

## OUR DESPERATE NEED FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

**Exodus 3:1-12**

**November 20, 2022**

This is the last Sunday of the church year – called Reign of Christ Sunday and next Sunday begins a new church year with the season of Advent. During Advent the church celebrates the birth of Christ, and then the rest of the year we spend delving deeper into the revelation of God in Christ Jesus through the Scriptures. For us then as His followers, as we look back at what we've discovered over the past year, hopefully we have come to realize that there's no turning back, we are now even more committed to following Christ, declaring Jesus is Lord of all, and reigns as Lord. And we can only come to this understanding when we have spent time in God's presence, so this morning I want to look at the life of Moses, who God used to bring His people, the Israelites, out of bondage in Egypt!

Actually, God began the process of saving His people in Egypt at the birth of Moses but let's skip ahead 80 years as Moses was tending the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro in the desert wilderness near Mt Sinai. **Exodus 3-4** tells us, at 80 years of age, God shows up as a burning bush and has a conversation with Moses – and this was the assignment God gave to Moses: you are to lead a group of people out of a place where the people living there didn't want them to leave – and you will lead them into a place where the people living there didn't want them to come – and you will lead a group of people who will constantly grumbled and complained because they didn't want to take the trip. It was an impossible assignment that God was giving to Moses, and he felt inadequate for the task, as indicated by his very first question to God, "*Who am I?*"

Who can blame Moses for not going back to Egypt – he had fled Egypt forty years earlier after killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. As a young man living Egypt, he saw how the Egyptians mistreated the Israelites and in trying to save his people, the oppressed Israelites on his own, without the help of anyone else, including God, Moses ended up killing an Egyptian and hiding him in the sand. But Moses was found out, so he fled from Pharaoh and went to live in distant Midian, far from Egypt, as a failure, filled with guilt and shame. Then, after 40 years in exile, God shows up in a burning bush that's not consumed, and identifies Himself as, "***I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. At this Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God***" (Exodus 3:6). This is the normal response of someone who carries guilt and shame, they hide their face from God. They don't want God to

see them as a failure! Just think about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they ate the forbidden fruit, they were filled with guilt and shame, and hid from God as He walked in the Garden and tried to cover up their nakedness with fig leaves. Sin had caused them to take their eyes off of God and put it on themselves and had driven them away from their God given purpose and destiny!

Moses never dealt with the guilt and shame of killing that Egyptian, he just ran from it as far as he could. He had a secret in his soul, so he relocated to a different area to start a new life with different people, but the secret was still there, that is until God showed up. Moses had to deal with his past so he could be used by God, but Moses is so convinced that he doesn't have what it takes to carry out this impossible assignment from God that he responds, ***“But who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt”*** (Exodus 3:11). As we read on Moses gives three excuses for how God has chosen the wrong man. I don't know your name! I don't have what it takes! I can't carry it out! I am not competent for this assignment! I've never been a good speaker, I'm slow of tongue and speech! People won't listen to me or believe me or follow me! I can't convince Pharaoh to let the people go! And after this back-and-forth dialogue, Moses finally tells God, ***“Pardon your servant, LORD. Please send someone else”*** (Exodus 4:13).

I can definitely relate to Moses' call to ministry – I said the same thing to God, you've got the wrong person, I'm not eloquent in speech, send someone else. I'm sure that we can all relate to Moses' lack of confidence in serving God, and this can be one of the problems in the church today. Like Moses we focus on ourselves and not on God – we make it too much about us: our gifts, our talents, our abilities, our programs, and about our human and financial resources. Moses struggled the same way we do, making it too much about him; thereby asked the wrong question of God. That day at the burning bush, Moses shouldn't have asked, *“Who am I?”* Moses should have asked, *“Who are you?”* Because if you are going to accomplish the impossible for God, you desperately need to know Him and seek His presence. Only God with His unlimited resources, His infinite wisdom and unstoppable power can accomplish the impossible. We need to notice in this conversation that God, in His grace and mercy answered Moses with the right answer, anyway: ***“I will be with you”*** (Exodus 3:12). Here's the key: God will never give you an assignment that you can accomplish without Him coming alongside of you and empowering you. God will never leave you nor forsake you – God promises His presence to get the job done because He wants you to fulfill your divine calling!

The one desperate need of our lives is the presence of God! From the burning bush God was telling Moses: *“I know you feel inadequate. I know that you feel that you don’t have what it takes to accomplish this impossible assignment, but I will be with you, and that’s enough.”* As we continue to read Moses’ story in the book of Exodus, we come to find out that Moses learned this lesson so well that he was willing to pay any price to enter God’s presence and carry God’s presence with him on this journey to the Promised Land. The Israelites arrived at Mt Sinai three months after leaving Egypt and as promised God descended onto the mountain where Moses met him earlier at the burning bush, and this time it was a terrifying sight – *“There was thunder and lighting, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled...The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up”* (Exodus 19:16-20). Moses in fear and trembling ascended God’s holy mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, because he was desperate for God’s presence. Moses wanted to be in God’s Holy presence regardless of his fears and shortcomings. He didn’t want to miss out on anything God had for him this time, so Moses stayed on the mountaintop with God for forty days and forty nights and came down transformed!

In fact Moses was so transformed that as we come to **Exodus 33** – we are told that this man who at one time hid his face from God, now has become a face-to-face friend of God – A DEVOTED LOVER OF GOD! Then another amazing thing happened on Mt Sinai, Moses had the privilege of seeing God’s glory pass before him, seeing God’s back pass before him, as God put him in a cleft in the rock and covered him with his hand of protection. And Moses had also a special place to meet with God, outside the camp, called the *“tent of meeting.”* Whenever Moses went out to this tent of meeting, all the people rose and stood at the entrance of their tents worshipping as the Lord would show up as a pillar of cloud. **Exodus 33:11** tells us that at this *“tent of meeting”* – *“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”* And we are also told that whenever Moses entered the Lord’s presence to speak to Him, his face became radiant, and he would put a veil over his face, because the people were afraid to come near him. When we have been in God’s holy presence others will notice! Moses had learned that he needs God above all things, the presence of God was crucial, and he wouldn’t take one step forward without God’s approval and blessing!

In the same way, the one thing that marks us as the people of God is His presence. It isn’t going to church, it isn’t reading the Bible, it isn’t praying, it isn’t being

good, or trying harder, or accomplishing great things for God. While all those things are important, it's the Holy presence of God that sets us apart as followers, and Moses had learned this lesson well. Could there be a more noble goal than to become a true and faithful friend to God? The Moses story is a story of intimacy – it's a story about carrying God's presence to confront our impossibilities with the authority we have been given in Christ Jesus.

We are very fortunate today because we not only have the example of Moses, but also have the example of Jesus who operated in authority as He walked this earth – an authority that He was given by His Heavenly Father as a man with human flesh like you and me! As we read the Gospels, we will notice that whenever Jesus showed up kingdom stuff happened – the blind would see, the deaf would hear, the mute would talk, the lame would walk, lepers would be healed, and people would be delivered because demons would flee His presence. Amazing things happened when Jesus showed up! However, when I show up, nothing much happens! Why is that? Could it have something to do with hosting God's presence in my life? In His teaching on *“the vine and the branches,”* Jesus said that kingdom stuff can only happen when we dwell in God's presence – ***“I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”*** (John 15:5). And just before that teaching Jesus said this in **John 14:12**, ***“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do ever greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*** So, why is there such a disconnect between my ministry and Jesus' ministry? The answer is in hosting His presence! I need to continuously draw near to Jesus if I want to see the Kingdom things of Jesus happen around me. I need to be connected to the VINE 24/7, receiving the nourishing sap of His authority, His power, His presence. The more I learn to seek the presence of Jesus, carry the presence of Jesus, and walk in step with Jesus, the more likely kingdom things will happen around me!

Looking at the life of Moses as an example of how God used him in such miraculous ways, the constant and abiding need in my life and your life is the presence of God. If you want to do the impossible, if you want to touch Heaven, move mountains and change the world around you, you must be desperate and passionate for God's constant presence. So much so that you would never take a step without it. As Jesus tells us in **John 15:7-8**, ***“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, (not to your glory) that you bear much fruit, showing***

*yourselves to be my disciples.*” Our fruitfulness gives God the glory. We are only the vessels He uses. Always giving the glory to God keeps us humble, and keeps us seeking His presence!

One time when Moses’ brother Aaron and his sister Miriam opposed Moses because of his interrelation marriage (an Israelite marrying a Cushite, a black woman), God came to Moses’ defence because of his exceptional humility in always giving God the glory, **“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth”** (Numbers 12:3). Humble Moses did everything for His Father’s glory, not his glory! Moses’ desire was for God to be lifted up in praise, not for him to be lifted up in praise! Moses wanted God to be honoured, not for him to be honoured! We can come to God in prayer every day for our personal needs, for our family needs, for the needs of our community and nation, but do we come to God in humility for His glory? Do we pray for what God wants accomplished and done? Do we ask God what His desires are for our lives, our church, our community and our nation? Do we pursue God for Himself, because we love to be with Him and passionately pursue Him as a lover, or do we pursue Him for His blessings, His protection, and His favour? If I want to come close to my wife Laurie, I need to seek her heart, seek what she desires, not what I desire or want to get out of our marriage. God loves to answer our prayers and bless His people, but only when we come humbly before Him for His glory, honour, and praise!

Author Dr. Rob Reimer who is passionate to see the kingdom of God advance through spiritual renewal says this is his book on Spiritual authority, *“Spiritual authority flows out of intimacy. Spiritual authority is rooted in identity and expanded in intimacy.”* Spiritual authority comes from being both rooted IN CHRIST and having intimacy with Christ. We need both! Seeking God just to have our prayers answered will never develop intimacy with God. If we want to go deep with God, we need to constantly seek His face. And, if we are going to draw near to God, we are going to have to spend quality time with Him – be with Him and get to know Him – consumed in the pursuit of His presence 24/7. YES, it’s important that we come to God with our prayers and requests, but it’s more important to seek His face!

There are all kinds of books out there to help us to connect with God through Bible reading, prayer, fasting, worship, and seeking silence and solitude; however, Jesus is our best model on how to connect with God. We need to turn to the life of Jesus

and learn from Him as our model on how to seek out God's presence. When Jesus was operating in spiritual authority for those 3+ years of ministry, He was incredibly busy; He was constantly in-demand, mobbed wherever He went by those in need and watched closely by those religious leaders who were waiting for Him to slip up so they would have a reason to have Him crucified. And yet, all that time of business He stayed constantly connected to His Heavenly Father and as a result had a fruitful ministry because He was rested and replenished in God's presence. Jesus operated in tremendous spiritual authority as a human, so how did He do it?

The first thing Jesus did – to live an intimate, rested, and fruitful life was to only do what His Father told Him to do and only say what His Father told Him to say. Jesus never took on His own assignment! YES, Jesus definitely showed compassion for the human needs around Him, but you will notice that not every human need around Jesus was met. Not everyone got healed! Not every demon was cast out! And when His Father told Jesus to move on to the next town, He went, leaving sick and needy people behind. And when His Father told Him to get away and rest, He did, even though some were left unhealed. For example: John 5 tells us about the healing of an invalid who had been laying at the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years. Jesus tells him, ***“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk”*** (John 5:8), and immediately the man was healed and walked. This is how John describes the pool of Bethesda in **John 5:3, “Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.”** So why didn't Jesus heal all of them? This is an important question, because human need is endless, the sick and poor are always with us!

Like Jesus when He walked this earth – we all have human limitations: limited time, energy, resources, gifts, and abilities. We can't do everything! So how do we decide what to do in a world of endless need? We follow Jesus – Jesus limited Himself only to His Father's bidding. This is a wise approach because God knows us better than we do, and He knows where we can have the greatest impact. We need to learn how to say YES to God and NO to people, because if we end up saying YES to people and NO to God, then we will end up spiritually, emotionally, and physically depleted and burn out. We will end up ministering out of our human strength and not overflow with God's holy presence. Moses was able to lead one to two million grumbling people through the desert for forty years, because of God's constant presence with Him – as God promised him at the burning bush incident, ***“I will be with you.”*** Moses learned to pace Himself and

listen to God to prevent from burning out. Every battle is not our battle! Every need is not our responsibility! And every human request is not God's desire for us to meet. We need to follow Jesus' example and only do what our Heavenly Father calls us to do, and then like Jesus, we will be fruitful because we are rested and replenished, as we abide in God's presence!

Another good example is found in John 4 – John 4 tells us about the time that Jesus and His disciples were travelling through Samaria and Jesus stopped at a well while the others went into town to buy food. There at the well Jesus met and ministered to a Samaritan woman who was now living with her fifth husband. Because of guilt and shame she came to draw water at noon, knowing that she would be alone in the heat of the day, and not have to face the other judgmental, condemning women. Jesus ministered to her, and she came to believe that He was the promised Messiah, becoming the first evangelist, as she ran off leaving her water jar behind to tell those in town, ***“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”*** (John 4:29) As the Samaritan woman was running off, the disciples returned from their shopping trip and offered Jesus food, urging Him to eat something, ***“But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you know nothing about’”*** (John 4:29,32). Jesus discovered that doing His Father's will was food for His soul, it was life-giving, replenishing His strength, it sustained Him. And it's the same for us, doing God's will, not our will, is life-giving, it will replenish our strength, it will sustain us, because it is food for the soul, the only food that satisfies. When we do more than God desires, or not do what God desires, we will end up depleted and drained – there will be no joy in serving the Lord. And we see that far too often in ministry, people get burned out, all because they aren't connected and listening to the Father!

The second thing Jesus did to live an intimate life of rest and fruitfulness – is that He often withdrew to lonely places to be alone with His Father. Jesus was busy, but He rested, He retreated to refresh His soul, but it wasn't always easy for Jesus to get away, because He was in high demand, the crowds kept finding Him and pressing Him to meet their needs. That's why Jesus used boats, mountains, darkness, and lonely places to meet with His Father. **Mark 1:35, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”** **Mark 3:7, “Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake.”** **Mark 3:13, “Jesus went up on a mountainside.”** **Luke 5:16, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”** Like Jesus, we need to also find those places of retreat, to get alone with God and abide in the VINE, so

that we don't wither and bear little fruit! Moses was also in high demand with the constant needs of the people he was leading to the Promised Land, and he also needed to get away with God. When ministry got too demanding, Moses went off to the "*Tent of Meeting*" that was located on the outskirts of their tent city, and met with God, face-to-face and was replenished to continue on!

A Sabbath rest is also another form of retreat. This is also one of the Ten Commandments, "***Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God***" (Exodus 20:8-9). God didn't want His chosen people to continue on as they did in Egypt where they were slaves, working constantly without a day off for rest. This is one area where Jesus was constantly in trouble with the Pharisees and religious leaders, because God did good on the Sabbath by meeting the needs of the people. This is another area where we can create division in the church because we don't understand what a Sabbath rest means and move into legalism. It's a principal of taking a day off for rest and it doesn't always have to be Sunday. If you work shift work, you can take another day of the week off as a Sabbath rest. One day when Jesus and His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain, the Pharisees accused them of doing what was unlawful on the Sabbath, and Jesus responds to them, "***The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath***" (Mark 2:27-28). And Jesus also said to the Pharisees, "***Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill***" (Mark 3:4).

The third thing Jesus did to live an intimate life of rest and fruitfulness – is that He drew from His Father strength. Jesus' divine union with His Father was His supernatural source of strength, being able to exceed His human limitations. Jesus was in the Father and the Father was in the Son. It was a divine union, and Jesus invites us into that same union, as the Holy Spirit now dwells within us. Just as Jesus could do nothing apart from His Father, Jesus tells us we could do nothing apart from Him, and that takes us back once again to **John 15:4-5**, "***Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches, if you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***" Notice that the command here is to abide, not bear fruit. We often work very hard to bear fruit, but Jesus tells us here to abide, and when we do, the by-product is fruit. While we can use our intelligence,

gifting, and abilities to accomplish something for God – if we want to see what only God can accomplish, the miraculous, we must abide!

Spiritual disciplines help us connect with God – but we need to do them with the right attitude and the right reasons. The purpose of reading the Bible is not only to know the Bible and quote Scripture, the purpose is also to have a fresh encounter with the living God by having Him breathe on the passage. The purpose of praying is not only to tell God what is on our mind and our needs, but to have an intimate conversation with our Creator on a personal level. The purpose of fasting is not to show others how holy we are, but to present our body as a living sacrifice. The purpose of worship is not a prelude to the sermon or demonstrate our musical talents, but to come into His holy presence and prepare the heart to receive nourishment from God's Word that feeds the soul. We can even walk or sit in nature and host His presence as we are inspired by God's grandeur and beauty. The Pharisees did all the right religious practices, but they ended up killing Jesus. Doing spiritual disciplines is important, but it's not the same as abiding in His presence – we need both!

Brother Lawrence was not only aware of God's presence in the church sanctuary, but also in the kitchen peeling potatoes. Jesus told us we must ask, seek, and knock. We must come with willing persistence and abide in His presence. Holiness is more about the people we are becoming than about the things we stop doing. Holiness is about becoming like Jesus as we spend quality time in His holy presence!