

Preached by Jen Reiff  
Director of Family & Adult Ministries  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, Virginia  
September 9, 2007

Matthew 5:13–16  
Exodus 4:1-17

## UNLEASHING HOLINESS

This morning's Old Testament reading from Exodus is the story of Moses and the burning bush. We're going to pick up the story about halfway through. God has just appeared to Moses in the burning bush and has told Moses of the suffering of his people, the Israelites, in Egypt ... and that he is calling Moses to deliver them from Egypt to the Promised Land. Moses is a little hesitant and says "Who am I to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" and God says, "Don't worry, I will be with you."

And now reading at Chapter 4 ...

I love this story. Moses is freaking out about what God is calling him to do. And keep in mind, God is calling this guy who is a bad public speaker and who can't ever find the correct words when speaking ... so certainly it makes logical sense to send this same person to rescue thousands of people from slavery in Egypt, right? No! It's like asking the kid who gets picked last in gym class to play quarterback for the football team. You just don't do that. But God calls the unlikely suspect to do His work. This isn't the first or the last time God does this in the Bible – look at Jesus' disciples. He left the spread of Christianity to a motley crew of blue collar fisherman. Small, weak, David defeats the giant Goliath. Sarah gave birth to Isaac long after she was of age to bare children. There's a little saying that goes, "God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called." And that is what God is doing here for Moses.

So Moses is still a little freaked out and wondering what is going to happen when no one believes him. God gives him these three little signs to show people he's for real, which quite frankly make me not want to run into Moses in a dark alley. He's going to turn his staff into a snake, he can give his hand a skin disease by pulling it out of his coat, and he can make river water turn into blood. Now if you ask me, these are some pretty cool signs that God is in control, but Moses starts to doubt himself. He throws out his slow speech and slow speaking as an excuse for why he's just not right for the job. God lays into him a little bit and says, "Look. Who do you think gives you speech and the words to say? Me!" God assures Moses that He is going to be there for him and will be his words in his mouth.

And this is why I love Moses—Moses is me; because after all of that, Moses says one of the best lines in scripture, "Oh my Lord, please send someone else." He's going, "Ok, God, seriously ... I appreciate the whole snake and staff thing, and that leprosy trick is pretty cool, but I just don't think I'm your man."

What is our excuse? What is our excuse for not doing what God calls us to do? We all do it. Maybe you have the same excuse as Moses—maybe you feel ill-equipped to do the task or you don't think you have the gifts to do the work of God. Maybe you don't possibly have *another* hour to give during the week. Maybe you've already "done the kid thing" and you'd rather not deal with those young folk. Maybe you're just not sure how you are going to squeeze those last dollars from your already tight budget to make a pledge in a few weeks. Maybe it's just not the

right year for you ... next year should be better. Or maybe you're thinking, I've done this for years, it's time for the next generation to come in and take over. What is your excuse?

We won't even go into the laundry list of excuses I've given to God over the years—the reasons why “I can't.” I can tell you something though ... if Jesus knocked on my door tomorrow and asked me why I haven't followed through on all the things God has called me to do over the years and if I were honest with Him, I'd feel pretty embarrassed to tell Him all the excuses I've convinced myself were legitimate.

Maybe the better question this morning is not *what is your excuse?* But instead, *what are you being called to do?* It's no secret that today is Christian Education Kick-Off Sunday and it's no secret the message I am giving directly relates to Christian Education at Bush Hill. The Christian Education & Nurture Committee and I have prayed for months about the future of our ministries and programs here. And while we have no clue what the future holds for 10 years down the road, we know for certain that for today, we want to strive towards a community where *everyone* is a contributor and *everyone* is a consumer of their faith. Being a community who shares the stories of their faith with each other. Being a community who pushes each other to grow deeper in our spirituality. Being a community who can come together and learn as one body. Being a community who recognizes the contributions of all ages—infants, children, youth, adults, and our seasoned and respected elders.

I have two challenges for you this morning.

The first is to find somewhere new to share your faith with others—to be a contributor to our faith community, the salt of the earth. Several months ago I wrote an article in the TEMPO about the “Over 21 Club”—no that is not a reference to Carl's sermon about Wild Grapes a few weeks ago—in which I challenged the adults in our congregation who were over the age of 21 to be involved in some way with the life of someone under the age of 21 in our church. I hold that same challenge for you adults today. Whether you believe it or not, your contributions are essential to the spiritual growth of our young people. Sign up to eat dinner with the children from Wednesday Club or to assist with that worship service. Join a youth ministry team to help lead a small group once a month. Contact Jill Sullivan to let her know you'd like to help love and care for infants in our nursery once every few weeks. Become a mentor for a confirmation student. Commit to pray for our college students while they are away at school. Participate in Sunday Seekers and get to know the child who sits next to you each week.

And youth and children. I'm not leaving you out either ... although sometimes I think you get this more than we adults do. Just because you are under the age of 21 doesn't mean you shouldn't be involved in many of the ways the adults are. So many of you already serve in the nursery, at enrichment, during Wednesday Club each week, by teaching the Confirmation class, by praying for the leadership in our congregation, and by attending Sunday Seekers.

This morning when you leave worship you will find many tables set up in the narthex with different ways you can use your gifts God has given you for ministry at Bush Hill—for ways you can connect with others to let your light shine. I considered locking the doors and not letting you out of the building so you *had* to attend, but I'm just going to trust you not to bolt. Stay, talk to the people at the tables who are already serving in these ways and find a new place this year where you can serve.

I still have my second challenge for you, in case you have forgotten ... or maybe you were just hoping that I did. You cannot pour out from your cup unless your cup is full, and so my second

challenge this morning is for you to find a way to fill your own cup. Some of the hardest moments in my life are those when I was spiritually dead—those times when I thought I heard God calling through the mess that was my life, but I just didn't feel like I was in any place spiritually to do the things the Lord was calling me to do. Fill your cup. Find a small group or Bible study to join. Commit to attend the Fall Retreat. Decide as a family to go through the journey of Confirmation together as a smaller body. Take a leap of faith and be a part of Sunday Seekers this fall. I don't care *what* you do, but make a commitment to nourish yourself regularly through the study of God's Word with other Christians.

We didn't finish talking about the story of Moses. Last we left him he was making his plea to God to "please find someone else." We didn't talk about how God gets pretty ticked at Moses for making excuses and then assures him once more that He will equip him with everything he needs for the journey. I've got good news. Moses finally must have trusted God because most of us know the ending to that story—Moses does lead God's people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land in that whole parting of the Red Sea incident. Moses is faithful to the call and in the end God rewards an entire nation of His people.

My prayer this morning for our congregation is for you to be faithful to God's call—for you to embrace the gifts and weaknesses with which you've been blessed and to actively use them for ministry. And for you to see that even though you are an unlikely suspect, God has a plan for you in His Church.

Amen.