

Calvary United Methodist Church  
August 25, 2019

**MOSES: A FRIEND OF GOD**  
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

**Children's Message:**

Exodus 3:11-12

I invite our children and all their book bags to come up to the front. Children and the blessing of the backpacks here if you would like to come up front. Good to see so many of you here this morning. Good to have so many of you. Goodness, everybody must really be getting ready for school that starts this week.

So, today I'm going to tell you a story about someone else who had some challenges because going to school can be a challenge. How many of you are going to a new school this year? How many of you have some new teachers that you have never met before? And you are excited to meet some new friends? All that, as much as it's good, is kind of scary for some. For some it is quite exciting.

All through life of all the things I want you to remember today that no matter what you are facing, God goes with you and God is your friend. He's my friend. He's all of our friend if we want to call on him wherever we are. So, I want to share the story about a man named Moses and this man wasn't feeling good about what God wanted him to do. He wanted him to go to speak to someone. Now, some people come up here and they are fine speaking and acting and I know we have actors and actresses here this day, and some people are fine with being on stage. But other people get a little more shy. They would rather do things in the back. And he said:

But Moses said to God, "I'm not a great man. Why should I be the one to go to the king and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" God said, "I will be with you."

So, that's what I am trying to say. You might be worried about a new teacher, worried about new friends, worries about new schools and God says: I've got this. I'm your God. I am going to be with you wherever you go. It's going to be okay.

And so when we face these challenges, I want you to remember what it would have been like to be Moses. He had a very difficult life growing up as a little boy. His whole nation of people grew up in slavery and yet he was pulled aside to be raised in a palace. But he chose rather than to live in that palace forever to follow the path that God would have for him. And his lesson to us is that all the days ahead of his life, whenever he faced a challenge, like going to school, going to a new place, meeting new people, he trusted that God would be with him.

He at one point actually had to go and speak before a king. That would be like here in America having to talk to the top leaders of our state or our national or federal governments. That's

kind of a scary thought, because those people, they are trained and they are directors. There was so much responsibility that sometimes we think we are less than them, but we really aren't because we are the people who put them in those offices. And God says: Look, you are a gift. Wherever you go, I am with you. You shouldn't have to worry about those things.

And God knew that Moses wasn't perfect. There is no one in this room that is perfect, do you know that? I remember going to school and when I went there there was always someone who could do better in some tests. Have you ever met folks like that? Maybe they are better in science or math or history or sociology or some subject. And sometimes you go out and there are others and you think: I'm going to be the best ball player or whatever sport it is and there is someone better there. One of the things I have learned about God's expectation for us, and it's probably your family, you don't need to be perfect, right? There is nobody in this room perfect, but what God does ask is that we give our very best.

So, when you go to school, your teachers and your coaches and the people who train you on multiple things, they want you to give your best even if you aren't the very best. There might be someone who runs faster, there might be someone who can play a musical instrument better. There might be someone in theater or in dance or some other kind of instruction that does it better than you.

But you know what I also learned? Can a ball player of any sport or any individual in music group or anybody in theater or anyone else, can they do it all alone? No. Sometimes there are other people in the field. Sometimes it is the spectators that cheer them on. Some people are behind the scenes doing things. None of us can do everything we do alone. We do it better when we are in unity, when we pull together and when we help each other because we are greater together than we are on our own.

So, we don't have to be perfect, right? What do we have to do? Give our best, always try to give our best.

I'll read this for you: God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. So when we have a bad day, God just wants us to know: I am with you. Don't worry. God says: I love you no matter what!

**Message:** Deuteronomy 34:7-12  
I've been sharing a variety of characters from the scriptures lately and the one today is Moses. "Let my people go." We often know of him as the person who lead the people out of slavery into new life and I share this word today from Deuteronomy 34.

(Deuteronomy 34:7-12)

What would it be like to be a friend of God? Well, you know it because you are a friend of God. You speak to him every day, you pray to God all the time I would assume throughout

the day, not just morning and night. When we think of our lives, at least for me, I think of a constant relationship with a very loving God who is present for us.

We can't quite imagine, at least I can't, what Moses' life was like. And I am going to give you a little bit of the history. It was a time when the Pharaoh, the king at the time, was getting a little concerned that the people of God, who were his slaves, the Israelites at that time, were growing in numbers. They had been in slavery for multiple generations and as they grew in number the king finally said: if we don't do something about this, there are going to be more of the slaves than us and that could be problems. So he ordered like the kings did later when Jesus was born that all male born Hebrew children were to be killed at birth. Can't imagine that, can we?

So, his mother had given birth and when she gave birth she didn't care what the people of Pharaoh's military were saying. She hid her son for about three months. Finally she put him in a basket, she had a plan, and put him in a reed basket with tar covered over it that it could go down the stream. And as the plan went, there were some folks along the water who would see this child floating down stream and they had the princess, the Pharaoh's daughter with them and she said: Oh, my a child! And she could not have her own children so she took this child to be her own. What a lucky day in some ways for Moses. Here was a child that could have perished brought to life and not just to life; he was given one of the best lives you could have ever imagined. Imagine going from being a pauper and a family of a slave to being in the presidential palace, whatever it was in those days. They had the best foods, the best clothing, the best education, the best opportunities, sort of like people today when they have those privileges and possibilities.

Now, Moses was enjoying that, but the greater gift in all that was that Pharaoh's daughter needed someone who could nurse this baby, so she found a Hebrew woman who was indeed Moses' actual mother. This sounds sort of like a television program, doesn't it? His mother was caring for him and what do mothers and fathers do with their children? They hold them, they cuddle them, they teach them. They tell them about their history. They teach them to love and his mother taught him about what it was to be a child of God, to be an Israelite.

That was fine until one day as a young man in the palace he noticed one of Pharaoh's men beating one of his own family, and Israelite slave and Moses rose up and murdered that man and he had to indeed run for his life. And he was on the run for a long time until he had a face encounter with God. God said he had called him for a plan. We heard some of those stories already in scripture. God had a major plan, not only to speak to him, to let him know he was holy. He gave him these commandments because the people of Israel had forgotten who they were. They were God's children.

Do you ever forget who you are? I remember my mom or dad saying that: Now we are going out today. Act like... You've heard it right? I know some of you have heard it. Don't forget who you belong to. We want you to act right.

And God said that to us today. He gave him those commands and he was the same Moses when they finally convinced the Pharaoh to “let my people go,” they went out and the armies were following them and he held up that rod and the sea split and they made their way into safety and the people of God did what? They started moaning: you brought us out here in the desert. We may as well have died back there in slavery. There is nothing to eat. So again he called out to God because of the people’s hunger and he prayed to God and God delivered the people of Israel again by giving them manna from heaven and providing the quail that they would eat.

He was the same Moses that sooner or later said: I am leading God’s children, the people of Israel, from slavery to the Promised Land. That’s the same land where you and I long for one day: the land of peace, the land that belongs to God, the land that’s home.

I don’t know about you, but wherever I’ve been in the world, when I go home, it’s a good feeling, isn’t it? Home with God. Home with the saints who have gone before. Home with our loved ones. Hear these words from Deuteronomy:

And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.

It’s the only person recorded in the Bible that God took care of his burial because God loved him...he was God’s friend.

I’m not sure what it is you expect from friends, but friends are important. It’s what gives us strength to get through the difficult times and there is nothing better than celebrating with friends: the joy, the laughter, the parties that we have.

The Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. Then Moses returned to the camp but Moses’ young helper, Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave that tent.

A friend, Moses and God. A friend means you can be honest, right? You can tell your friend your darkest deeds and they might gasp a little bit but they are still your friend. They trust. They are people you lean on. They are people who can make us feel happy. They expect probably the best of us. They will be there for us no matter what. Sometimes friends complement one another, sometimes not so much. Sometimes we have similar interests and sometimes we are opposites. Friends stick with us through the good and bad and sometimes we think alike and sometimes no so much.

But this I do know about friends: we grow together. God and this man Moses didn’t become friends the first day. They grew through arguments. Moses and God would have arguments.

When I was a young person people would say: You can't talk to God like that and you shouldn't be mad. I've been with many people through losses of life and someone in their family said: Oh, you can't say or do that. God is a big God. God can take it. We can be angry with God. We can be wrestling with God as we have seen it in scripture. God's okay because God just longs like any friend to get to know us better. Isn't that what friends do? We grow together in the knowledge and the wisdom of one another. And friendships are not one way. They have to be give and take. And when we build those relationships, what a wonderful thing can happen. And when we build relationships from children on, what a gift it can be.

I look at a child and think: what an imprint that we can make on every child. Those of you who have children have known that walk from the time they are little, even before you are out of the womb mothers and fathers talk to those little children. And we could teach them the comfort of God and we can teach them the joy.

I heard a lovely story this week. This is Bishop John Yambasu. I've known him long before he was a bishop. He was a youth pastor way back in the early 90s. I worked with him in Sierra Leone many times and he was here to have dinner with me on Tuesday night. He told me more of his story. He grew up in a Muslim home with a father that had about 7 wives, many have more. He's not sure how many siblings. I've seen some as many as 60 to 100 plus children. That's a big family. He was saying that when he was a very young boy he had very little. When I first met him in that day the average life expectancy in Sierra Leone in the early 80s when I was there was 37 years old for a man and 42 for a woman. It is now up to close to 50.

His older brother, like 2 years older, but at 10 years old, was taken to be a house boy. Many people in these countries use them as house boys to help with laundry and clean up the yard and help with chores. And after a while the people met John, his younger brother, only 8 years old and said: we want him to come too. And the master of the house, a British person and his wife, they started teaching them the alphabet so they could run chores and go to town and pick up things. And they saw that John was a quick reader and a quick learner. He went to school and he jumped several grades when he finally went to school because he was doing so well.

The greatest thing they did was a person of faith, the mother in this house, took him on her knee and read him stories. Now, I want you to understand the importance of stories. A man who came from a big family who had nothing, a dirt floor, a dirt house, no water, no clothing, grass roofs, nothing; and she would read story and said: Moses was a leader. You can become a leader.

Remember Ruth I talked about a few weeks ago? Ruth was faithful. You can be faithful. Remember what it was to hold a plumb line? Remember what it was to hear about all these

biblical characters. And he said: every time they read to me, they told me this could be me. I can make a difference in my world.

And I assure you, that little boy never thought he would be a bishop of the United Methodist Church. He not only served as a bishop, but he was appointed by the Council of Bishops in America, it's one big council for the world, to be the bishop that presides not only over his country, Sierra Leone, but over the Central Conference, which includes all of Central America, all of South America, all of Asia and the whole continent of Africa and Eastern Europe, because some mother, some father, somebody read to them and told them they could be anything.

I told you the last couple of weeks and I want you to say it again. Say: I'm a gift of God. Say it! (I'm a gift of God.) Believe it! (I'm a gift of God.) You are a gift. You have no idea what you can do and what you can do with the children and the people around you as an influence for the Kingdom of God because someone taught you to read and write. You can lead other people on the path to eternal life. You can lead other people out of their deserts. You can take somebody in a little village who had nothing to become a world leader, because he doesn't only work for the church; he's a leader in the nation as well, as one who represents, even on our boards of UMCOR committee on relief, our missional board.

When I am there they are always preaching: God is good! And everyone shouts out: All the time. And you say: All the time God is good. And we forget to say that because we have so much all the time. We forget that if you are going to die by the age of 40 maybe you'd better start praising young. We are so blessed, we are so gifted and God is saying: Let me make you an instrument of my peace. Be something because you are a gift to where? To everyone that meets you. You are a gift of God and God needs you. He couldn't have in his most lavish dreams that he would be in places like this.

And Moses couldn't. And Moses had a choice to stay there, which would have been comfortable, but he threw it away and sometimes you say: Why would I do that? Because there is something bigger, there is something better. It's a Promised Land. Why are you a gift of God? To make this world a better place; to bring God's Kingdom here.

You and I are surrounded by people who are in the desert. Last week between services a homeless man came into my office and after church, another family. And then I saw another family driving over towards Lowes, a mother with four children who was saying: I've lost my job. I have nothing for my family. And that's nothing compared to the people we know who are ill and they found out they have cancer or they are dying or some family member has an addiction or in prison. There is desert all around us and you and I have the spring of living water, it's called Jesus Christ. He is the hope of the world. And you and I are a gift to introduce him and to provide life and to take them on the journey. It's not an instant thing; it's a journey.

I don't know of anyone I've met in my years of life that is not on an upward journey. We go up and we go down and we go up and we go down. And if we have the spring of living water with us, that we will sometimes say: I don't know where I am now. I don't know how, but I know ahead of me is the Promised Land. I know we are surrounded by men and women of different cultures and different languages and different aptitudes and different gifts and God says to us: what will you do then? Are you going to stay in your comfort and do nothing or are you going to step out and be a friend of God and a friend of others to make a difference in the Kingdom. We are a gift that if you hold it tight, it's not going to do a thing.

You are a gift of God and a gift for God and a friend of God. By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of the Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as a greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead for his reward. By faith he left Egypt not fearing the king's anger. He persevered because he saw him who was invisible.

Have you seen him who is invisible? I struggle with him every day and I bet you do too. God is calling us and that journey for Moses was tough. He murdered a man and had to live with that. He was a man who fought with God. He didn't like some of God's decisions and yet he chose to walk a different way and try to be obedient.

You see, when we live in our comfortable life, we have our dreams. I had those dreams as a little boy. You know, you want your own house, you want your own family, you want the things of this world and you realize I think as we get older that all those things, they are comfortable and they are nice. They don't complete me. They really don't make us content. Sometimes we've dreamed of dream jobs, the dream place, the dream school. Sometimes those things let us down. Sometimes family and friends let us down, but by being a friend of God, you will find that in the darkest hours, God is always with you.

When I was looking at this, I imagine what it was like for the men and women, from my family tradition came from Europe, but we have people in our congregation now that has had family come from all over the world, to leave and say goodbye and never ever see your family again. You know our ancestors a couple of hundred years ago did that. No Skype, no telephone, no pony express. Ships took months, but because they were ready to go to a new land to make a better life, they did that. They were willing to give up and to sacrifice. We complain about our nation, about our culture, about our world. What are you willing to give up, to sacrifice, to serve our God? What will it be that God is calling me with the gifts God has given me and the gift that I am of God to bring the Kingdom? Following Christ could for some cost everything, for some, but it is yet the greatest journey of our life, to walk with our God and discover who it is, for God to offer us this journey to the Promised Land.

The Promised Land is what I would like to see before I die right here. I want to see it on earth. I would love to see a day when we are not at each other, where there is no longer a

daily murder on the streets, when people can learn to live in peace with one another even though we are different. We can learn to love and care for one another and share what we have. I would love to see that. And it comes when being that friend of God, we listen to our call and respond to God as the gift He has created us to be. Whoever it is, you have to search it, you have to converse, you have to be Moses, you have to meet God face to face every day.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you have given us such great biblical examples of men and women who were willing to step out. They didn't always agree and they wrestled with you and you loved them anyway and you love us. You've empowered us. You've gifted us. And you've called us. Lord, move our hearts, draw us close to you that like Moses we will lead others to this Promised Land. We will lead them to the spring of everlasting life found only in Jesus Christ. We ask this in your most Holy Name. Amen.