

What Have We Gotten Ourselves Into?
Exodus 3:1-6, Matthew 16:13-16, 21-26
August 30, 2020
First Presbyterian, Luling

When we moved from Gonzales from Buda, the house was smaller. That wasn't such a big deal. We had never filled up the house in Gonzales, and our stuff fit just fine in Buda. What was a big deal was that the garage in Buda was smaller. Much smaller. Our garage in the parsonage in Gonzales was gigantic, with a built in workbench, three separate closets, shelving, and inexplicably, wood paneling on all the walls and the ceiling. Except for it being poorly lit on account of the dark wood paneling and single lightbulb, that garage in Gonzales was the stuff of dreams. Anything we needed to fit in there, fit. Cars, trash, lawn equipment, tricycles, big wheels, anything. So when we moved to Buda, we had a problem.

You see, when Andy and I got married, we made some vows on the side, kind of. Among other things, we vowed to each other that we would never have fake animals in the yard. And we vowed that, were we ever so fortunate as to have a garage, we would park both cars in it. And we had managed to do so up until the point that we moved to Buda. There was barely room for both cars and nothing else. No place for the rolling trash cans. We moved them to the back porch and toted them back and forth to the curb for the whole three years we lived there. There was no place for the toolchest. It is on casters, completely metal, 5 or 6 drawers, about 4 feet tall, maybe 18 inches deep and two feet wide. Hefty.

I had what I thought was a creative and genius idea. We didn't use the toolchest that often, especially with no room to work in the garage. Our most frequently used tools could hang on the wall, and we could free up floor space by moving the toolchest to the attic. That isn't as ridiculous as it sounds. We had access to the attic through a normal door in the upstairs closet, and there was plenty of decking that would easily hold the toolchest. Our only obstacle was getting it upstairs. We pulled out all the drawers to make it lighter. Andy got one end—the top if I remember correctly—and I got the other. We began making our way upstairs. There were 14 steps. At about step 7, I started to wonder if we were going to make it. It was really really heavy. Andy and I traded places. That didn't help. It was still really really heavy. Going down wasn't any easier than going up, because we couldn't just let it go—it would have crashed into a window and probably broken it. And going back down step by step would have probably meant one of us was falling down the stairs with a metal toolchest on top of them. So there we were. Stuck. Couldn't just take it back to the garage. Couldn't imagine that our muscles would hold out long enough to get it the rest of the way up the stairs. Couldn't let it go to call someone for help. Worst of all, it was my smart idea in the first place. What had we gotten ourselves into? It was way way way more difficult than we had imagined when I thought of this brilliant, creative plan. And we'd gotten ourselves in far enough that there was no escaping the mess, except going through it.

Our two readings for today are two good examples of people having to say to themselves "What have I gotten myself into?" or even worse, like me, "What have I gotten US into?" The call of Moses is a classic call story. This same outline of God calling people happens to multiple prophets in the Old Testament and on into the New, with the angel appearing to Mary. God appears to the person, in this case in the bush that was on fire but was not consumed and calls Moses to liberate the people from slavery in Egypt. To his credit—at least, I think it's to his credit—Moses doesn't agree right away. He seems to realize, from the very first, that this is a big job and doubts his own ability to fulfill the calling. God reassures him, a little after we stopped reading, "I will be with you," and eventually Moses agrees. We know how that story plays out—Moses does indeed liberate the people from enslavement, but then they wander in the wilderness for forty years and Moses himself never gets to see the Promised Land. Though he doesn't say it in these words exactly, I think Moses must have thought—probably more than once—"what have I gotten myself into? What have I gotten all of us into? What have we gotten

ourselves into?” It was all harder and more complicated than he had realized, and he had thought he had a grasp of how hard it would be.

Peter’s predicament is a little different, but he’s also looking around thinking “What have I gotten myself into?” We went back and picked up a few verses from last week’s reading. Jesus asks the disciples, “who do you say that I am?” and Peter bursts out with something that is, for once, the right thing to say instead of the wrong thing. “You are the Messiah!” he says, and Jesus commends him, tells him that he will be the foundation on which the church is built.

In the very next moment, Peter reveals that he has no idea what he has said. He knows what he meant by Messiah. He meant a political, military, strong, liberating figure. Somebody victorious. And maybe Peter’s been counting his chickens before they hatch, figuring that if he is a loyal follower of a victorious and powerful Messiah, then Peter himself might get his own power and prestige. Maybe he hasn’t gotten that far in his thought process.

But when Jesus starts to describe the suffering and death of the Messiah, Peter again bursts out, this time with “no, no, no, Jesus, this can’t be what happens to you. You’re the Messiah!” Again, if Peter has already started counting his chickens, then he surely can see his plans fall apart, and worse—if he’s associated with someone who becomes an enemy of the state, then he himself is in danger. Jesus makes that even clearer with what he says next: “Get behind me, Satan!” I would say that is Jesus speaking in the strongest terms. Surely Peter thinks, “What have I gotten myself into? Two minutes ago, I had the right answer, and now something has gone horribly wrong.”

Following Jesus doesn’t mean power and prestige. Following Jesus means denying oneself, taking up the cross that will surely come, focusing on divine things rather than human things, and even losing one’s life.

What have we gotten ourselves into? If we are hanging out with Moses, we’ve got wandering and hardship ahead of us. If we’re hanging out with Peter, we’ve got denial of ourselves and crosses ahead of us. What have we gotten ourselves into, answering God’s call, following Jesus?

God’s answer to Moses is the reassurance we need. “I will be with you.” Jesus himself says something similar “For where two or three are gathered, I am there in the midst of them.” No matter what we’ve gotten ourselves into, whether it’s trouble of our own making, or trouble we’ve found by following Jesus, we aren’t stuck in the trouble alone. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.