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First Congregational Church of Old Lyme, CT.  
Texts: Exodus 3: 1-12  
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## **If You Are Called to Anything, It will Sound like Freedom**

### **Exodus 3: 1-12**

Our scripture for today is known as the call of Moses from the book of Exodus.... The 2nd book of the bible, the Exodus, is that unfolding dizzying drama that lies at the heart of the Hebrew scriptures. We know Moses as the intrepid leader of the Israelites, the legendary folk hero found in the bulrushes floating in a basket down the Nile. Moses was the chosen one to lead the people out of bondage. Charlton Heston's most famous role.

In this passage though, Moses is an unknown shepherd tending sheep he doesn't own. He has left the "palace life" behind, saw the oppression of his people, murdered a fellow Egyptian and was now being pursued by Pharaoh (2:12). He sets off for the far-off hills of Midian. Moses it seems was actually an outsider, neither accepted by the Hebrews (2:14), nor the Egyptians (Exodus 2:22) and declared that he was "an alien residing in a foreign land." Even the Midianites saw Moses as a foreigner, "an Egyptian" (Exodus 2:19).

Nonetheless, God finds him and a bush flares up like "shook foil" as the poet says in all the grandeur of God, telling Moses, "*Take off your sandals. This is holy ground. I can hear the cries of the people. GO to them. Go to Pharaoh. I will be with you.*"

It's a stunning pronouncement and conversation. One which makes me wonder about what this summons might mean for us today. What burns but shall not be consumed within us? As people of faith and vision we know "the grandeur of God" that lies within each person, each creature, each living thing. That is the holy ground upon which we stand. "Go!"

There are many stunning calls in the Bible. From Abraham and Sara, the child prophet Samuel, and the calling of Jeremiah. In the gospels, Jesus calls his disciples, even hears a call at his own baptism that "you are my beloved always". There are the calls of Mary and Joseph to raise a child; in most calls, if not all there often is the very human response of "wait, who me?" And the assurance, Yes, you! I will be with you. "Do not fear...(Jeremiah 1:8, 15:22).

A true call is like that. Whether from a burning bush or a midnight dream, a series of aha moments or a quiet urging...however it comes, it often involves what Howard Thurman described as "*the sound of the genuine within yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have.*"

What has called to you in your life? What calls to you, now? How did you choose your profession? What has led you to FCCOL?

My first calling in my ways was to be an educator. It was because of my younger brother, Dennis, that I pursued special education in the first place! After teaching Dennis his first words by singing the theme song to Batman in the back of the family station wagon on road trips, it was no surprise that I'd become a speech-language pathologist.

Many of you know my brother Dennis. He considers FCCOL his home church and thinks we have the best Fellowship

hour anywhere. I am so proud of him and the kind and compassionate adult he has become.

Dennis to my knowledge has never said an unkind word or judged anyone ever... To hang out with Dennis and his peers from his group home in Chester is to walk on holy ground.

I'm heartsick over the thought that federal protections for students with disabilities and their families under the law (IDEA) is on the chopping block. It's among the seemingly countless devastating effects of the dismantling of government institutions from the cruel cessation of USAID services around the world to the abrupt Immigration cuts which IRIS is feeling right here to assaults on Trans affirming care for our young people... The list unfortunately goes on.

Just this past week, I attended my brother's Annual Education meeting as prescribed by federal law under the CT Department of Developmental Services. As an adult in his 50's, (and thanks to the State of CT!) Dennis' health and housing needs, his overall care and well-being is taken care of by a devoted team of educators and professionals. While protected for the time being, I have great anxiety about what services might be eliminated next. These threatening actions by our government are in effect strategies to eliminate people.

In New York City back in the day, as a young SLP, I worked on an educational team at a high school for kids with developmental disabilities. We tapped into theater to teach kids all kinds of skills. At my school in the West Village, we performed CATS and West Side Story, had costumes loaned to us by a Broadway costume shop and rented tap shoes. I'll never forget the opening day of our first performance of CATS.

Our lead actor was named Moses, and he was an artsy teenager with Down's Syndrome. Unfortunately, Moses didn't show up for school that morning. Yikes! Without hesitation, a paraeducator and I took the subway uptown to Washington Heights, knocked on his apartment door and swiftly brought Moses and his grandmother to school. The show went on without another hitch and Moses as you can imagine took the house down! He danced on stage as though lit from within by a burning bush. This, too, was holy ground.

According to the legal mandates and federal legislation set in 1975 under President Ford and reauthorized in 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protects and ensures that all children with or without disabilities receive free, equitable and individualized education under federal law<sup>1</sup>

As Koffi Annan, the Former Secretary General of the United Nations and Pulitzer Prize laureate said years ago *"Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development."* To think that this legal, *human* right is under attack in our own country has created terrible ripples of anxiety for educators and families everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

What do we do? Where are you and I being called? What's flaming up right before our hearts and eyes? I'm grateful that we live in the state of Connecticut. But the impact across the country will be devastating and disproportionately affecting many communities of color.

I believe in my whole heart that God continues to speak through flaming bushes and cries for justice and people like my brother, Dennis, and candlelight vigils and artists and brave folks organizing protests and writing letters and poetry and praying with their whole selves.... Like the legendary Moses, we're invited to keep open to the signs of our times and the opportunities to respond that appear before us.

Writer and poet, Cole Arthur Riley, writes, "I cannot tell you what to do with your life. But I can tell you that how you spend your days is a matter of choice, place, privilege and how willing you are to proceed down the corridor. However dimly lit. Even when your legs are trembling. If you are called to anything, it will sound like freedom."  
(Cole Arthur Riley, Black Liturgies)

It will sound like freedom.

As an educator, a parent, Dennis' sister and a minister, I, too, remember my 3 R's: Resist, Resist, Resist. Friends, this is holy ground and I'm privileged to walk it beside all of you. So, come! Let us make our way to Pharaoh! As we find our footing in the holy soil, may we know what it means to refuse complicity in practices of oppression and domination.

May we hold our ground. May we become sacred ground for the other.

Amen!

Rev. Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager 2/16/25

<sup>1</sup> In the United States, the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) is a federal law that requires every school system to provide a free and appropriate public education for every child, ages 3 to 22, regardless of how or how seriously that child may be disabled.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/what-the-assault-on-public-education-means-for-kids-with-disabilities?>