

“Finding God in Unexpected People”

Exodus 3: 1-16; 4: 1-16; 1 Corinthians 1: 26-30

Before we get started with the sermon, we know that we have talked about finding God in unexpected places and today we are talking about finding God in unexpected people but let's be honest with each other. We know the type of people we expect to find God in as part of their lives, the type of people we expect to find God in as part of their spiritual journey. You know the type of people that I am talking about: the ones who are so kind and courteous that we wonder if they are for real, or the ones that always seem to have the right thing to say in any situation, or especially the ones whose faith never seems to get shaken regardless of the situation. You know the type of person I'm talking about: the people that we say are “good Christian people”, the ones we see living out their faith every day. You know the ones I'm talking about because every time we are in their presence we do feel God.

And maybe when we start thinking about those “good Christian people”, maybe our minds go to the saints of the church, the ancient fathers and mothers of the church, the ones who wrote beautiful theological statements that inspire our faith journeys today, or the ones who wrote stirring prayers that help center us, all of which lived lives of faith, all of which gave their lives over to Christ. We expect

to experience God when we think about them, when we think about their writings, when we think about their lives because we already do experience God through their writings, and their examples.

Or maybe when we start thinking about “good Christian people”, we begin to think about the saints of the church who have touched our own lives, the men and women who we have encountered along our own faith journeys, the men and women who have loved the church, who have worked tirelessly for the church, the men and women whose own faith journeys have molded and shaped our own, the men and women who we saw time and time again walking humbly with their God. We expect to experience God when we are in their midst, when we remember them and their service to the church because we already do. Their examples of faith have become foundations for us, have become stepping stones for us along our own journeys of faith. And that is not a bad thing! We just know that there are certain people in whom we expect to experience God more than others when they are in our midst, when they are in our hearts and when they are on our minds because we already do experience God more when they are in our midst.

But what about the rest of us? Do we expect God to be found and experienced among the rest of us? We certainly would not call ourselves the saints of the church. And we would probably be the first to admit that more often than not we fall very short of this image that we have of the saints of the church. So if that’s

the case, and since we don't like to think that we would fall into that category of saint, is there any hope of finding God among the rest of us, the unexpected people?

I'll be honest, as a child, I thought that if I went into ministry, it would be a sure fire way that I could definitely get into heaven. I thought maybe when Saint Peter asked me if I had been a "good Christian person" all my life, then I could at least respond with "Well, no, but I served in ministry!" and then maybe he would let me sneak in the back door. I have never felt like that I was one of those "good Christian people", people who I thought had a direct line to God. And to this day, I am still not sure I would put myself in that category nor am I comfortable with having this title placed upon me. I'm just not sure if I fit the mold of that type of person, you know, the type of person that one expects to find God through and in or experience God just because he or she is in our midst. I'm just not sure that I am that type of expected person. So where does that leave me, the unexpected? Is there any hope that others will experience God through me, through us, the unexpected?

And the answer to that question can be found in our Scripture today. I invite you to turn to Exodus 3 and 4 and hear this part of the story of Moses.

Read the Scripture

I love this story because I have always had a soft spot for Moses. because I have felt a connection with him. he is such a kindred spirit for me. So often I have

been able to relate to his hesitancy and reluctance at accepting his call from God. So often as I have continued with my faith journey, I have felt like Moses standing at the burning bush, hearing God call and then turning around to see if hopefully God was speaking to someone else-someone more suited for the job, only to find out, nope-God was talking to me.

I have often asked myself, “Surely, God doesn’t expect me, the one who doesn’t quite fit the mold of a “good Christian person” to be the one who goes out and helps others experience God through my inadequate words, through my awkward actions. Surely God doesn’t think others will experience God through me. I’m no saint. I’m part of the unexpected group. Surely God there is someone better suited than me! Someone who is wiser, someone who can quote Scripture, someone who doesn’t fall short of this image of a “good Christian person”. Surely God there is someone else!

But every time when I finally turn around, there is only me and God is speaking to me. I’m sure none of you have ever felt like that. This sermon is probably more for me anyway but I’ll ask for a little grace. I’ll ask that you stick with me while I try to figure out why God thinks God can use me, the one who doesn’t fit the mold, the one who is part of the unexpected group. While I try to figure out why God thinks God can use me to help others experience the Kingdom of God in their midst.

Come to think of it-Maybe that's why I really feel connected with Moses. It's because of his imperfections and his humanity. Maybe that's why I like the Moses' story because it reminds me that God can do all things and that God can use even the most unexpected people like Moses and like me to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Because let's face it-Even though Moses is lifted up as a saint of the church, lifted up as an example of faith-the guy who lead the people out of Egypt, the guy who had one of the closest connections with God, the guy who gave us the ten commandments, even though Moses did all those things-Moses was still human, imperfect and far from being a saint.

In his lifetime, Moses killed a guy. Moses fled responsibility. And more importantly, Moses disobeyed direct orders from God. Most of us think that Moses didn't get to go into the promise land because he killed a guy but that is not the case. The real reason Moses didn't make it into the promise land was because he disobeyed a direct order from God. God told him to speak to a rock and bring water forth but instead, Moses hits the rock, not once but twice to bring forth water. Even after journeying with God for forty years and after speaking with God one on one on multiple occasions, Moses still didn't trust the word of God. He fell short of the perfect image of a "saint of the church." Moses was human. He had flaws. He had faults.

And Moses wasn't the only one. Just look at who God chose to work with here on earth so that the people would know God: Abraham and Sarah-really old, beyond child bearing years, not part of the expected group, Jacob, a liar and a thief, not part of the expected group, David, young and inexperienced, not part of the expected group, Ruth a woman and a foreigner, not part of the expected group. And that's just the Old Testament. Don't get me started on the New Testament. The disciples-a ragtag band of tax collectors and fishermen, one who would deny Jesus, one who would betray Jesus, and the rest would run away when it got a little rough, certainly not part of the expected group, Saul turned Paul-a fanatic for the law of God but not for the love of God, certainly part of the expected group by human standards, but after his conversion, all his friends thought he was crazy and so not part of the expected group, and then we have the first Christians-waiting for Jesus to return, questioning, arguing, wondering, some falling away. On the whole, they were not part of the expected group.

What was God thinking!?! Surely God, there were better more suited people for the job than the ones that you chose, people who fit the mold of a "good Christian person." God-why did you chose so many from the unexpected group when surely you had better choices?

And that's when we realize something that God has known all along. Sure God could use perfect people to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth, but

there are no perfect people! And if there were, the glory would go to them and not to God! No one would experience the life giving and life changing grace of God. Everyone would think it was because that person was so good and so righteous that they could never like that person, so why bother trying? Or maybe if God did use perfect people, then everyone would use the excuse-well, we'll just leave it for that person do to because he or she can really get things done around here. Surely it is not God working to bring the Kingdom of God here on earth. And that is not the case! The good news is that God does not call perfect people into the service for the Kingdom of God because there are no perfect people. God calls the unexpected people. God calls the imperfect people. God calls the ones that don't quite fit the mold to help bring about the glory of God, to help spread the grace of God to all of God's children. People like you and like me.

That's why the Biblical story is so powerful. It tells us about God's grace and God's love but it also tells us about how God does the impossible all the time through imperfect and unexpected people. People who we would call saints of the church, examples of faith but I'm sure if we would ask them, they would have a completely different answer. In fact, I know this for sure. All we have to do is take a look at part of 1st Corinthians: Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men

and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these “nobodies” to expose the hollow pretensions of the “somebodies”? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything that we have—right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ

Paul understood that he was no saint. He understood that he was not perfect. He understood that he was human with faults and flaws! He understood that he was from the unexpected group and he gives thanks for that. He even encourages us to do the same! All because he realizes that it is not because we are perfect that we help people experience God but because we are not that so many people do. So many people experience the perfect love and grace of God through our awkward actions and inadequate words, not because of what we do but because of what God does!

There is this wonderful quote from Dorothy Day that says: “Don’t call me a saint. I don’t want to be dismissed that easily.” When asked why she would say such a thing, Dorothy Day said, “That when they call you a saint, it means basically that you are not to be taken seriously.” Now I share this with you because for many of us, Dorothy Day is a saint. She falls into that category of a “good Christian person” She is a part of that expected group of people in whom we experience God through her writings and her work. She worked tirelessly for the rights of the working, for the poor, and for women. But Dorothy Day would be the first to say she was far from a saint.

In her lifetime, Dorothy Day caused many a scandal. During the 1930's, in a different time and place, she broke many of society's accepted and expected rules. she had an illegal abortion, she was divorced, she wrote for Marxist papers, and she lived with but never married the man with whom she had a daughter. Dorothy Day would probably say she was the least likely to be lifted up as an example of a "good Christian person."

Because she knew the danger in that act. Dorothy Day realized that when we think of someone as a saint, we put them in this exclusive category of the expected group of faith. We put them up on a pedestal and we polish away their imperfections. When in reality all we have done is strip them of their humanity. Day knew that the real beauty and power behind the story of the saints of the church and the saints of our lives was that they were human, imperfect with flaws and faults, just like you and me.

The thing we have to realize and embrace is that it is not in the perfect person that we find God because there is no perfect person. We find God in our humanity and in our imperfections. The thing that inspires our faith and gives us passion for the Kingdom of God is that God knew Moses abilities well and still God called Moses. God knew the disciples' abilities well and still God called them. And the good news is that God knows our abilities well and still God calls us to help others experience the grace and love of God here on earth. God is able to

work even with the most imperfect and unexpected people, like you and me, to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth because that is what God has done all along! Since the beginning of time, God has used the unexpected, the imperfect to share the perfect grace and love of God.

As modern day disciples, We just need to open ourselves up to God's grace and God's love in our own lives to really begin to understand that God really can do the impossible. In fact, we just need to embrace our own faults and flaws to truly begin to understand that God can be found in just about anybody including you and me. In fact, as modern day disciples, we just need to know God and experience God's perfect grace and love in our own lives to know how to serve and to live out our calling as the people of God. .

Because it is not in the perfect nor just in the expected person that we can experience God. We can also find God in our imperfections, our flaws, and our faults. We can find God in all of us, the unexpected saints of the church.

May we embrace our humanity and all our imperfection and maybe by doing so, we are truly able to experience the perfect love and grace of God in our lives and in our world. Amen.