodus story of oppression and liberation. Joseph and his brothers eventually reconciled and they all moved to Egypt. For a while things were good for the Israelites but then at the beginning of the book of Exodus, Joseph dies and another Pharaoh comes to power who didn't know Joseph (1:8). This Pharaoh was threatened by the Israelites, and they soon became the Egyptians' slaves (1:13) and this went on for over 400+ years. It's not surprising that the economic arrangements of slavery lead to abuse. Scripture tells us that "the Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor" (1:13-14). But the Israelites still kept growing in number, and Pharaoh's fear was rising so he said that any sons born to the Hebrew women must be thrown into the Nile River (v. 22). "Yet from those same waters would emerge the man who would face down Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of slavery to their long awaited freedom (Exodus 14:21-31). The Almighty's plans once again dwarf those of humans. Once again we see how God engages ordinary and imperfect people to fulfill his plan of salvation" ([link](#)).

One Hebrew mother hid her baby for three months after his birth and when she couldn't hide him any longer, she put him in a reed basket, sealed with black tar. Then the baby's sister, Miriam, stood watch nearby as her baby brother, Moses, floated down the Nile River right into Pharaoh's daughter, who was taking a bath. Moses was eventually adopted by her and grew up as that Pharaoh's grandson- he had one foot in the Hebrew world and one foot in the Egyptian world. Years

later, Granddaddy Pharaoh died and another Pharaoh rose to power. The Israelites remained enslaved in Egypt. But then something happened. After 430 years of being enslaved, we're told that the Israelites finally break their silence and cry out- not just to God but to whomever would listen to them. "They groaned because of their hard work. They cried out, and God heard their cry of grief, remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (and Joseph)" (2:23-24). God heard and God saw this "cry that begins history" (Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered Out of Empire*). But why now? Why did it take God this long to respond to the Israelites? This is a question for the ages and yet, God is God. "Yahweh, for whatever reason, had not until now taken any initiative. The initiative, rather, has been taken by the Israelites who have found their voice. It is the cry that begins the narrative of rescue and salvation. The cry changes circumstances for the slaves; it changes matters for Pharaoh, as his imposed silence cannot finally refuse or resist the insistence of human bodies that refuse to bear pain in silence. And most of all, the cry moves Yahweh to act." (Brueggemann). Moses meanwhile has grown up and married Zipporah of Midian (2:21). One day while minding his own business tending sheep in his father-in-law's pasture, God appeared to him in a burning bush. God told Moses that God had heard the cry of injustice of God's people. God tells Moses that He will deliver them from the Egyptians and relocate them to a better place" (Russaw). So God sends Moses back to Pharaoh- but not before Moses makes every excuse in the book to not go. But I'm getting ahead of the story and today's text. I don't title my sermons but if I did, I would borrow a title for today

from the Rev. William Barber, “God Always Has Somebody.” And in today’s story that somebody is Moses. Let us turn to God in prayer.

**PRAY. READ.**

“Moses calls himself “an alien residing in a foreign land” (2:22). But he is a man who has never really been at home anywhere. As I said, he had a foot in both worlds- Hebrew and Egyptian- the poor, enslaved and the wealthy elite. Although Moses tries to intervene to help his kinfolk, the Hebrews (2:11-13), he ends up murdering an Egyptian and being rejected by his own (2:14). He flees Egypt and the mess he had created there, only to be identified as an Egyptian by the women he meets at the well in Midian (2:19). From the adopted son of royalty, Moses is now shepherding flocks, working for his father-in-law” (Amy Merrill Willis, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). God Always Has Somebody.

It is right there in those pastures with those smelly, mischievous and wandering sheep where God meets Moses in a burning bush. Moses isn’t looking for this encounter with God nor does he ask for it. When I was in school to become a pastor, it seemed like most people there had what is known as a “call” story- the reason they were in seminary. Many call it a “burning bush” story. Well, my call never made it to burning bush status. But I most definitely relate to the minding my own business when God wouldn’t leave me alone part. Ever had that happen? That stirring of the Spirit that keeps at you until you act? Moses had a theophany at the strange bush. What’s a theophany?,” you ask. A theophany is “derived from two Greek words meaning ‘God’ and ‘to show.’ It is a manifestation

of God” (Kimberly D. Russaw, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org))-like the burning bush. This was a great prophetic commissioning scene. Moses’ call sets up a deliverance not only him but also for God’s people.

I don’t know about y’all, but it gives me great comfort to know that Moses has fears including but not limited to: insecurities, lack of confidence and skill, and rejection. Anyone who has struggled to hear God’s call in their life can identify with Moses. **I’m learning that there is no divine call without human conflict.** “It is interesting to note Moses’ first objection, which questions his own identity: ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ Moses is reluctant to take on the role that God asks of him, but really, who better than Moses? His dual identity seems to make him the perfect person to confront Pharaoh for the sake of the Hebrews. What is more, despite his reluctance and his own earlier misguided interventions, Moses is driven by a deep sense of justice — a desire to intervene for the victimized and the mistreated, wherever he sees injustice taking place (2:11, 13, 17)” (Merrill Willis). After turning from his own identity, Moses asks about God’s identity. “When they ask me, ‘What’s this God’s name?’ What am I supposed to say to them?” (v. 13).

God answers with the strangest name. “I Am Who I Am.” Tell them that “I AM” has sent you” (v. 14). God’s cryptic answer to Moses brings out the greatest mystery. “Within biblical times, the name was deemed too holy to pronounce, so it was read as Adonai or ‘Lord’ or Yahweh (minus the vowels). Whatever the precise understanding, the answer ‘I Am Who

I Am' is not just a declaration of a name, but assurance of God's presence in the call. One possible explanation is 'I am the one who causes things to pass.' This answers the heart of Moses' question. Moses does not want the name. More than that, he wants assurance that God will do this" (Roger Nam, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). "In this (and every!) prophetic commissioning scene, God's work is once again aligned and intertwined with human agency. Just as Moses *saw* the Egyptian beating a Hebrew (2:11), and Pharaoh's daughter *saw* the child and heard him crying (2:6), so also has God *seen* the misery of the people and heard their cries (3:7) and has been moved to action. Indeed, such seeing, knowing, and acting for others is part of the very identity of God. And much as Moses' identity emerges from his own past, so God's actions in the present emerge from God's past commitments to the ancestors (3:15). The God of the Exodus is one who remains faithful to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But unlike human commitments that can waiver and fade, God's identity will be constant" (Merrill Willis).

This passage is filled with challenges and unexplained details. I'm not here to solve the ambiguities. I am but naming them and holding up the mysteries associated with theophany. "We cannot read the Bible as an answer key to a math textbook. Rather, the Bible is a reflection of God's word for us, so our human selves should expect mystery" (Nam). God's always going into mess and choosing those who are imperfect to lead God's charge. Like Moses, many of us offer any excuse in the book. But God Always Has Somebody. Maybe that somebody is you?! How is God calling you to take a stand for justice? How is God calling you to show up

in today's world? No, as author and poet, Madeleine L'Engle, reminds us, "God doesn't stop the bad things from happening; that's never been part of the promise. The promise is: I am with you. I am with you now until the end of time" ([link](#)). "God will deliver on God's promise of redemption. Like the name, how God does it and who God chooses will be a mystery. But we can hold on to the knowledge that God will continue to cause things to pass for the ages" (Nam). Thanks be to the Great I Am! Amen.