

“Freedom Through Listening”  
Exodus 5:1-22; Hebrews 11:23-29;  
Luke 16:19-31

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First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

As we enter into summer, one of the things we are going to do during worship is talk about each of our stained glass windows. We are going to start with the Moses window (window on left/east side nearest to front.) In it we see, on the very bottom, a baby in a basket floating on some water. In some ways we see two sides of Moses' life because on the top we see Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. Our Old Testament lesson contained some information in between. Moses is one of those characters that is as large as any life is in the Old Testament. In fact, you might say his life defines an 'epic.' Think about how it started in the bulrushes. Pharaoh had told the Hebrews that all the Hebrew children were to be drowned, thrown into the Nile. Moses' mother technically followed the edict as Moses was in the Nile. He was just in a basket. Pharaoh's daughter found him, had compassion for him, and raised him. As Moses gets older, he realizes, at some point, that he is a Hebrew. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, his anger comes out, and he kills that Egyptian. Soon, he has to flee to the desert to start a new life. He gets married, has children, and goes out tending goats in the wilderness.

There in the wilderness is one of those incredible events, the definition of the word *theophany*, which means a time when God shows up in an unusual way, there at the burning bush. It's one of those you always think about and we even talk about as in, "Have you ever had a burning bush experience?" Moses hears God's name "I am who I am" and has this conversation with God and tries to say that, "I don't really want to go and do anything else. I'd rather stay here." God says, "No, go save my people." So Moses goes back to Egypt.

Our scripture reading this morning told us the beginning of that time back in Egypt. It didn't go real well. It took ten plagues for Pharaoh to begin to really listen. Finally, it was the death of his first born. The Hebrews high-tail it out of there and soon find that Pharaoh has again changed his mind and the army is on their tail. The Hebrews cut across the Red Sea on dry land. Pharaoh's army doesn't have quite the same experience as the sea closes in on them. And then the Hebrews are off into the wilderness to worship God. Many struggles occur and it takes them forty years to finally get to the Promised Land. Moses never gets to go it.

It's an incredible story in itself. There are all kinds of pieces we could take from it and wonder at. But if I look at the overall picture, the story of Moses' life, there are two things that stand out to me. One is that he liberates his people. It's an interesting way he does it as well. It's not through a fight but by continually going and telling the Pharaoh what bad things are going to happen if he doesn't let them go. The other thing that is incredible about Moses' life is receiving the law, the Ten Commandments. Those two things in Moses' life are amazing things. In some ways they feel like almost opposite things. Usually, when you think about freedom, you don't think about being freed to a law; leaving the oppression of the Egyptians and then receiving the law of God. Those almost seem to contrast. And yet, if we think about it, as I asked the children to do with the soccer ball, they were now out of a society and beginning to form

a new people. They were going to the Promised Land. How were they going to live there? The gift of the law. It was a gift because you have to begin to figure out how to live together.

What happens if you don't? I would argue that the manipulative, the charismatic, the strongest get their ways. Often times it seems that the strongest won, the group that gathers the strength to be tyrannical and dictates how things have to happen. What's different with the law? One of the phrases we use sometimes is, "No one is above the law." Interesting how the law has an equitable sense to it where it lifts everyone because it gives us a way of understanding how we get along. That's what Moses does for his people in that time and in that place. He gives them a way of getting along that's undergirded by the wishes of God demonstrated in the Ten Commandments. They become God's people. It's almost as they go through this liberation and wandering and begin to try and form again their understanding of who they are, they become somebody special. There are several places in the Old Testament where God says, "I want you to be a people who show my light to the nations"

Take this tennis ball. You look at a tennis ball and you have a sense of what it means. A certain kind of game. A different ball means a different game. The ball can be bigger or smaller. When we look at one of these balls we immediately know about some rules. We immediately know how the ball is to be used. Even if we don't know the game really well, we have a sense of where and how that ball is used. So, as God gives the Israelites a way of living, it's almost like, creating a people who are kind of like these balls. People look at them and say, "Oh, they are ones that live that way." There is a certain way in which they live. It is a way that God gives.

Jesus, in our gospel lesson today, says "You have Moses and the Prophets." Moses gave the law, a way of living together and you struggled with that. The Prophets tried to draw you back to what was essential about that. Maybe the Law, the rules, help free us to live together. Have you ever gone into a social situation where you didn't know the rules? You weren't sure what you were supposed to do or how you were supposed to act. Does that feel free? Does it feel good? There is a way that rules, the way we do things together, help free us up. So if we think about God giving us a way of life (and who would know better the way of life that is good for us), he is giving us rules that help free us. Guidance that helps us know the wonder of life, the fullness of life. Jesus is saying, "Why don't you listen to Moses and the Prophets? God is giving you a way." In a way he is also saying, "Are you going to listen to me?"

As we hear Jesus encourage us to think about it, is there a way we can listen? I believe that sometimes freedom comes not through throwing off the yoke of oppression, not by thinking we have to fight in some way to get that freedom, but freedom can come through listening, listening to Moses and the Prophets, listening to Jesus. Jesus came to free us from our sin. In that way, it's much like what Moses did with the Israelites; he freed them from the oppression of the Egyptians. But that's not all Moses did and, really, that's not all Jesus did. He frees us from our sin but then he helps us look at how we live into the Promised Land. His teachings are there to help us live into the kingdom, into the Promised Land, into the family of faith, however you want to describe where he is taking us as we follow him. Jesus tells this story and wonders, "Even if someone rises from the dead, will you listen?" Will you listen? Amen.



## Stained Glass Windows of First Presbyterian Church

### MOSES

Our sanctuary was built in 1940-42. Stained glass windows were planned as important features, and were provided by gifts, bequests, and memorials. The windows were installed from 1942-1958. They were designed and made by Charles J. Connick and associates of Boston.

Today we focus on the Moses window, nearest the front of the sanctuary on the east side. The main picture portrays Moses, the law-giver and the major author of the first five books of the Old Testament. Moses holds the tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments), given him by God on Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 20:1-17) White plumes in the background represent smoke coming from the mountain "because the Lord descended upon it in fire." (Exodus 19:18) The plants with green leaves above the brown ones on both sides of Moses represent the Promised Land. The medallion near the bottom of the window shows baby Moses in the bulrushes. (Exodus 2:1-10).

This window was given by Mrs. Herman Wilson in memory of her mother, Mrs. M.E. Washburn. It is signed "Boston 1945 Charles J. Connick."