

Have you seen the movie or TV series, Mission Impossible? In the movie Ethan Hunt (or Jim Phelps of the TV version) would receive a message on a recorder or cell phone that said, "Your mission if you choose to accept it is to... and the voice would relay this elaborate, insane mission for him to accomplish. Like break into the Kremlin and steal classified documents, drop them off at a train station in a safety deposit box, steal a couple boats and crash a couple cars along the way... And then right before the cell phone self destructed the voice said, "This is your mission if you choose to accept it."

At that point I always wanted to say, No! Don't do it! Don't accept it! Can't you just quit? Can't you find job someplace else- become a barista or something. Retire in the bahamas?!

I wonder if these thoughts are similar to what Moses was thinking when God called him to go on the mission God had for him. In Exodus ch. 3 God spoke to Moses (not from a cell phone, but from within a burning bush) and laid out his mission for Moses. He said, "I have heard the cry of my people, Israel. And I am sending you to go before Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

Just a moment earlier, Moses was tending his Father in Law's sheep. A second later God was calling him to be the key leader in God's plan to save Israel and to bring salvation to the whole world.

Do catch a familiar theme w/ all the Old Testament we've looked at Heroes so far? Did God say to anybody, stay put! Live in comfort, eat drink and be merry! No. Listen to what God said: To Abraham God said, Get up and go, Abraham. I'm calling you to leave your homeland to become the Father of a Great nation... And with Joseph-- God allowed his brothers to sell him- he lived his whole life away from the comforts of home and family, so he could end up in Pharaoh's palace... And with Noah last week. Noah and his family- they lost their home and everything they owned-- and lived on a boat, with hundreds of animals, so that Israel would be saved. And we have more to come with Jonah next week.

The consistent theme in all the stories is MOVEMENT. CHANGE. Vulnerability. The UNKNOWN. God takes everybody out of their comfortable places and says what Jesus commands, "Follow me."

If we worship and follow a God who is constantly on the move-- teaching, loving, wooing, convicting, SAVING!-- we've got to be ready to move too, wherever the Lord would have us go (in whatever change he'd have us make)...

But this is not easy. It wasn't easy for Moses.

Does anyone know or remember the excuse Moses gave God as to why he was the wrong person for God's mission? (His speech! A stutter? A slowness?)

And what was the one thing God called Moses to do? Communicate God's words to Pharaoh and to all the people.

(A sidenote- I don't remember a speech impediment in Charlton Heston when he played Moses in the 10 Commandments. Do you?)

What would have been if the big burly Moses of Hollywood didn't talk right?! I'm sure that's what Moses was thinking too.)

Listen to the interaction between Moses and God way back in ch. 4.

In Exodus 4 Moses asked God, "what if people don't listen to me? What if they say, The Lord didn't appear to you!"

God said, throw your staff down- and it became a snake.

Put your hand in your cloak!- and he pulled it out and it was leprous, put it back in- it was healed.

And if they don't believe after those two signs I have yet another--- take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground-- and it became blood.

So there God was, giving him all these signs of God's power to prove to the people his call upon Moses was for real...

But after all that, Moses told God, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I've never been eloquent, neither in the past, or even right now."

God's response: "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who give them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord!!! Now go, I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord, Please send someone else."

That's what was really going on, wasn't it. He just didn't want to do it.

God could've sent someone else. He could've sent Aaron, Moses' brother who God allowed to be Moses' spokesperson.

But who did God want to speak for him? Someone who couldn't speak.

Do you see that in addition to this great big mission of God to save the world from their sins, God has a mission he's working out inside each one of YOU! Each one of us!

So THAT WE MIGHT KNOW THIS GOD WHO SAVES US and be agents who participate in God's saving work.

One more verse I want to point out: (3:11) Moses asked "Lord, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh bring the people out of Egypt?" God replied, "I WILL BE WITH YOU."

In other words, who are you? WHO CARES! Who cares who you are with what kind of hang-ups! I WILL BE WITH YOU! And that is all you need.

MOVEMENT. CHANGE. VULNERABILITY. The UNKNOWN. It can make us all out of sorts. It can also be the very place God puts us SO we can learn GOD IS WITH US! AND THAT'S ALL WE NEED!

Let's go to our sermon text. Full of drama and suspense, CRISIS.

Pharaoh had finally agreed to let the Israelites go!

BUT THEN HE CHANGED HIS MIND.

Pharaoh and all his army (600 chariots!) went after God's people. The Israelites heard and saw them coming to get them and yelled out to Moses, "VERSE 11-12)

Far away from home, out on their own, their enemies coming after them – Can you blame their response?

They were confused, disoriented, they thought they were going to die.

Did you notice that from within that place of lostness, all of a sudden the place they were before, in Egypt, looked like Disneyland.

They said, "Oh, if only we were still in Egypt!"

But what was their situation in Egypt?

THEY WERE SLAVES FOR 400 years.

Pharaoh had recently doubled their work, making them gather their own straw for bricks.

They were oppressed. They were beaten.

Oh, and when Pharaoh was worried about the increasing Jewish population he ordered all Jewish baby boys to be thrown into the Nile river.

Hmmm.... Yea, things were sure better in Egypt!

Were they really better? Of course not! But at least they were familiar with Egypt. They knew what to expect. Yea, they were beaten and oppressed, but that's what they were used to. It was their life.

The option in front of them, as I see it, was to CHANGE--

To stop looking back,

To instead GO where God was leading them--

To put themselves in the hands of the living God... OR DIE.

It looks like, if we take their comments seriously, they were opting TO DIE.

There's a book entitled "Change or Die." It came out in 2007 by Alan Deuatschman.

The book asks an intriguing question.

What would you do if your Dr. told you, You are going to die If you don't make changes to your lifestyle. But if you change your behaviors-- stop smoking, lose weight, start exercising... you will live.

What do you think most people would do? What would you do? Would you opt to change or die?

In his research, Alan Duatschman discovered that when given the verdict, either change your behavior or you will die.....

90% of folks do not change. They would rather stay as they were, with what was comfortable and predictable, the way things have always been.

Even if the consequences are very, very bad.

I'm sure some folks, who are trying to quit after smoking for many years, or those who go out and try to exercise after being sedentary for so long FEEL LIKE THEY ARE going TO DIE when they make these changes. I know that the Israelites thought they were going to die when they left Egypt and Pharaoh and his men were after them.

But God's way with all the unknowns and unpredictabilities, was the path to LIFE. It may not have looked that way at the moment, BUT GOD WAS ACTUALLY IN THE PROCESS OF SAVING THEM.

I want us to hear Moses' words to the people that day. 14:13-14

Do not be afraid, Stand Firm, The Lord will fight for you. You have only to keep still.

Can we hear that word for us today. In the midst of a changing world. In the midst of changing circumstances. In the midst of unknowns and uncertainties...

WHEREVER GOD IS CALLING YOU TO TRUST THE LORD TODAY.

Do not be afraid, Stand Firm, The Lord will fight for you. You have only to keep still.

Look at what God did! (read 15 to the end of the passage.)

The Lord brought victory. The Lord fought for God's people, just as Moses said.

In what words do you need to hear God's words through Moses today, "Do not be afraid. Stand Firm. The Lord will fight for you! You have only to keep still..."

And we must know, these words, "Be still" in Hebrew in no way suggest a passive stance as if they are to just wait around for something to happen. The root word for still here comes from the root word "to plow" and the root word "to engrave." Being still involves tending the soil to prepare it for growth. What comes to mind for me is PRAYER. That's what prepares us and gets us ready for whatever changes and challenges might come.

When I learned "be still" comes from the word, "to engrave" I thought of how important it is to remain firm in our identity as God's people. We are followers of Christ. THAT is what shapes us, not the challenge ahead or even our ability to move forward. The Lord will lead us. God is faithful.

Do not be afraid. Stand firm. The Lord will fight for you! Be still...

I couldn't help but think of you all in the midst of this important season in the life of Community Presbyterian Church. You are searching for a new pastor. And no matter what this new pastor is like, I'm sure it will induce CHANGE. MOVEMENT. Vulnerability. The Unknown. Yet it will also provide a wonderful opportunity to trust the Lord and move where the Lord is calling you. The Lord will fight for you. You have only to be still. Do not be afraid.

As we leave from here I want to encourage all of us to seek the Lord in prayer. May we pray that we will be open to whatever changes and movement the would have for us. I will close with these words from Anne Lamott from her book, *Help, Thanks, Wow*. Listen in as she describes prayer in the active sense of being still and silent before God.

"Prayer can be motion and stillness and energy-- all at the same time. It begins with stopping our traks, or with our backs against the wall, or when we are going under the waves, or when we are just so sick and tired of being sick and tired that we surrender, or at least we finally stop running away and at long last walk or lurch or crawl toward (God). Or maybe, miraculously, we just release our grip slightly."