

September 3, 2017

“Called to Serve Together”
Exodus 3:1-15, Matthew 16:21-28

Moses was a baby born to a Hebrew woman. If you remember the readings from the two Sundays before last, Jacob, whose other name was Israel, his sons and daughters and their families came to live in Egypt from Canaan, due to severe draught and shortage of food. They came by invitation of Joseph, who was the head official for Pharaoh at that time. In Egypt, Jacob and his descendants, called Hebrews or Israelites grew in number, outnumbering the Egyptians.

When a new king came to power, who did not know anything about Joseph and who feared the presence of the Hebrews in Egypt, he enslaved the Hebrews. Since the Hebrews continued to grow in number, the king ordered that all the babies born to Hebrew women be killed immediately when born.

To make a long story short, Moses, a baby born to a Hebrew woman, was saved by an Egyptian princess, Pharaoh’s daughter, when she found him in a basket that was floating on the Nile River. Moses grew up as the Princess’ son.

One day, Moses saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. After making sure that nobody was watching, he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the ground. The news of this reached Pharaoh, and he tried to kill Moses. Moses fled from the Pharaoh, and moved to the land of Median. There he married a daughter of a Midian priest and herded his flock.

Years past and one day he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. The Lord said to him, “Take off your shoes. You are standing on Holy Ground.”

God addressed Himself as the God of Moses’ ancestors; God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This Holy One had heard the cries of His people and called Moses at the burning bush to lead them out of Egypt, the land of slavery.

Moses responded, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

God’s response was, “I will be with you.” To prove to Moses that it was God of Israel who had called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, God promised Moses that he

would come back to this mountain to worship Him. This mountain was Mt. Horeb; its other name is (Does anyone know?) Mt. Sinai. This promise of God was fulfilled when Moses and the Israelites worshipped at Mt. Sinal after the Exodus. They received from God 10 Commandments through the hands of Moses.

Moses still hesitated and said, “What am I supposed to say to the Israelites when they ask for your name, the name of their ancestors?” “My name is YHWH, “ said God, which means “I Am Who I Am.”

Though Moses grew up in Egypt as a member of the royal family, he remembered his origin, a Hebrew. In Egypt he most likely worshipped Egyptian gods. In Median, his religion was most likely Druze, of which his father -in-law was a priest. Nonetheless, Yahweh, God of his ancestors, called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. A shepherd in the land of Median was commissioned by the God of his ancestors to be the shepherd to free His people and lead them to the Promised Land “flowing with milk and honey,” which symbolizes abundance, fertility and luxury.

God calls us and commissions us again and again to be shepherds to those who are enslaved by addiction, poverty, hunger, thirst, delusions, misconceptions, loneliness, fear and hatred by reaching out to them. God calls us to reach out to one another always.

At an Outreach meeting this past year, the members had a discussion on who we would like to reach out to as the church. As possibilities were shared, someone said, “How about the 12 Step Groups that meet downstairs? Maybe we can have a BBQ with them.” This suggestion was seconded by someone else. Thus we had the first BBQ with friends from our 12 Step Programs last Sunday. (p.p.)

Of the 35 to 40 people who gathered, 12 were from the 12 Step Programs. Though most of them didn't stay long and didn't even sit at tables, they came for “food.” As one of the 12 Step leaders said, “People come for free food and for socializing.” They were appreciative for the good will and friendship extended by this congregation; and all went home with a copy of Upper Room devotional for September/October. We ordered extra copies of Upper Room for this occasion; we wanted to share with our friends good food, friendship, and the Word of God. In life's challenges we come to God. As we say or we may have heard other people say “I do not know how people get through life's struggles without God.” We would also add, “without a loving community.”

Volunteers worked at and behind the scene. Some went shopping for the food and all we needed for the BBQ. They left things in the freezer, refrigerator and kitchen closet a couple of days ahead. They put out utensils and paper goods and made drinks on the day. Somebody brought a very efficient grill to the church from home the day before and set it up just before the BBQ. Some chopped veggies donated by a member of the 12 Step program for salad. Some set up a lovely eating area with tables, chairs and tablecloths. Some set up the food table. Some brought fun games to play and set them up on the ground. Some stood at the grill and cooked hot dogs and hamburgers. Some took down chairs and tables and did the clean-up afterwards.

Both our people and friends from the program worked together side by side.

Some of the volunteers could join the BBQ and some couldn't. It was, however, team work by willing volunteers that made our first Friendship BBQ a lovely occasion. Those who were at the BBQ had the best part; we had the good food, great fellowship, fun time playing games, beautiful weather, and mosquito-free church grounds, which had been weeded and cleaned by another set of volunteers the day before. In addition to friends from the program, we could reach out to those who came and who are not in pews on Sundays in this friendly way.

As we enter a new year starting in September, let us continue to reach out to others through various programs and activities, through monetary contribution and offerings to help those in need, through prayers and through words of encouragement.

Some of you may not be active participants, but we can always pray for those who we are reaching out to and for those who are serving; we can offer words of encouragement and appreciation to those who are serving from our congregation. Whether you are on-site servants, those who serve behind the scenes or those who pray and give words of encouragement, we are all part of the same team.

Next Sunday our choir will start off with "Come, Follow Me." In today's gospel lesson, Jesus speaks to us: "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them." We choose to follow Jesus together as the church of Jesus Christ. May we find fun (p.p.) along with challenges as we work and serve together.