

# Odd People in Weird Place for Great Tasks!

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 08/30/20  
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Robert Service has among his poems one entitled, "A Sourdough Story." It's about an old Yukon sourdough who bargains his way to heaven. (A sourdough is a prospector during the Gold Rush in Canada and Alaska). In his little introduction to the poem, the poet tells us that "a genuine Sourdough Story ain't a yarn for the Sunday School." And it ain't

There are, however, some other stories upon which you and I have grown up that are for the Sunday School. One of these is this morning's scripture and is the account of Moses' finding his purpose in life.

Some of us this morning may remember the pictures hanging on bulletin boards or flannel boards which depict a barefoot, bearded Moses, standing before the flaming bush, apparently awestruck by the Voice coming from the flame, while snowy, white sheep graze in the background. And in contrast to that "Sourdough Story," it's just right for the Church School.

And in a way, that's a shame. Because for some of us, that story never made it beyond Sunday School, and we see it as one of the enchanting children's stories of which the Old Testament is so full. This morning, I'd like to suggest that this story is not just a story for children, but is also an adult story.

This call of Moses to his life-purpose was something brand-new in the history of religions. It is not just a heart-warming tale or an ancient legend. It is what makes the Biblical faith unique in world history. And – even more important – it shows what our lives in this world, under God, are to be all about.

For one thing, today's scripture shows that the God of the Biblical faith involves people to accomplish his objectives. God picks helpers from whomever he can find them.

Take Moses, for instance. Today we would say that Moses was not a great influencer. He would have been low on social media. He was, after all, a fugitive; a felon wanted by the authorities for murder. He was a runaway slave, who killed one of his Egyptian overseers. And rather than face the consequences, Moses fled from the scene of the crime, losing himself in the hills of an unknown land, tending sheep.

He had no other goals in life than to lay low and stay one step ahead of the authorities. If they were to catch up to Moses, there would have been no due process – no sophisticated plea bargaining; he'd have been executed without trial, on the spot.

But God found him out before the police did. On a mountainside, there was an appearance of the Eternal One. God said to that fugitive, "You're just the person I've been looking for. I've got work for you to do. You're going to help me do it."

And do you remember what Moses said to that? "Who, me; I'm a nobody; a criminal. And the answer: "Yes, Moses, you. No more alibis about your shortcomings; enough of the false modesty. Don't worry. I'll be with you. Now let's get to work!"

One of the peculiarities of the Biblical God is this preference for pick odd people to get his job done. This God who is proclaimed throughout the Bible is one who invites us to join him in pursuit of love and justice.

God takes a person like Moses, not because Moses is a puppet, but because God wants us to be co-creators of our destinies with God. People, odd people – this is what the Lord is up to.

And God's still at it. Oh, I know, there are a lot of us like Moses who would like to back off. We have just as many alibis as he did: "Not me, Lord; I'm too old." Or, "I'm really busy right now." But God

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employs people, sometimes odd people, to share in the work of the Kingdom.

And this God of the Biblical faith is not partial to religious places. Moses met God in an out-of-the-way place in the Midian desert and tells him to return to the place where his face appears on WANTED posters and his people were in slavery. God made it clear that any place is God's place, had we but the eyes to see. "Take off your shoes, for the ground on which you stand right now is Holy Ground."

Sometimes it's pretty hard to believe that. We'd much rather find God where we're looking for God. But we meet God not only in our preconceived places. God meets us, just as God met Moses, in surprising places.

This understanding of God meeting us in unexpected and weird places has some remarkable stories behind it. Moses on Mount Horeb; Isaiah in exile; Job in unspeakable suffering; Jeremiah in the stocks. The Old Testament is full of God changing unusual places into Holy Ground – and it carries over in the New Testament.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" And Golgotha –the Place of the Skulls – That! – Holy Ground? Who could ever have dreamed that the most unlovely of places would ever be a place for God?

And surely it hasn't ended with the scriptures. In the tin mines of Cornwall – "Take off your shoes, John Wesley." In the slums of Chicago – "Take off your shoes, Jane Addams." Or on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama – "Take off your shoes, Rosa Parks."

The God whom we worship is not limited to special shrines or magnificent cathedrals. It is not God's intention that some places be redeemed, but that all places may be redeemed, and God has made it possible for you, for me, to be open to his invitation on whatever ground we stand.

So be prepared, my friends, to take off your shoes, for the ground on which you stand today, or tomorrow, may be Holy Ground.

For the first time in the recorded history of religion, a God was saying, "Life doesn't have to be this way – change it! Slavery is not in the nature of things; do something about it. Go back to Egypt and 'tell old Pharaoh, let my people go.'"

Is it any wonder that Moses hesitated?

And that hasn't changed. God continues to call odd people in weird places to do great things. You, me, to do great things. There is still racism among us. People are disregarded or diminished because of who they are. There are many people living in loneliness and loss.

And the world is currently overwhelmed with religious charlatans and false prophets; and one of our great tasks at Crossroads United Methodist Church, and all churches, is to present the Biblical faith with clarity and integrity.

The Biblical faith tells us that things need not be as they are. We can change them, and sometimes it is a mandate to do so.

Odd people in weird places to do great tasks. As Robert Service said: "that ain't no yarn for the Sunday School." That's also for adults – for you and me. Take off your shoes, for the ground on which we stand; the place in which we live, the tasks facing each of us – and Crossroads Church – are holy. Amen.