“We Have Heard”

Exodus 1:8-14, 3:1-15

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Since the beginning of September, we have listened to the stories of Creation, of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Today we are going to focus our attention on Moses. A generation before the birth of Moses, Joseph had died, the old king of Egypt, who knew Joseph had died, and Egypt had a new king. The Israelites living in Egypt had multiplied to the point that they outnumbered the Egyptians. The king felt threatened; therefore he enslaved them and also instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill all the boy babies; thus eliminating the threat of the Israelites continuing to populate Egypt.

Moses was born to a Hebrew, but instead of being killed as instructed by the king, he was allowed to live and was hidden in the reeds along the bank of the river, only to be found, rescued and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter. For the first forty years of his life, Moses lived in the palace as an Egyptian.

In today’s scripture we find Moses in the desert tending a flock owned by his father-in-law. In the desert tending a flock was a long way from the comfortable life he had lived earlier. Moses had fled to the desert because he had murdered an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew who was working the forced labor of the Israelites. He thought he had covered his deed by burying the man in the sand, but someone had seen him because the next day as he attempted to stop two Hebrew men from fighting, and they told him they were going to report the murder to the king; therefore, Moses fled to the desert to the land of Median. These two attempts of trying to keep one person from hurting, or bullying another, gives us a picture of a compassion for peace that was in the heart of Moses.

There he encountered more bullying and again he stepped in to stop it.

He was nearby when the seven daughters of the priest of Median came to draw water for their father’s flock and were driven away by some shepherds who also had flocks and had come for water. Moses intervened and he drove the shepherds away and drew water for the seven sisters. In return the priest sent for Moses and welcomed him into his home, and later gave him one of his daughters in marriage.

It was while Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law that he encountered the burning bush and answered the call given to him by God. God had heard the cries of his people and he had chosen Moses to lead his people out of bondage. Scripture tells us that an Angel of the Lord appeared in the form of a burning bush. Did Moses run away and hide? No, he stopped to look, to inspect the happening, to try to figure out why the bush was burning and yet was not being consumed by the flame. Then God called his name. Moses answered, “Here, I am.” God then called him to come closer and to remove his sandals because he was standing on Holy Ground. God continued the conversation with, “I am the God of your Father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” God told him he was aware of the people’s suffering and had come to deliver them by choosing Moses to be their leader. He promised Moses he would be with him.

Since the people of Egypt worshiped many Gods, and the Israelites were very aware of this, Moses was extremely concerned with how he was going to convince the Israelite people that the God who had spoken to him was the God of their ancestors. When Moses asked him, “What is your name?” and God replied, “I Am who I Am.” This is my name forever, and my name for all generations. This was all the information Moses was given when he was standing barefoot at the foot of Horeb, the Mountain of God, with his father-in-law’s flock. I wonder if Moses was extremely confused or somewhat befuddled.

The name I Am indicates that there is only one I Am, one God of the Israelites. The God who is calling the shepherd to obey the call and lead his people out of bondage--is the God of all.

What would we have done, had we been in Moses’ sandals? Would we have said, “Here I am Lord?”

This brings us to the present. We may not see bushes burning that are not consumed by the fire, but we do see and read about injustices occurring daily. Each time we see an injustice and recognize it as an injustice, we have an opportunity to act. The action may start with a prayer, but prayer is action. The recognition that changes need to be made is a burning bush for us. It is an opportunity to spread God’s love.

PCUSA has designated the month of October as a month to seek peace and justice worldwide for all oppressed peoples. We at 1st. Presbyterian have elected to set aside Sunday, Oct. 19 as a Sunday to hear a representative from Hays-Caldwell Women’s Center speak to us about the needs of battered and abused women. At that time we will be given an opportunity to give an offering to aid in the healing of those women as they receive counseling, education and emergency assistance.

There are many burning bushes throughout the world and here at home that seek our attention. When we see one of those burning bushes and we feel an emotion of anger, fear or compassion, will we hear God’s call, and will we answer with Here I Am Lord, as Moses did.