

**Foundational Stories Series**  
**“Vocation: God's Call...Your Life...Our World”**  
**Sermon on Exodus 2:23-3:15 (9/13 & 9/14/14)**  
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Noting the title of this sermon, you'll see we're going to be thinking about “vocation” for the next 15-20 minutes...and one of my favorite quotes of all-time is a quote about the concept of *vocation*. The quote is by pastor and writer Frederick Buechner; he wrote, “Vocation is where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need.”

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The English word “vocation” comes from the Latin word “vocare” which means “to call.” And “vocare” comes from “vox,” which means “voice.” So “vocation” is a *calling* – a calling that is sort of spoken to us by an outside voice. Many people think of their work or their career as a vocation...but a vocation can also be a hobby or a volunteer position.

What makes something a vocation is the voice calling you *to* it – compelling you...a vocation is something you feel created to do.

*“Vocation is where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need.”*

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Here in the church, we often love to talk about “vocation.” Here in the church, we frequently talk about the things God *calls* us to do.

But, here in the church, all too often, the word “vocation” gets specifically connected to the kind of work done by church professionals – people like me who have chosen a full-time career in pastoral ministry.

Now, it's a very good thing to speak about *pastoral* vocation in the church – if we don't speak about it, we might miss the opportunity to nurture the pastoral vocation of someone sitting near us in worship.

Very often the “call” – the voice of pastoral vocation – comes to us through someone within the church who knows us and who sees in us gifts for pastoral ministry.

We in the church need to have a sense of what it means for people to be *called* into pastoral ministry...because, like I said, we don't want to miss out on helping a brother or sister in Christ discover or discern a pastoral calling.

That said, I don't want to go on for too long about *pastoral* vocation because *vocation* is for everyone to discover and to discern...and, clearly, not every vocation is a pastoral vocation.

Again, Frederick Buechner's beautiful definition of *vocation* is “where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need.” One of the reasons I love this definition so much is that it is incredibly non-specific: this definition works for everyone, no matter what your vocation – no matter what your *calling* – in life is.

I also love this definition of *vocation* simply because it's helpful. If you're wondering how to discover and discern your vocation in life – if you're wondering what you are being called to do with your life or with your work or with your spare time – Frederick Buechner offers some insight into how you should find those answers:

First, you figure out what you are most passionate about – what gets you going in the morning, what excites you, what makes you mad, what you love, what you hold most dear.

Then, once you identify that which you are most passionate about, you look at your community, the world – you look for all the places where there's pain, where there's suffering, where hope is needed...and then you find connecting points between *your* greatest passions and the *world's* greatest needs.

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When you go to seminary to study to become a pastor, everyone wants to know your “call story” – the story of how you discovered God was calling you to be a pastor...the story of your pastoral vocation.

When I went to seminary, writing my call story was part of my application. Then, once I got to seminary, we students were asked to, again, write and to then *tell* our call stories in one of our required classes...plus, it seemed like swapping call stories was part of the required conversation when you became friends with a fellow seminary student.

So we had to *write* our call stories several times and we ended up *telling* our call stories on a regular basis. Even now, years after my time in seminary, any time I make new friends, meet new church members, or even go out on dates, I am often asked the question, “So...how did you decide to become a pastor?”

In all honesty, when I tell my call story – when I tell the story of my pastoral vocation – I feel like I'm simply quoting myself. I have told it so many times that very often I use the same language, I tell certain parts of the story in exactly the same way every time, and I often use the same little bit of humor at this one particular point in the story...every single time I tell it.

Sometimes I inwardly roll my eyes when someone new asks me how I decided to become a pastor. I think, “Here I go again with this old story...” But then, inevitably, every time I begin to tell it, I am reminded of just how important and just how powerful that story is to me.

And see, that's a major reason why I think the church fails when we only talk about "vocation" in reference to pastors. Because *everyone* has a vocation. *Everyone* has a calling. *Everyone* has a story to tell about how their greatest passions meet the world's greatest needs.

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Maybe you've figured out by now – or maybe you haven't – that we're thinking about vocation today because it was in today's reading from Exodus that Moses came face-to-face with *his* vocation.

However, the stories of our own vocations are not always like today's story from Exodus chapters two and three. God doesn't usually come to each of us like God came to Moses.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the stories of our own vocations do not always present themselves like a divine voice speaking from within a burning bush.

Yet, despite the fact that the drama of *Moses'* call story is rare in comparison to our own call stories, there is something in this story for each of *us* to learn – about God and about ourselves.

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For over two months now here at McCabe United Methodist Church, we've been in a sermon series on some of the very first stories in the Bible – the foundational stories of our faith and of God's people. After eight weeks of sermons on stories in the book of Genesis, last week we journeyed into the book of Exodus.

As we have gone through Genesis, and now into Exodus, we have been learning the story of how the people of Israel – or, as they are sometimes called, the *Hebrew* people – how they became God's "chosen" people.

Back in Genesis chapter twelve, God invited a man named Abraham to follow... Abraham said "yes" to God, and then God made a three-fold promise to Abraham and his wife, Sarah: that they would inherit the land we now call "Israel," that they would have many descendants, and that their descendants would not only *be* blessed, but that the world would be blessed *through* them. Land, descendants, and blessing.

Beyond Genesis chapter twelve, we met Abraham and Sarah's descendants: Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, their sons Esau and Jacob, along with Jacob's many wives and children...all the way through the generations to Moses.

At the end of Genesis, God's chosen people had all migrated down to Egypt because of a famine in their promised land of Canaan. Then, over the course of generations in Egypt, the Hebrew people became slaves.

As we learned in last week's story, the king of Egypt – the Pharaoh – had gotten paranoid about how numerous the Israelites were becoming, so he made them slaves... figuring that *that* would cause their numbers to go down. In fact, while they were slaves, the Israelites multiplied at greater rates than ever before.

The Pharaoh's next plan for the decline of the Hebrew people was to kill all of their baby boys. This *also* did not go as Pharaoh had hoped it would. It was within that story we learned the beginning of *Moses' story*: Moses, whose mother had hidden him in a basket and put him in the Nile River, hoping against hope to save *her* baby boy from the Pharaoh's wrath.

The Pharaoh's own daughter found baby Moses in the river, brought him out of the water, and raised him as her own son. What happened next in Moses' life is something we didn't get in last week's story or in today's reading, so I'll offer you a brief summary right now:

When Moses was a grown man, he decided to look around at the situation of his own people – the Hebrews. He saw them as slaves...and then he was horrified when he saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man. In his rage over the beating of one of his own people, Moses killed the Egyptian who had been beating the Hebrew, and Moses hid the body.

Though he'd hoped news of this killing would not get around, Moses discovered very quickly that it had...and the Pharaoh was immediately after him. So Moses fled.

He ended up in the land of Midian and encountered a priest named Jethro who had seven daughters. Through a sequence of events, Moses married one of Jethro's daughters – Zipporah – and they had a son whom they named Gershom.

As we heard a bit ago, the very end of Exodus chapter 2 says this: "After the death of the king of Egypt, the Israelites still complained because they were forced to be slaves. They cried out to God, and God heard their loud cries. [God] did not forget the promise he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and because he knew what was happening to his people, he felt sorry for them."

*Right after that*, God called to Moses from the burning bush: "I am the God who was worshiped by your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt, and I have heard them beg for my help because of the way they are being mistreated. I feel sorry for them, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians. I will bring my people out of Egypt into a country where there is good land, rich with milk and honey."

At that point, I'm sure Moses was pretty thrilled – wouldn't you think? God had seen the misery of the Israelites and God was going to do something about it.

This was *great* news. But God wasn't done...because God went on to say to Moses, "Now go to the king. I am sending *you* to lead my people out of this country."

This is Moses' call story. This is the story of Moses' vocation.

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*"Vocation is where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need."*

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We don't really know much about Moses' passions in life. We don't know for sure what it was about Moses that caused God to call *him* to go to the Pharaoh to plead on behalf of his people and to lead them out of Egypt.

Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Moses had survived the Pharaoh's attempt to have all Hebrew baby boys killed. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Moses had been brought up by the Pharaoh's daughter, so surely he would have had insider knowledge into Egyptian life and customs.

Maybe it was the fact that Moses had seen the injustice of a Hebrew slave being beaten by an Egyptian...and then, in vengeance, had later killed that Egyptian and fled for his own life when the Pharaoh found out. Clearly there was passion there.

Whatever it was, there was something about Moses and about Moses' own story that caused God to say, "This. *This* is the guy. This is the one whose vocation in life will be leading my people out of slavery in Egypt and back to freedom in the promised land."

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*"Vocation is where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need."*

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Now, of course, a person can use their greatest passion in ways that do *not* exactly meet up with the world's greatest needs.

A musician, for example, can use their gift either to put meaningless song into the world or they can choose to bring beauty or challenge or worship into the world with their music.

Someone with a passion for justice can either use their gift for pure vengeance or they can choose to channel their righteous anger to transform the circumstances that *cause* crime and violence.

In fact, in today's story from Exodus, we see how God chose to help redeem someone's untamed passion for justice and then to put it to work for one of the world's great needs.

As it turned out, Moses' great passion was justice for his people. Yet, without the proper channel through which to direct that passion for justice, Moses had become a vengeful murderer who had to run for his life.

When God called him, however, Moses' passion for justice got connected to one of the world's great needs: freedom from slavery for the Hebrew people.

Leading his people out of slavery and into freedom was Moses' vocation. And his call story into that vocation was not simply the story of God speaking to him out of a burning bush. No. Moses' call story was not an isolated – albeit powerful – experience on holy, burning ground.

Moses' call story began the moment he was born...and his call story was wrapped-up in the story of his people – the people to whom God had promised great blessing. And not only that, but these people – Moses' people – had been promised that the world would be blessed *through* them.

Well, it would be pretty hard for a people to bless the entire world if they remained in slavery generation after generation. But, as we know from our own country's sordid history with slavery, it takes incredible leadership to free a people from it...so God called Moses to be that leader.

*“Vocation is where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need.”*  
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We do not all find ourselves called to things that seem as big as Moses' calling. But we are all called *something*. And, even if that something doesn't *seem* big, whatever our calling, it *is* big.

Maybe it's a calling to teach children in a school or in a church classroom. Maybe it's a calling to be a stay-at-home-parent. Maybe it's a calling to care for a building or to keep our cars running or to style our hair so we can feel beautiful.

Maybe it's a calling to keep people safe on the streets or to counsel people through tough circumstances or to be the friend people constantly come to for guidance.  
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There are so many needs in this world...aren't there?

Thankfully, God has given us just as many passions: we just need to make the connection between *our* passions and the *world's* needs.

And making that connection is a way of life. Living your vocation is a moment-by-moment choice to put your passion to work...for *good*. And for God.

That's the hard part of today's reading from Exodus. It's about God putting us to work – and sometimes that work isn't easy.

But the *best* part – the good news in this story – is that the One who promised to be with Moses as he led the Hebrew people out of slavery, well that's the same One who promises to be with each of *us* every day of our lives.

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The same God who called Moses also calls us to put our passions to work. And that same God goes before us, alongside us, and behind us – every step of the way.

*“Vocation is where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need.”*

Thanks be to God. Amen.