Hearing the Cry, Answering the Call **6 September 2026**
Rev. Dr. Mitch Kinsinger St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Exodus 3:1-15 Pleasant Hill, CA

Happy Labor Day weekend! I don't know about you, but it's hard to believe that summer is wrapping up. I'll also be honest that, as a transplanted midwesterner, Labor Day in my mind signals the end of hot summer weather and the beginning of cooler days of fall, and leaves turning color, but as near as I can tell, it looks like more of the same in the weeks and months to come (!), and I'm not complaining!

As a kid, I think we all wondered why most people didn't work on Labor Day; shouldn't it be called "Non-Labor Day"?! But of course, tomorrow we will commemorate and honor those who labor, the millions of workers in our nation.

> Did you know that . . .
> The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, in New York City. Within two years, President Grover Cleveland signed a law designating the first Monday in September each year as a national holiday.

And while we are all familiar with Labor Day, did you know that there is such a thing as "Labor Sunday"? In 1909, the American Federation of Labor declared the Sunday before Labor Day "Labor Sunday"—an opportunity to reflect on the spiritual and educational parts of the labor movement.

The roots of this declaration are in a statement by our Methodist[1] friends called the Social Creed, which they adopted in 1908, one of the first formal statements by an American denomination addressing social and economic justice as a matter of Christian faith.

It emerged from the Social Gospel movement which called Christians to address not just individual sin, but systemic injustice, like

> harsh conditions of industrialization,
> Long work hours,
> unsafe factories,
> child labor,
> and stark inequality between workers and owners.

Thus the Social Creed called for

[1] Techinically the Methodist Episcopal Church.

- Equal rights and justice for all workers
- Abolition of child labor
- Regulation of working conditions or safety standards
- A living wage
- Reduction of working hours
- One day of rest per week
- Protections for workers injured on the job

Fast forward 100 years to 2008 when our own Presbyterian Church (USA) affirmed the 1908 Social Creed and adopted a document called the Social Creed for the 21st Century, which described the church's prophetic concerns in the century in between, and, along with other ecumenical leaders, speaks to why and how the church has used its voice and built structures for economic, racial, women's, and environmental justice. It also looks ahead at how the Social Creed can help address new challenges to Christian social witness in the 21st century.

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Our story this morning has something to say about equity, equality, and labor, and what God thinks about it all.

Picking up from where we left off two weeks ago, baby Moses, in his basket/ark of salvation, is rescued by several quick-thinking and clever women, and ends up in Pharaoh's palace to be raised by Pharaoh's daughter. Such intrigue, right? The deliverer being raised by the oppressor?!

One day Moses, now in his late 30s, goes to watch his fellow Hebrew "kinfolk" work. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, is incensed by the abuse, and identifies with the injustice. Scripture reads that Moses kills the Egyptian, looks left and right to make sure that there are no witnesses, and then buries the body in the sand. The next day when he intervenes between two Hebrews who are arguing they ask, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?"

Clearly Moses's dirty deed wasn't as secretive as he thought. Word is out that he murdered an Egyptian, and that word reaches the Pharaoh, and Moses becomes a fugitive on the run. After 40 years in Egypt, he flees to the land of Midian where

he marries, raises a family, and lives happily ever after for another 40 years or so . . .
. . . until, on an ordinary day, as Moses is going about his business and the sheep he's tending wander "to the far side of the wilderness." Moses must have been on his phone. . . and there he catches a glimpse of a bush engulfed in flames. Curiosity causes him to investigate, and God calls to him from out of the burning bush.

After some conversation about who it is that is addressing Moses, and that he should take off his shoes in reverence—would we expect anything else? I mean we take shoes off in many of our homes!—we get to the crux of the matter:

God says that,

God sees the misery of his people.
God hears their cries on account of those inflicting punishment,
the Egyptian taskmasters.
God knows their suffering.
And God comes to deliver.

Venerable OT scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that this exchange between God and Moses tells us

"everything we need to know about God."

God sees.
God hears.
God knows.
God delivers.
Thanks be to God.

And God repeats it just to be sure Moses, and we, get it:

"The cry of the Israelites has now come to me;
I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them."
Yes, thanks be to God.

Here is what my long-time pastor friend Roger writes about this:

"That's great news! Right?
That's what you want out of God.

When you're stuck, when life has beat you down, when you're at the end of your rope, God sees your trouble, God hears your cry, God knows your need, God comes to deliver.

So far, so good….

Except that God chooses to send Moses as the agent of his deliverance. And therefore, by extension, God chooses broken, weak, and flawed people to deliver deliverance. To biblically tease out that theme: God sends liars, swindlers, cowards, adulterers, and murderers to bear his will in this world…. Thanks be to God?"

Moses pushes back against God's call and offers five excuses, the first two occur in this morning's text. Moses asks, "Why me?" and "Who are you?" In turn, God responds with the promise of his presence–"I will be with you"-- and the self-disclosure of his name.

"I AM who I AM," God says. In Hebrew, "I AM" is four consonants: YHWH. You might recognize this from one of the 11 names for God in the OT, "Yahweh," though we aren't actually sure which vowels to use. Over the centuries, uncertainty about the missing vowels sometimes led to God's name being rendered as "Jehovah."

This is the holiest name for God such that Jews to this day do not pronounce it to avoid ever "taking the Lord's name in vain" per the 10 Commandments. YHWH, often called tetragrammaton, literally "4 letters," is rendered "LORD, in small caps in our Bible.

A further enigmatic quality of YHWH is due to the fact that Hebrew doesn't have a future tense, only present tense understood by context to be future tense, so one could easily translate this name for God as "I Will Be Who I Will Be."

My Rabbi friend used to say that this name was not so much a name as it was God saying to Moses,

"I am the one that needs no name,
so quit asking questions,
and get your whiney self down to Egypt."

A mysterious God in a burning bush has broken into Moses's world with a clear command,

And yet God remains at the same time transcendent and beyond Moses's and our grasp.

Would we expect anything less

from the creator of the heavens and the earth?

Moses knows enough of who God is, and Moses knows what he's asked to do. Even if he makes a bunch of excuses, God doesn't let him off the hook of being God's deliverer for God's oppressed people.

* * *

Commentator Meg Jenista points out that

> "*The Africana Bible* reminds us that this tussle between God's plan, human resistance and the rollout of Divine Deliverance is "the formational and identifying event for Israel. It became the lens through which Israel interpreted her experiences and the foundation of her understanding of God. Thus the historical event developed into a transcendent moment — one that can occur again and again. And so it does, in the life of Israel and beyond."

* * *

I'm wondering if this kind of transcendent moment can happen here at St. Andrew's? All of God's deliverance in this story begins in an unlikely, unimaginable, unbelievable place: "beyond the wilderness"/middle of nowhere, on a mountain which means "waste," in a bush that is on fire, and yet it is not consumed; THERE God spoke, and called for a deliverer.

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Last month, Session decided that we would have a booth at Martinez Pride a week from this coming Saturday, Sept 19. If you can, we hope you will join us.

Now of course, folks at Martinez Pride aren't the Hebrew children, and we aren't Moses. But maybe there are people who have only experienced a hateful and hurtful version of Christianity. We are going to be there in an effort to shows that not all versions of Christianity are seeking to divide and marginalize, but that some of us understand that scripture asks us to care for any who are forgotten, marginalized, or oppressed, to "recieve and share God's love for ALL."

This is the privilege afforded to those of us in the majority—having a voice.
How will we use it?

Some with a majority voice use it to punch down, malign, and marginalize;
My hope is that we, like God, can hear the cry
of those who are persecuted
or captive to the hostile powers that be,
and that we can lift up those in need,
come alongside the hurting,
to love our neighbors,
regardless,
as we love ourselves.
And isn't this a universal feeling, to cry out in need of help? For some of us that is the result of systemic societal issues,
But for all of us, we feel the pain of loss,
we can feel captive to circumstances of health issues,
maybe financial issues,
or any one of the many things that can harm human flourishing.

But know that for each of us, God hears our cries, and both
sends a deliverer to free us from the heavy burdens of whatever oppressions we might be experiencing,
and asks us to do the same for those in need.

Thanks be to God. *Amen.*[2]

[2]*A word about the offeratory song David, Mark, and the choir are going to do share next. "My Deliverer" by Rich Mullins tells the story of Mary and Joseph taking the baby Jesus to Egypt to escape the murderous plot of King Herod, who is trying to kill off all baby boys to eliminate the threat of the "king of the Jews." Sound familiar? The song imagines baby Jesus along the banks of the Nile, hearing the cries that the captive Hebrew children used to sing, the same cry that God heard, and that God answered through Moses the deliverer.*