



**Plymouth Congregational Church**  
**2001 E. Grand River Avenue**  
**Lansing, MI 48912**

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## **FROM PLYMOUTH'S PULPIT**

### **“THE CALL”**

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**SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 3:1-15  
Romans 12:9-12

Each time I read the story of Moses, I'm reminded of the typical elements of the Hebrew calls from God. There is the divine appearance of God, an introductory word of greeting, a divine commission or call, an objection by Moses with various excuses, God's assurance that he is the one called, and a sign – this burning bush – one that is not consumed by fire. There is a pattern about Hebrew stories.

Moses is called as God's messenger to bring a lesson to the people, so we consider Moses as the first prophet in a sense. Like others, Moses is expected to speak the truth on God's behalf. But why Moses? That's his question too!

Moses is out at Horeb alone. The word Horeb means “wasteland.” It is a lonely and desolate place, just the kind of place for a man on the run. You see, something happened to bring Moses to that place. Back in Egypt, Moses had struck and killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a helpless Hebrew slave. He had to run to Midian to hide and there we find him alone. There is no church or temple for him to hide or find sanctuary. After all, that's where we expect to meet God, isn't it? Moses is frightened and knows the Egyptians want to kill him so this is the last place on earth he ex-

pects to encounter God. After all, he's not a priest or Levite – just an ordinary man.

My favorite part of the story however is Moses' dialogue with God. It's a powerful moment. Moses is not a passive recipient of the call of God. He argues. He gives God some reasons why he is not worthy or able. But God will not take no for an answer. He gently but urgently prods Moses and answers his questions and reservations.

Have you ever thought about this conversation? Here is Moses giving God all the reasons he's not a good spokesperson, yet he seems to have the courage to hold a debate with God! I don't know about you, but I love that about Moses. I love that he is so very human and reminds me of all of us even today. We want to say yes, even when we hear the call of God to speak out or act on God's behalf, we argue with God – or ourselves. After all, we have so much to do. Why do I have to do what God expects? It's too much!

There's a part of us that says, "Can't I just go to church on Sunday and take care of myself and my family? Why does God call me to do more? Take care of others? After all, I'm not even related to those hungry people – or the homeless. God wants me to tell others about Jesus? To take care of his church? Why do I have to do that?"

I was talking to a small group about this very thing a few weeks ago and one person said, "Joy, you don't understand. When most of us were growing up, we were taught—especially if we were going into the business world—not to talk about politics, religion or family issues. It's hard to break that habit after all these years." I realize that. But then I wonder if you've ever noticed that when someone moves into the neighborhood you have no hesitation in recommending a grocery store or hair stylist or even which doctor to care for your children, but we hesitate to invite them to attend worship with us or even talk about our church?

This weekend we celebrate Thanksgiving and we forget that the Pilgrims embarked on that treacherous journey, almost starving to death, many dying of disease, to gain the freedom to worship God and tell others of the faith? Do we

ever wonder how our faith has grown and flourished over all these years, and yet as times have changed churches all over the world are now struggling to survive?

Moses keeps pushing God, resisting and questioning God's wisdom. Have you ever done that? When confronted with a really big challenge, have you ever asked God why this would be happening to you? Have you ever shared with God that you don't think you're up to the task? Through his dialogue with God, Moses begins to understand the basic nature and identity of God. Moses realizes that God needs him – needs us! God does not work alone! God invites us to share in his work. God takes an ordinary bush and uses it as a medium of revelation! Then he takes an ordinary man and does some extraordinary things with him. He points him in a new direction, gives him strength and courage he has never known.

And there is more! When God hears the cries of the Hebrew people being used as slaves by the Egyptians, the author of this story tells us that God decides he must release them from oppression. But God, the God of Israel reaches out and latches on to the lives of ordinary. And these ordinary people lead the way to the Promised Land.

This is a great story! It's a story Paul knew and used to compare to ministry in his time and place. It's a strange story filled with miraculous happenings. If we waste our time trying to figure out how the water parted or how the bush didn't burn, we miss the whole dynamic. The story is about God's action and an invitation to ordinary people.

Have you ever thought about how you happened to come to the church? Or to feel the presence of God at a particular time or place? Trying to identify God's call we often hear someone say: "One day I just decided that I needed to be part of a group of people who made a difference in the world." Or "I was going through a bad time in my life and I came to the church as a last resort. I didn't know where else to go. I thought maybe the church could help me." I sometimes wonder why we think that coming into the presence of God is our idea!

Could it be God calling us? Whether Moses, or Peter or Paul or Augustine or Martin Luther or you or me – is it God’s initiative that brings us here?

This very church – that original gathering of people believed that they needed a place set aside to worship God. Moses was not seeking an encounter with God – he just wanted to escape the wrath of the Egyptians He wasn’t looking for a task to perform – that was God’s idea. And I firmly believe that it happens in our lives even today. God hears the cries of oppressed people and God is on the move. Whether for the Hebrews or for the poor of today, through us, God overturns the present power structures and invites us to join the journey. We gather our gifts and abilities and even our weaknesses and use them to make the world a better place.

In the story, Moses takes off his sandals and the ground becomes holy. In that place, an exchange takes place between God and humanity. Here on this holy ground, God grabs us up to do the extraordinary. We come to worship, give a portion of God’s gifts given to us, work for others and with others and take responsibility for the tasks God needs us to perform. And sometimes we’re not even looking for God, but God is looking for us.

We may say together, “We may not be the best in the world for the job, but we are the best we are able to be.” At the invitation of God we have been summoned, called, claimed to be co-workers with God. If someone should ask you sometimes, “What are you doing in a place like this?” Just tell them, “God called my name.” And if don’t think you’ve heard it yet, don’t worry. Wait just a little while. You will!

Amen.