

WELCOME 18th June 2023 – 3rd Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Exodus 4:1-17 & 27-31

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week...

"The process sometimes doesn't look like progress" Whether it's making sausage, a major construction project, or having a baby..."The process sometimes doesn't look like progress." The envisioned outcome seems completely unlike the path to reach it. Three steps forward & two back...would be awesome if you could get just that. 400 years in a foreign land. Grueling slavery. Grinding oppression. Relentless suffering. The long ago promise of land offspring & blessings...is just that: long ago & faraway...and there doesn't seem to be much progress toward it.

That too often is the place of discouragement anxiety fear hopelessness or despair. It can also be the place of trust patience obedience faith & hope.

"Now go! I will be with you as you speak, & I will instruct you in what to say."

Sometimes all we have is the voice of promise assuring us that all is not lost, that we are not without purpose or power, & that the presence of the Promiser is the assurance of its fulfillment.

Today is the 3rd week in the book of Exodus, a Journey of Promise. It's a journey initiated, led, & sustained by God who is present w/ his people, whatever they face. Today Moses remains reluctant...maybe you are too!

But in his resistance God assures Moses that God is still with him to bring to fullness all that God desires for those whom he loves & chooses as his own. As God draws near & gives us his word/promise, we are always transformed & being transformed will always lead us to live into the destiny God has declared is ours in him.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father...All authority power & glory belongs to you & your Son Jesus. Thank you that by his life given, we are given life forever. We praise You that no-one & nothing can stop Him from growing His church...from seeking & saving the lost for whom he has died & risen...from opening hearts so people can respond to the good news about Him. Lead us into opportunities to share with others the grace we have received...to find ways of engaging with those who have yet to respond to his offer of hope, forgiveness, life & salvation. Make us ready & able to put words to the hope within us & the love we enjoy in Christ. By your Spirit offer it through our words & deeds...in Jesus' Name...Amen.

Let's hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Why would someone resist speaking God's Word to someone else? "fear" Of what?
2. What "voices" do you hear in your life that shape (or try to shape) how you live?

3 PENTECOST '23 A – A JOURNEY OF PROMISE: THE VOICE OF PROMISE

Leonie was not long pregnant when I first heard the phrase, “The process sometimes doesn’t look like progress” Morning sickness, fatigue & swelling bits was naively not what I envisioned for expecting our 1st child...It’s proven true over & over again in our lives in countless situations that as we move toward some desired goal, what it takes to get there doesn’t always look like we’re getting there. Moving house. Remodeling. Planting ourselves as a congregation 10 years ago...You could name your own experience...sometimes you have to keep reminding yourself why you’re doing what you’re doing or the process & seeming lack of progress plays havoc w/ your journey...When things get worse ^b/₄ they get better, you become reluctant to keep going...or worse yet retreat to where you started...throw up hands/quit

Which brings us to Moses...hiding out in the desolate wilderness on a road to nowhere arguing w/ God about his fitness for speaking God’s promised deliverance & freedom to God’s enslaved people.

Moses is well aware of the age old **promise**...From childhood he’s heard the word spoken to Abraham/Sarah, Isaac/Rebecca, Jacob/Rachel & their descendants. Embedded in his memory he hears the echoes: *I will make you a great nation. I will bless you & make your name great, & you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you & curse those who curse you. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.* – Gen 12:2-3

He’s no stranger even to what brought them to Egypt in the first place...*The Lord said to Abram, “You can be sure your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, & in the end they will come away with great wealth.* – Gen 15:13-14...He is heir to Abraham’s assurance that the promise of a relationship w/ the Father flows through slavery & struggle, suffering & death into freedom life & salvation. But from all he can see, the fulfillment, **the** Promised Land, is nowhere in sight...not even a faint speck on the horizon. If anything it’s farther away now than ever. Moses lives, & it’s true for us too, in what one scholar called **“The** Arc of the Promise.”

We, like Moses, like all of God’s people live in-between...We exist holding on to the assurance of a day when sorrow struggle tears & death are gone forever. We live clinging to the hope of a day when life endures justice triumphs mercy wins love prevails & joy **so OVERFLOWS** that every earthly sorrow is made insignificant...But **where?** When? How? When so much of everyday screams sadness...turmoil...confusion...When disorder chaos tragedy & violence populate the news cycles...When things get worse ^b/₄ they get better...your circumstance doesn’t change...when you wonder if there really was a promise after all & you become reluctant to

keep going...or worse yet retreat to where you started...throw up hands/quit...I often recall the old hymn...*Lord Whose Love in Humble Service*...The 2nd verse: Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread; still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead. “Still” That’s the in-between. At 1 point Moses cries out to God, *“Ever since I came to Pharaoh as your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to your people & you have done nothing to rescue them!”* Oh...I know that prayer. In the in-between it’s easy to make that accusation.

In the in-between Moses remains reluctant...*Moses protested again, “What if they won’t believe me or listen to me? What if they say, ‘The Lord never appeared to you?’” --- But Moses pleaded w/ the Lord, “O Lord, I’m not very good w/ words. I never have been, & I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, & my words get tangled.” -- - But Moses again pleaded, “Lord, please! Send anyone else.”* 5x he tries to say “No”

When you’ve been told faith is a crutch for the weak-minded...When you’ve heard clearly “I want nothing to do w/ your beliefs”...When you’ve been assured you’re not smart enough educated enough know enough to say anything meaningful about Jesus...speak only what’s pre-approved...All religions are the same...all a delusion anyway...Xns are bigots haters & fearful...authors of so much evil in the world...Reluctant seems the wisest course. In-between is that place **where** anxiety – fear - discouragement - hopelessness - despair reside.

In-between is where you can only think of running your own way...take matters into your own hands...pretend the promise doesn’t exist. In-between is where rebellion dwells. So much of our world & even people we love live there: “Rebellion.” That place where we hear: My desires are stronger than your promises. What I want, you won’t give...so I’ll go my own way. I don’t see a way to get past what I feel so I’m just going w/ it. God you messed up when you made me...so I’ll fix that. I’m tired of saying “no” to myself. Everybody else is doing this...I’m not hurting anyone. Love means you let me be whoever I see myself to be...no questions asked.

In-between can **ALSO** be the **place** of trust - patience - obedience - faith – hope – endurance – persistence – tenacity - resilience. Of saying *“I will not let go until you bless me.”* I don’t see it yet but you promised so I’m staying. But behind both of those alternatives anxiety/discouragement/fear/hopelessness/despair/rebellion **AND** trust/patience/hope/endurance/obedience/tenacity/faith/resilience is the crucial **question**: *Is God enough?* Is God enough...when the chips are down...the cancer spreads...they don’t come home again...the pain is unrelenting. Is God enough when you just can’t see a way ahead. Is God enough for my life satisfaction contentment peace loneliness joy hope brokenness healing? Is God enough? *“Are you the One or should we keep looking?” Well...here’s what I’m doing...is that enough? Die & rise to rule...is that enough? – Mt 11:3*

Sometimes all we have is the voice of promise assuring us that all is not lost, that we are not without purpose or power, & that the presence of the Promiser is the assurance of its fulfillment. **Now** go! I will be with you as you speak, & I will instruct you in what to say." I will be w/ you...I will work through you...

That sounds a lot like Jesus' promise to his followers: **Mt 10:17ff** - "Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves...But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts & flogged with whips in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors & kings because you are my followers. This will be your opportunity to tell the rulers & other unbelievers about me. When you are arrested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." I will be w/ you...I will work through you... For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?" - **Heb 13:5-6** I will be w/ you...I will work through you...

And you know I love this verse...this assurance...I hold tight to this in all the in-betweens: "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." - **Eph 3:20**

Sometimes all we have is the voice of promise assuring us that all is not lost, that we are not without purpose or power, & that the presence of the Promiser is the assurance of its fulfillment. God assures us that God is still w/ us to bring to fullness all that God desires for those whom he loves & chooses as his own. As God draws near & gives us his word/promise, we are always transformed & being transformed will always lead us to live into the destiny God has declared is ours in him.

TAKE IT HOME - We leave sent the way Moses & ultimately the disciples were sent

"Now go! I will be with you as you speak, & I will instruct you in what to say."

Where & to whom will you be the voice for God's promises this week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Gracious Father, we praise you for your unfailing love that blankets us past, present and future. We praise you in the midst of yesterday's regrets, today's troubles, and tomorrow's worries. We praise you that nothing can separate us from your love or snatch us from your sure and secure embrace. Let praise arise with faith, so that those around us will hear our voice and see your strength to be drawn into your saving love. Through Jesus Christ we pray... Amen.