

**THE MESSAGE for June 12, 2011**  
**Numbers 11:1-6, 10-16, 24-29**  
*Moses... Followers Become Leaders.*  
**The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

We continue with our summer worship series on “Great People in God’s Story” and what an amazing story it is. You’ve probably heard the old adage, “If you want a job done right, do it yourself.” Amazingly, God doesn’t work that way. God chooses to work through people to get things done. Common, ordinary, everyday, flawed people like you and me.

Paul was throwing Christians in jail and approving their execution. Yet, God used him in a powerful way to spread the seeds of the Gospel and plant new churches. Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven unclean spirits. Yet, God used her in a powerful way as an example of discipleship to support Jesus’ mission and ministry. This is a pattern we’re going to see all summer long as we consider how God uses common, ordinary, everyday, flawed people like you and me to do God’s work on earth.

I wonder why God chooses to work like this. Could it be, so that we don’t forget who is really in charge and who really deserves all the credit? God does! Using flawed people, God makes it clear to one and all that the power for this unfolding story comes from God not us. We are but servants of the Lord.

I love how Paul put it this way in Corinthians chapter 4... *For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.*<sup>6</sup> *For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.*<sup>7</sup> *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* (2 Corinthians 4:5-7).

God is at work through us. That’s our hope as servants of Jesus! I love this image; we are but clay jars filled with the glory of God to do God’s work in the world. We are a vessel for God’s mission work in the world. God chooses to use flawed people for God’s glorious mission in the world.

Today we focus on one such person chosen by God. His name is Moses, one of the most influential people in God’s great story. I invite you to check out this video that offers us an introduction to Moses...

<http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/13251/Moses-Intro>

God was at work in Moses’ life from the very beginning. Born in Egypt when Pharaoh felt threatened by the number of Hebrews living in his land and saw them as a growing threat against him, Pharaoh decided to kill all the newborn boys. God devised a strategy and saved Moses by having his mother put him in a basket and floating him

down the Nile River where Pharaoh's own daughter found him, and raised him in Pharaoh's own house and raised Moses as her own as a prince in Pharaoh's house.

Moses was a Hebrew but grew up as an Egyptian, two different worlds. He knew his Egyptian family loved him yet that same family was brutally oppressing his kinfolk, the Hebrew slaves. Can you imagine Moses' inner conflict?

One day Moses is a young man and he sees an Egyptian taskmaster brutally beating a Hebrew slave. Moses murdered the taskmaster and buried his body to hide the crime. While the body stayed buried, Moses' crime did not. He became exposed. He is around 20 years old by my calculations. He was forced to flee from Egypt and winds up in a land called Midian where he marries, settles, raises children and tends sheep for 40 years.

If Moses' story ended there, it would be quite a story, indeed. But as they say – "You ain't seen nothin' yet." That was just beginning.

One day while tending sheep for his father-in-law, God called Moses through a burning bush. He is around 60 years old by my calculations. Moses becomes God's unlikely choice to free the Hebrew slaves from Pharaoh, the leader of the world's superpower at the time. Moses was chosen to be God's spokesperson even though he had a speech impediment. With God, never say never because God doesn't call the qualified, God qualifies the called.

The story is nothing short of spectacular. It included plagues, a journey through the sea on dry ground, pillars of cloud and fire, bread from heaven, water from a rock, Ten Commandments from a mountain, a golden calf and poisonous snakes, a lot of whining, there's a lot of whining, there's a lot of whining, the building of a tabernacle and God's incredible patience.

For 40 years Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness. By my calculations, it should have only taken them around a month. But God had other plans. God had another strategy. It wasn't the destination God was focused on, it was the journey. It was about learning to trust in God and God's word. The people needed to learn some important lessons about God along the way. It's the making of a great Hollywood movie. Oh yeah, they did that already.

For Moses, the journey ended on the banks of the Jordan River. He was only part of the story. He could see the Promised Land, but God would not allow him to enter it. Moses had failed a number of times as a leader during those 40 years in the wilderness, at one point he failed to trust in the Lord, failing to follow the Lord's clear command according to God's journey. When we fail to follow God's call, there are consequences. So God passed the mantel of leadership on to Joshua, and Joshua leads the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Moses died in the land of Moab, but his legacy lived on. He is remembered as one of God's greatest servant leaders in God's unfolding story of amazing grace. In fact, the Israelites believe that the Messiah would be a kind of second Moses, a leader who would set people free from their bondage.

I've noticed that Moses and Jesus share a lot in common. Consider these commonalities:

- Both are born Hebrews.
- At the time of their birth, powerful rulers called for the death of all male newborn Hebrews, so both had to be hidden to be saved.
- Moses spends 40 years as a shepherd, being prepared for his leadership. Jesus spends 40 days and nights in the desert, preparing for his leadership.
- Moses meets God on a mountain. Jesus is God on a mountain.
- Both perform miracles.
- Both are considered great prophets.
- Moses intercedes for God to miraculously feed his people. Jesus miraculously feeds people.
- Moses is a lawgiver with the Ten Commandments. Jesus is a lawgiver with the command to love God and neighbor.
- Moses prays for his people. Jesus prays for all people.
- Both set God's people free.

Today's reading is an interaction between Moses, the people, and God. The people are tired of the manna God has been providing them in the wilderness day in and day out. They are even tired of looking at it. It would be like eating oatmeal every day, day in and day out. And you just can't stand it anymore. (And I love oatmeal by the way). They long for the feast of food they left behind in Egypt. It seems they have forgotten about all the hard labor that made them so hungry! Yet they would much rather go back there than be out in the wilderness under God's provision. So they turn to Moses and they whine, "We have nothing to eat." Moses responds like a good servant leader. He looks outwardly at the problem, and inwardly at his own inability to solve it, so Moses blames God!

Ever done that? Have you ever been in a situation where the problem seems sooooo overwhelming, too large for you to deal with, but you know God wants you to deal with it, so you turn to God and say, "Why are you doing this to me?" I would guess we've all been there! As your servant leader, I sure have!

God's response is remarkable. Rather than chiding Moses for his failure to lead with greater trust, God raises up 70 new leaders to help Moses bear the leadership burden to help people live and trust in God's Word. God shares the Spirit that was placed on Moses with those new leaders and, like Moses, they begin to help people live and trust in God's Word. Wow -- what I wouldn't give for a leadership team of 70 all filled with the spirit and working on the same page to help more and more people live and trust in God's Word. Moses responds in true servant leadership fashion, with gratitude.

Joshua is upset by all these new leaders. Joshua is jealous for Moses' sake. From Joshua's perspective, more leaders mean less power and less glory for Moses and for Joshua. But Moses doesn't see it that way. Moses is delighted with this gift from God. Moses is more interested in seeing God's mission accomplished through more and more people than it is for him to get more power and glory and praise.

Question. How many full-time ministers are here today? Would you raise your hands, please?

That's a question that Wayne Cordeiro asked at a conference a few years ago. Wayne Cordeiro is a very effective pastor in Hawaii whose church, New Hope, he started 26 years ago. That church has grown from zero to over 14,000. He has helped plant over 100 churches and started a Bible college to train new leaders for ministry. Pastor Cordeiro is a great innovative leader.

It's no surprise that thousands of people came to a workshop he offered a few years ago, and, during one of his presentations, Pastor Cordeiro asked how many full-time ministers were present that day. About four hundred people raised their hands, most of them ordained pastors.

Pastor Cordeiro then went on to talk about the fact that God wants to reach the world, not just people in the church, and so God hides full-time ministers in doctors and nurses. God hides full-time ministers in moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas. God hides full-time ministers in students and teachers. God hides full-time ministers in managers and business owners. God hides full-time ministers in athletes and construction workers.

Pastor Cordeiro went on for ten minutes talking about where God hides full-time ministers. When he finished, Pastor Cordeiro asked his question again. "How many full-time ministers are here today?" And this time, every hand in the auditorium went up.

So let me ask you again. How many full-time ministers are here today? Everyone of us, everyone of us is a full-time minister. I don't know about you but that means the game has changed. The rules have changed. The results we strive for have changed. The scorecard has changed.

What you do for a living is your ministry setting. Your baptism is your ordination. In baptism God has called you, cleansed you, commissioned you, and empowers you -- every one of us -- with the Holy Spirit to share in the joys and challenges of God's mission and ministry in the world. Every one of us is filled with the Spirit. The same Spirit that filled Moses and the 70 leaders. The same Spirit that Jesus sends in Baptism. The same Spirit that came on Pentecost. The same Spirit that sends us out into the world.

I'm not talking about everyone becoming a preacher. That's an awful thought! But we each have gifts to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Being a full-time minister means sharing God's love in word and deed wherever we live, work, and play. It means being a peacemaker. It means working for justice. It means loving the unlovable. It means serving others. It means living generously. It means reaching out beyond ourselves. It means being Jesus to others. We are to be Jesus to others.

Last week, I was standing right up there at the altar after the first service getting ready for the second service and I saw the Spirit at work here in the Body of Christ as ministers gathered right up here around one of our band members (pointing to the first pew) who was getting ready to go through a challenging surgery this week. And those ministers laid their hands on that person and prayed for God's Spirit to guide the doctors and nurses this week. That's the Body of Christ at work. There are many ministers in this place all being called to share in equipping and supporting one another that we might trust and live by the Word of God

How might we be Jesus to one another? How might we be the body of Christ not just in this place but wherever we go? How might we support and equip one another to be full-time ministers hidden in the various roles we play in daily life? You are the church wherever you go. You are to be Jesus wherever you go.

Moses was a flawed character in the flawless story of God's amazing grace. And so too are we. We have a part to play in God's amazing story. My hope is that the Spirit will stir among us so that God's love flows into our lives in this place and flows through us out into the world. You are ministers of God's love. Amen