

*Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Reading the call stories of people in the Bible is always something of an adventure because 99% of the time, the person being called either outright tells God, “No” or “I can’t do that - go find somebody else.” And we usually laugh because we know how the story ends - that the person God calls eventually agrees and goes.

But what we learn is that even though the person being called may not have confidence in their own abilities to do the work, *God* has confidence in them.

And in the call stories, what develops is a relationship of deep trust between God and the person God is calling.

In the reading from Exodus, we’ve jumped ahead a couple of hundred years from when last week’s reading took place. But the story of Moses has its roots at the end of the book of Genesis, when the ancient Israelites moved to Egypt during a famine.

They essentially sold themselves into slavery in exchange for grain, so that they and their livestock could survive. And for a while, things were fine because Joseph, Jacob’s favorite son, was high-up in the Egyptian government.

But that changed after Joseph died and a new pharaoh came into power. This pharaoh didn’t know Joseph and was afraid that the Israelites would overtake the Egyptians. So, he encouraged his people to deal harshly with the Israelites. And he also called for all Israelite boys to be killed at birth.

But Moses was spared. He was rescued from the Nile and eventually raised in Pharaoh’s household. He ran away after killing an Egyptian taskmaster that was mistreating an Israelite slave. Which is where our reading begins.

We only get the very beginning of Moses' call story. As his story unfolds beyond our reading, he protests - a lot.

But before we even get to that, he wants to know who's asking. Moses directly asked God, "What's your name? Who am I supposed to say sent me?"

God recognized this as a plea for assurance. So, when God answers, "I am who I am" it was more than just a declaration of a name. It was also the assurance of God's presence in the call.

In English, "I am who I am" is an awkward name. In Biblical times, God's name was considered to be too holy to pronounce, so it was read as *adonai*, or "Lord" in scripture. Other scholars found the name to be untranslatable, so they wrote out the Hebrew as *ehyeh-asher-ehyeh*. From which we get YHWH.

Even after God's name was revealed, Moses still didn't agree to go right away. He had reasons for why not, he negotiated, and God said Aaron could go with and help. But even before Moses said "yes," he knew that God would be with him the whole way.

And that experience of God's faithfulness deepened throughout Moses' call. God taught him what he needed to know, and even what to say, at every step in the journey. And even when Moses made mistakes, because there were a couple, God didn't abandon him.

Their relationship continued to deepen. And God's faithfulness in Moses remained throughout call and throughout his life.

Each of us has a story about how we came to do what we do. And within our stories is the story of God's faithfulness - how we experienced it, the difference it makes in our work and in our relationship with God.

My core memories of my mom working are as an RN. If she did anything before that, I don't remember it. But I have faint memories

of her when she went to nursing school. It was long ago enough that when she graduated, she had the old-school white uniform and funky hat.

After graduating, she worked in a few different places, but most of her career was spent working in kidney dialysis clinics. I don't know if she picked that specialty, or if it picked her. But she seemed to enjoy it, and she did it well.

One of the things she really liked about it was that she got to know her patients and their families. They shared about their weekends, family photos and events. For any of you that works in healthcare, or if you've received long-term healthcare, you know that that's a special relationship.

On the day after Christmas one year, I was home on break from school, she called the house from work and said, "I'll explain later, but I need you to get these things out of the pantry, and pull these things out of the big freezer." And she gave me a specific list of items to bring to her as soon as I had them together.

Mom always stocked up on food items when they were on sale, so there was always plenty on hand. So, I gathered the stuff and took it to her at the clinic. And she said, "I'll see you at home later."

It turns out that she had asked one of her patients that day how her Christmas was. And the woman responded, "Well, not very good." And she shared that on Christmas Eve, while they were at church, someone broke into their home and stole not only their Christmas presents but also their food. Not just Christmas dinner, but *all* of their food.

She didn't ask my mom for help. My mom just did it.

We tend to think that only pastors and other religious leaders are called by God, and that just isn't true. We also tend to think that

God only calls people through dramatic “burning bush” type moments. That also isn’t true.

Some people know *exactly* what they are born to do. Whether they recognize it as such or not, God’s call for them is as much a part of them as breathing, and they don’t need to be convinced of it. For others, it takes more time to develop. And for others, God needs to get their attention somehow. And others still, are called to many different things throughout their lives.

Martin Luther reminds us that, regardless of the work we’re called to do in the world, *each Christian* - not each Lutheran, but *each Christian* - within their work, is called to love and serve their neighbors. And in the gospels, Jesus is abundantly clear about the definition of “neighbor.”

In our work, whatever it is, there’s no hierarchy; no one’s work is more important than another’s. The only difference is what we do.

And when we fulfill our work through the lens of loving and serving our neighbors, it’s no longer just a job or an occupation. It’s a calling, a vocation. A summons from God.

Each of us has a story about how we came to do what we do - or *did*, if you’re retired. Maybe it was your actual job; maybe it was volunteer or service work you did in the community. But within our stories is the story of God’s faithfulness - how we experienced it, the difference it made. It’s woven through them.

When we do our work with the awareness of God’s presence in it, it not only has an effect on how we approach the work, it also deepens our relationship with God. And we discover that even when we may not have the confidence in our own abilities, *God* has confidence in them.

Because when God calls us, and God *does* call each of us, it’s because God knows us. God knows our gifts, because God gave them

to us. God knows our hearts, and knows what we're capable of doing. And when God calls us, God doesn't just take off afterwards and leave us to figure it out on our own.

God remains with us in the work, and in our lives, every step of the way.

Thanks be to God! Amen.