

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
Thy Will be Done: Hospitality
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Exodus 2:16-22; Mark 3:31-35

Have you ever felt like you don't belong? Have you ever felt like you were all alone? Have you ever felt like there was no one who understood you? Have you ever felt like the Michigan fan who finally scored a ticket to the Michigan-Michigan State game, but your seat was in the middle of the Michigan State band? If you have ever felt that way you know exactly how Moses felt in our morning's story. To understand this, let's recap Moses' life to this point. When Moses was an infant, his Hebrew mother placed him in a basket hoping against hope that he would not be killed by Pharaoh's forces. Through an act of caring, baby Moses was saved by the daughter of the Pharaoh. Moses is nursed by his Hebrew mother and then raised in the palace as an Egyptian. His name carries both Egyptian and Hebrew meanings. He knows he is an outsider in the palace even though he dresses and acts like an Egyptian. One day when Moses wanders out of the palace, he kills an Egyptian who is abusing a Hebrew, perhaps because he feels some kinship with the Hebrew. The next day though, Hebrew slaves essentially threaten to turn him in to the authorities. Moses then flees Egypt. Moses is a man without a country, a family, or an identity.

This is where our story picks up this morning. Moses, a very confused young man, is wandering in the wilderness and comes upon a well. At the well are some Midianite women who had come to draw water for their father's flocks. Some other shepherds drive the woman and their flocks away. Moses, being a man of justice, intervenes, drives off the shepherds and helps the women water their flocks. The women return home and tell their father, Reuel, about the incident at the well. Reuel is appalled that his daughters did not show appropriate hospitality and invite their Egyptian protector home. Now a brief word about hospitality. Hospitality, simply put, is treating a stranger like family, or helping an outsider become an insider. This is something that was commonly practiced among most desert cultures. Reuel tells his daughters to go and get the man. Moses is quickly not only treated like family, but he is also made family through marriage. It would be nice to say that this act of hospitality allowed Moses to find himself and he lived happily ever after as a Midianite, but this is not so. And we know this is not so because of the name he gave his first son, Gershom, meaning, "I am an alien who has been and continues to reside in a foreign land." In some ways Moses was now even more confused. Was he Hebrew, Egyptian, or Midianite?

Two questions that the book of Exodus forces us to ask then are, does Moses ever find his forever family and does he ever feel like he belongs? The answers to these questions are only found thirty chapters later in Exodus...and we shall turn to them now. For most of the Book of Exodus, the answers to these two questions are no. Moses is the ultimate outsider. He is not accepted by the Egyptians. He is not fully accepted and is looked on with suspicion by the Hebrews. In fact, whenever things go badly for Moses in his dealings with the new Pharaoh or with the Hebrews, Moses says to God, these Hebrews are **your** people, I have had enough of **them**. It is as if Moses sees himself as a turn-around CEO with no long-term connection to the company. But that will all change because of the great Golden Calf incident.

The Golden Calf incident begins simply enough. Moses has gone up the mountain to get some more rules and regulations from God. The people watch him ascend and the fire and smoke of God descend. For a while the people are patient, waiting for Moses to return. When he doesn't, they decide they need a new leader and a new God. They choose Aaron for their leader and quickly manufacture Golden Calf for their God. With those actions the Hebrew people have divorced God. They have chosen to be strangers and outsiders to God. They have declared that they are no longer God's children, God's family. To say the least, God is not pleased with this turn of events and so makes Moses an offer. "Moses", God says, "Listen, these people have divorced me, and so I will start over with you and your family and make a great nation of you. How does that sound?" In that moment, something happens inside Moses. I would argue that he remembers his struggle to find a forever family and how impactful was Reuel's offer of hospitality. And so Moses asks God for an act of radical hospitality. Moses asks God to forgive the Hebrews and welcome them back home; to turn these strangers into family and these outsiders into insiders. In one of the Bible's greatest acts of hospitality, God does so and that action changes Moses. I say this because for the first time in Exodus, Moses refers to the people as **"us"** and **"we"**. It is in that act of God's radical hospitality that Moses finds his forever family.

It is that same kind of radical hospitality that is at the heart of our Jesus story out of Mark this morning. The people gathered around Jesus are outsiders. As Galileans they are looked down upon by other Jews. They are ridiculed for their accents. They have been dispossessed by the wealthy of their lands. They wonder if they are still part of God's family. And so, when Jesus' family arrives and tells Jesus it is time for him to come home and resume his duties as the eldest child, he uses it as a teachable moment about hospitality. He says, pointing to the crowd, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother." This is the radical hospitality of God. All are welcome. All are invited. All can find their forever family in and through Jesus.

This my friends, is who God is. God is the God of hospitality. God is the God of open arms. This, my friends, is also what this table is all about. This is the table of radical hospitality. This is the meal of forever family. This is the moment when Jesus opens his arms wide and invites all who feel like they are outsiders, to come inside. This is the moment when Jesus opens his arms wide and makes strangers into family. So, if you are feeling as if you are alone; as if you have no family, as if you are an outsider; then come to the table and find your forever family. My challenge to you this morning is this, when we take the elements to say, "I am home. I am loved. I have found my forever family."