

Go down, Moses – Exodus 1-3
Terri Lynn Friesen – April 2, 2017

Over the past three months, we have been journeying through the Old Testament; we've done this to re-tell the stories of the people of God, so to be reminded of God's faithfulness and redeeming nature.

In three months, this journey has only taken us through one book - the Book of Genesis - as we've stopped for some important events in the life of our community along the way. Today we cross over into Exodus. The beginning of this book is an important time in the history of God's people. The era of Joseph's success is over, his coat of many colours that we talked about last week is forgotten, a new Egyptian king is established, and the Israelites find themselves in slavery.

And - we learned through the story Simon read for children's time - as the Egyptian empire is being built on the backs of the Hebrew people, Moses is born. The one whom God delivers from Pharaoh's hand so that Moses can deliver all of God's people from slavery in Egypt.

So I invite us to consider a short reflection on the character of Moses, and what we can learn about leadership as we follow him through his call to leading the Hebrew people.

For me, and I think for many, Moses is an inspiring and compelling model for leadership because he's kind of unlikely candidate. He's also relatable on many levels – maybe because we know so much about him – the long

and detailed chronicle of Moses' life stretches over four books (not four chapters, but four *books*)– and besides Jesus – we really know more about his person than any other character in the Bible.

And probably all of us have had similar questions or excuses to the ones that Moses gives, in relation to calls to lead and to serve. I feel quite unqualified to even preach this sermon on being a good leader – but I hope you'll come to see that this is part of the point. I have a lot to learn and I want to be a keen student, and therefore its easy to be drawn to Moses, and what people who are experienced leaders say we can learn from him.

In my quest to prepare for today I listened to a talk by Walter Wright, who was the president of Regent College, where I studied. By the time I got to Regent, he had already retired from that role, and was writing books on leadership.

Walter Wright likes climbing mountains, and he thinks that Moses did too – and so do I. So I listened to this lecture where Walter Wright talked about the five mountains that Moses climbed (or should have climbed), and the lessons that he has learned about leadership from Moses on each of those high places. But today we've only got as far as Mount Horeb, so I'll stick to just that.

To recap: Moses was given up as a child in hopes to save his life, adopted by a family of a different culture, trained in the finest schools, for

leadership in Pharaoh's kingdom. But part of his coming of age is his attraction to the ghettos of his birth, and the social justice issues around him that he can't ignore any more.

That's roughly the first third of his life. The first big scene change comes after Moses kills an Egyptian who he sees beating a Hebrew slave. Moses flees to the surrounding desert when Pharaoh hears what he has done. There, he spends the next 1/3 of his life - what most people probably think of as the stage of life when we DO things. The "career development stage". He marries Zipporah, makes his home with the Midianites, has a family, and becomes established as a shepherd.

And so it's not until Moses is on in his years that he finds the burning bush, and hears the voice of God, calling him in response to the cries of the Israelite people under the burden of slavery.

As we heard earlier in the text read by Benjamin, Justina, and John, the conversation begins on Mount Horeb: Moses encounters the burning bush, God tells Moses he's on holy ground, he must take off his sandals.

Walter Wright said that what follows is the primal question of leadership: "Who, me?".

Who am I, to speak to Pharaoh with this authority? I'm a fugitive, a run away, I've farmed sheep for 40 years, I don't lead people. I stutter.

I can relate to this: when I received the job posting for what is now my pastoral role, I thought, well, this looks like really neat things are happening, but I can think of many ways that I am unqualified, underqualified, or just not the right fit.

But up on Mount Horeb, God's response implies that Moses' question of 'Who, me?' is not the point.

God responds with this: What you need to know is who I AM.

I AM. The God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. I AM going to Pharoah, and you can follow me. Over and over, God answers Moses' insecurities with this response. God's response is not about Moses – the gifts or skills he has or doesn't have, and how he's equipped to be a leader or not. It's about who God is, and what God is up to.

So for Moses, and I believe for us, the call to set free the people of God is not a call to lead, it's a call to follow. First to pay attention, and then to follow what God is doing, and to create space for the people of God to be released into the potential of the life God has for them.

Followership then turns into leadership. I wish someone might have gently suggested this to me when I was a teenager. I too hastily jumped to the conclusion as a young person that leadership was for kids who were

popular, who were charismatic, who were extroverted and loud, and likable. *Those* were leaders.

But Moses, and so many other who draw close to God and serve God well – say with their lives that this just isn't true. That's not to say there's not worth in strategy and vision and training in how to lead well. It just means leadership is not reserved for the extroverted, the charismatic, and the ultra-talented. Leadership happens in so many other ways.

[and here would have been a natural place to list people who lead in these ways – but instead of that, I'm just going to pause very briefly and invite you allow to think about people in your own circles those types of leaders, leaders whose leadership comes through followership – and invite you to offer silent prayers of thanksgiving for their influence, or ask that God might encourage them]

So even though Moses was 80 when this all went down, we can all learn lessons from how Moses led, and how God answered Moses' worries. This isn't just a story for 80 year-olds. If we are in our first third of life, we can learn what followership turned leadership means when we're in school, when our friends are testing the boundaries of right and wrong, and follow Jesus' way of peace and justice, and choosing the right thing. If we are in our second third of life, we can learn what followership turned leadership looks like in our work, in our families, in our relationships, in the things that we study...(etc). It's not about the things we do, but how we do them. And in our third 1/3 of life, followership turned into leadership can be taking all of the experience and wisdom we have earned throughout our lifetime, and

investing it in a new generation that desperately needs thoughtful mentorship and a listening ear. And I want to make sure that I say that I see this happening in all thirds of life through the lives of people at OMC, and that this is really encouraging to me. I want to both acknowledge the goodness that I see, and also say, but don't stop! The upside-down kingdom of God needs all kinds of people to choose this followership turned leadership sort of way.

And to end, a quick reminder that we don't have to climb a mountain to learn these things. Wherever God is, is holy ground, if only we glance long enough to notice the burning bush and become aware that I AM is with us. Moses is just herding his sheep. Our Work, our neighbourhoods and communities, parenting, the tractor, the office, the garden or the calving barn are no different. God is inviting us to followership – to leadership – in all of these places. So don't worry about putting your shoes back on - when we pay attention, we will see that we are living on holy ground.