

Acceptance

August 30, 2026

Exodus 3:1-15

¹ Moses was taking care of the flock for his father-in-law Jethro, Midian's priest. He led his flock out to the edge of the desert, and he came to God's mountain called Horeb. ² The Lord's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames, but it didn't burn up. ³ Then Moses said to himself, 'Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't burning up.'

⁴ When the Lord saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses said, "I'm here." ⁵ Then the Lord said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." ⁶ He continued, "I am the God of your father, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I've clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. ⁸ I've come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that's full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. ⁹ Now the Israelites' cries of injustice have reached me. I've seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them. ¹⁰ So get going. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹² God said, "I'll be with you. And this will show you that I'm the one who sent you. After you bring the people out of Egypt, you will come back here and worship God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, “If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they are going to ask me, ‘What’s this God’s name?’ What am I supposed to say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God continued, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God, and Jacob’s God, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me.

Matthew 16:21-28

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. ²² Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: “God forbid, Lord! This won’t happen to you.” ²³ But he turned to Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

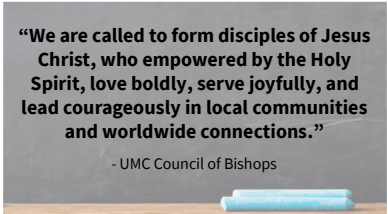
²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. ²⁵ All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them. ²⁶ Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives? ²⁷ For the Human One is about to come with the majesty of his Father with his angels. And then he will repay each one for what that person has done. ²⁸ I assure you that some standing here won’t die before they see the Human One coming in his kingdom.”



Earlier this week, as I read our texts for today, I kept wondering what God in the burning bush or Jesus pulling Peter aside felt like.

There had to be this sense that the person you're talking to might not respond well to what you are saying. But you knew that it was a needed conversation so that this person could move from resistance to acceptance. And, in truth, we've been on the receiving end of these kinds of conversations too. A boss or significant other or even God or the Holy Spirit is speaking to us about something we need to hear or do – and we are quick with all of the reasons why we cannot or should not accept what they are telling us or inviting us into.

As those who profess to follow Jesus, we all have unique gifts and talents that we are called to use in our mission to build the body of Christ and to employ for the building of the kingdom of God here on earth. In the current United Methodist world, the Council of Bishops has articulated this call to mission this way: “We are called to form disciples of Jesus Christ, who empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.” We touched on this earlier this summer, the Sunday after Annual Conference. As we said in mid-June, this is not an easy task to live into.



There are many barriers – cultural, societal, and personal – to loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously. But we are not alone in our efforts. God is with us. We have a community of faith to support us and to walk with us. We acknowledge that some days, accepting this call feels less possible than on other days. Especially on these days, we must lean into God and lean upon our fellow believers in the body of Christ, so that we can continue to strive to grow in faith together as we seek build the kingdom of God here on earth. Counting on God and on one another, we learn and re-learn these lessons in leadership – power, acceptance, conflict, and grace. As we prepare to learn more about the acceptance of our call today, let us begin with a centering prayer. Let us pray...



Eternal God, Moses saw a bush burning in the desert, and he turned aside to look. Jesus is a burning bush. And so we draw near. Your presence radiates in this world; your grace shines in our lives; and so we turn aside to look, to enter upon holy ground, to be in your presence. Speak your living Word to us, O God; our hearts are open. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and that the meditation of all of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

This past week, Kristin and I took my mom and dad to Minnesota to visit and spend time with my brother and his family. On Monday, I looked up the weather for the week ahead: high of 80 degrees, lots of sunshine, minimal rain forecasted. This made me smile as I thought of time relaxing in a place set apart, of cruises around the lake on the pontoon boat, of time spent just being with family. I always love going out on the lake or spending time at the lake front below their home. I'm frequently reminded of the beauty and wonder of God's creation. And as I looked forward to the time beside the lake, I wondered: Was Moses enjoying the scenery as he climbed the mountain, wandering along after his father-in-law's sheep?

As we turn to Exodus 3, I wonder, did Moses take in the majestic mountain and the wide-open skies above it? Did he notice the beauty and solitude that one can find when up high in God's amazing creation? Or was he more worried about the sheep he was watching? As we turn to the opening verses, we see that Moses was aware of what was happening around him. We know this because the story notes that the burning bush caught his eye. I think we often think of Moses seeing the burning bush as a dramatic, sudden event. But Moses would have had to stand there for a little while to notice that the bush wasn't being consumed by the fire. He took the time to notice and then to stop and give this event his attention.

Too often I miss such opportunities in life – too busy, too much to do. What about you?

In verse 3, Moses says to himself, *“Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn’t burning up.”* Now, Moses was not looking for God. In fact, Moses did not want to be found – by God or anyone else. He was in a kind of self-imposed witness protection program. He fled Egypt as news of his killing an Egyptian became public knowledge. At this point in his life, his old life in Pharaoh’s palace was a distant memory. Right now, all he wanted to do was watch these sheep as he plodded up the mountain – until he notices the burning bush.

Having gotten Moses’ attention, God called out to Moses. Underscoring the significance of this moment, God told Moses, *“Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground.”* Clueing Moses in further, God told him that the one speaking to him was also the God of your father and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We tend to think of Moses as one of the greatest leaders in the Old Testament. And he was. But at this point in his life, well, this is likely Moses’ introduction to God. Remember, he was raised as an Egyptian in Pharaoh’s household from the time he was weaned. He knew he was born a Hebrew, yes, but he was raised as Egyptian royalty. Moses might have heard of God, but that was probably as far as it went. That part, *“the God of your father,”* was God’s way of establishing a family connection for Moses. At this point, Moses hides his face in fear.

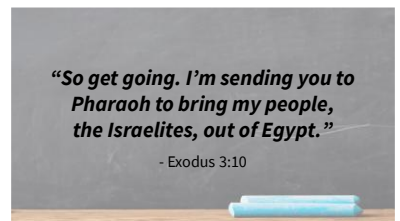
God continues to speak. God has seen what is going on back in Egypt and God has come to help. God says, *“I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain.”* Moses could relate to all of this. It is what led him to kill that cruel Egyptian task master years ago. God has heard their cries and God has seen the oppression happening to them. God can feel their pain.

“I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain.”

- Exodus 3:7

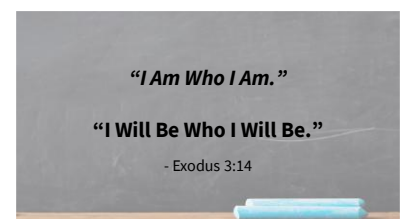
This is not the least bit surprising. God has, is, and will always stand against all injustice and violence and oppression. But God does not end it. That is our job. God opens our eyes and hearts to the injustice, violence, and oppression around us and in our world. And then God sends us to intervene. Moses just did not understand this about God quite yet.

God has come to rescue the Hebrews and to return them to their ancestral lands – to the place they left long ago as a severe famine settled in over that whole region, to the lands promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Continuing to verse 9, God reiterates how God has seen the injustices and the oppression. And then God says to Moses, *“So get going. I’m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”* Imagine how that bombshell landed in Moses’ heart and mind!



Not surprisingly, Moses reacts as you or I would react given a similar mission. Excuse me? Are you sure you have the right person? Why me, God? And Moses has just met God for the first time, at least for all practical purposes. And God’s response: *“I’ll be with you.”* That’s great and all, God. But still – me? Are you sure about this? Moses’ refusal to accept this sudden call upon his life continues. Moses says to God, if the Israelites want to know who sent me, what am I going to say to them? Moses knows that he was never really a part of them. Sure, he was born a Hebrew but he did not grow up as one. Most would not even know who he was.

Moses asks for God’s name. At least he could, if he were ever to accept this invitation, he could tell them who sent him. God tells Moses, *“I Am Who I Am.”* This can also be translated: *“I Will Be Who I Will Be.”* This is more of a description than an actual name. In Hebrew, this is often rendered “YHWH” or Yahweh when we pronounce it.



This name is considered so holy by the Hebrew people, they do not ever speak it. In the scriptures, they do not even write it. Wherever we find “the LORD” in our Bibles, Lord all in capital letters, it is a substitute for this most holy name for God. At the end of today’s Exodus passage, God adds this: *“This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me.”* It truly is. In the New Testament, in John’s gospel, Jesus gives us seven “I am” statements. He is connecting to this eternal name and nature of God in these statements.

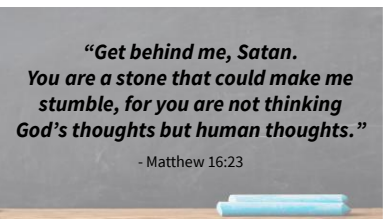


At this point, Moses is a reluctant participant. Acceptance of this role has not yet fully come. In time, it will. This scenario plays out in our lives at time. We know that God is calling us and we know that God will go with us. But... So, we begin to respond to the call before fully accepting the call, knowing that this is God’s plan and that God is with us and that God will see it through. At some point, Moses will fully accept the call laid on him there at the burning bush. He accepted both the joy and the burden of being where God wanted him to be. But it couldn’t have been easy. It usually is not. For more on this, we turn to Matthew 16 and to Peter’s interaction with Jesus.

As we turn to Matthew 16:21-28, we remember that Peter had just gotten his gold star for his proclamation that Jesus was *“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* The keys to the kingdom of God were probably just beginning to burn a hole in his pocket. Peter was still likely basking in the glow of being renamed the “Rock” and being identified as the foundation of Jesus’ coming church. The other disciples were probably celebrating right alongside Peter, perhaps envisioning their starring secondary roles in this new thing, this “church.” All of this would have made what Jesus talked about next, well, hard to hear. Never mind to accept.

“From that time” – from that celebratory day on – Jesus began showing his disciples how he must *“suffer many things”* and how he *“had to be killed and raised on the third day.”* In Peter’s mind and likely in all of the disciples’ minds, this was not what a Messiah was supposed to do. In the back of Peter’s mind, from the moment that it occurred to him that Jesus really was the one, Peter’s vision had victory at the forefront. Victory over the religious leaders, victory over the Roman oppressors. Peter imagined, again, as most of the disciples probably did, Jesus using his power and authority to make things right, to establish justice in Israel. So this talk of suffering and death and of this rising on the third day – whatever that meant – well, it had to have been really hard to hear coming from Jesus.

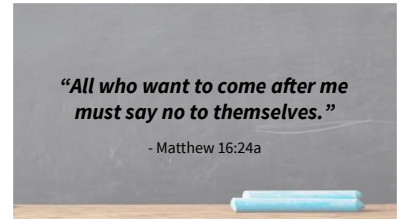
But, Jesus, he knew how power worked. He knew that those who fight for justice and for love and for belonging for all people, they were likely to experience persecution and oppression and maybe even death. Jesus knew that the powers-that-be would not change or yield their power easily. Poor Peter. He did not yet understand this. We do not know all of what Peter said to Jesus, but we do know that he pulled Jesus aside and scolded him. Peter tried to correct what Jesus was saying about suffering and death and all that. Peter even forbids it from happening. It is then that Jesus says to Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”*



That had to be quite the shock for Peter. Probably even more so than God telling Moses out of the blue to “get going.” In that moment, Peter was trying to stand in the way of everything that Jesus had come to accomplish: to practice sacrificial love, to show the vulnerability of true power, to live out the way of surrender and service. It is no wonder that Jesus reacts so strongly to Peter’s words of correction and forbidding.

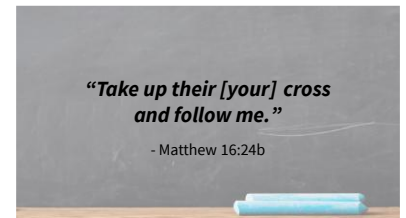
As we turn to the second half of our gospel lesson, to verses 24-28, Jesus teaches the disciples and us what sacrificial love, true power, and the way of surrender and service looks like when lived out fully. Jesus' teaching begins with this instruction:

"All who want to come after me must say no to themselves." Other translations say, "Deny yourself." This does not mean to belittle or diminish yourself or to neglect yourself or to abandon who you are. It



does invite us to let go of our insatiable desire for power, security, and privilege. It does invite us to let go of our egos and our self-centeredness. It invites us to center our lives on God's plans and purposes for us, becoming willing to suffer for the sake of justice and love.

Jesus' next instruction in this: *"Take up their [your] cross and follow me."* This is not something we "bear," some annoyance, like that uncle who talks way too much at family gatherings. The cross –

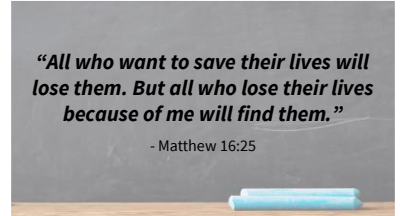


there was and is a dual meaning in these words. In Jesus' day the cross was both the preferred instrument of state-sponsored terrorism and it was the price of love in a system that rewards selfishness. This second truth is still at play for us today when we are willing to take up our cross. The price remains the same in our culture that rewards selfishness.

For us, the cross still represents our willingness to suffer for the sake of love and justice. Jesus continues to call his disciples to the place of self-denial and sacrifice, to the point of giving one's life. This does not just mean dying. My friends, Jesus is talking about any experience of self-giving or surrender to the call of love and justice. And, friends, this is not something that we do for ourselves. It is not about us. It is about loving and giving of self for the other. In God's call to Moses at the burning bush, here was his cross to take up: "I want you to help my people be free. It will cost you, but it will be worth it. I will be with you."

The same is true for us. When we take up our cross, it really isn't our cross. It is Jesus' cross. He'll be with us and he will carry the weight of it all the way.

And Jesus' last instruction: *"All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them."* Put another way, cling to your worldly life now and lose it; let go of your life now and find true life in Christ. We can become so caught up in protecting and holding onto our security, power, and privilege that we shield ourselves from love and issues of injustice. To enter into places and people's lives where love and justice are lacking or are not present, that is to put at risk our sense of security, power, and privilege.



Only when the shields come down can we become vulnerable, lovingly present, and engaged in true life. This true life is abundant and infinite and eternal.

When we accept God's call on our lives, when we surrender our life to love and justice, God gives us a life that is abundant and infinite and eternal. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When has rebuke or conviction in your walk of faith led to growth and maturity in your faith (as it did eventually for Peter)? How is this a lesson to share with others?
- 2) *Pray*. Who or what group of people are you hesitant to accept as they are? How might spending time in prayer (please do) change how you perceive this person or group?
- 3) *Study*. Read Exodus 4:10-17. When or how have you recently tried to deny or refuse God's call on your life? What "signs" has God provided that helped you step up?