

Moses: God's Will and My Inadequacy

### **Welcome to Worship**

Greetings and thank you for being here tonight. Our service this evening is centered on the verse Exodus 4:13, *"But [Moses] said, 'Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.'"*



### **Spoken Opening Hymn – My Faith Looks Up to Thee**

My faith looks up to thee; though Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine.  
Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away, Oh let me from this day be wholly thine!

While life's dark maze I read and griefs around me spread, be though my guide  
Bid darkness turn to day, wipe sorrow's tears away, nor let me every stray from thee abide.

### **Invocation**

P Wherever two or more are gathered together in Jesus' name, he promises to be there in the midst of them.

**C Come, merciful Father, and be our guest.**

P Come, loving Savior, and be our guest.

**C Come, Comforter, be our guest and fill this moment with your presence.**

P In the sure and confident hope that our Lord is present in this place we begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Let us glorify him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light!

### **Opening Litany**

P Periods of failure come into the lives of everyone. With the glorious exception of Jesus, every hero of the Bible had their times of failure as well.

**C Adam and Eve ate the fruit.**

P Abraham and Sarah laughed at God.

**C Moses murdered a man.**

P King David had an affair.

**C Solomon worshipped false gods.**

P Jonah refused to obey and ran away from the work of the Lord.

**C Peter denied the Lord.**

P Thomas doubted the promise and the testimony.

**C Paul persecuted Christians.**

P The list could go on and on. All the heroes of yesterday had their areas of weakness.

**C But God strengthened them in their weakness, and was able to use them according to his good and gracious will.**

P It can happen in a moment. A bad decision,

**C an action we shouldn't have taken,**

P a moment of fear that led to an impulse that was wrong,

**C and failure invades our life.**

P It can happen when things are going great,

**C or it could happen gradually, the result of a series of events that has taken place.**

P Failure invades all of our lives at one time or another.

**C Some failures are minor and are overcome quickly.**

P Others are devastating not only in their effect on us,

**C but in their effect on others.**

P Yet to those who repent, a gracious God offers full and free forgiveness.

**C God strengthens us in our weakness, and is able to use us according to his good and gracious will.**

### **Prayer of the Day**

**Moses said, 'Oh, my Lord, please send someone else'" (Exodus 4:13). We know that prayer, Lord; we know it all too well. At times we feel weak and inadequate, too sinful and unsure to be your representatives. At times we don't want to be bothered and are too self-focused**

**to be your messengers. We lay our own inadequacies and our own unwillingness before you today. Give us your sense of value and purpose. Forgive our failings. Restore our vision of your mission. And promise to be with me, that your will may be done through me. Amen.**

### **Children's Message**

*Needed: a picture of a burning bush*

P We are in the season of Lent and today we are talking about God's will and our inadequacy. Inadequacy is a kind of big word that means "not good enough." To be honest, we aren't always good enough in the eyes of God when we are sinful but thankfully God sent Jesus to take away all of our sins. Because Jesus died on the cross for us we are made good enough to receive forgiveness and life everlasting. What a gift that is.

Now that we are forgiven and saved, God has a job for us to do: He wants us to tell other people about his Son Jesus and his cross of salvation. But we may still not think we can do it. But you know what? God says we can. He will give us the strength to tell people about Jesus and he will be with us.

You know how I know this is true? Because of what he said to Moses when Moses told God he couldn't do the job of freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God told him through a burning bush (*show picture of burning bush*), "You can do it, because I am God and I will go with you, and your brother Aaron will help." God gives us strength we didn't know we even had and God gives us people to help us do the job God has given us to do.

So never say to God, "I can't do it!" He makes sure you can do whatever it is he has called you to do. That is his will for you. That was his will for Moses. And Moses did free the Israelites from slavery. And that was his will for Christ, and Jesus did free us, who are God's people, from the slavery of sin forevermore.

Dear God, thank you for showing us through Moses that you can make great things happen even through the most inadequate people. Help us to trust in your will for us even when we feel weak. Keep us strong to spread the Good News of Jesus to everyone we meet. Amen.

### **Old Testament Reading, Exodus 3 and 4 (selected verses)**

P God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of

Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth?... Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

### **Second Reading, Numbers 20:2-13**

Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.” Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.” And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him.

Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy.

### **Third Reading, Numbers 21:4-9**

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

### **Gospel Reading, John 3:14-18**

(Jesus said:) “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

### **Message**

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

At first, Moses did not think he could free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But God worked through him to set his people free. In Lent we remember that God sent his Son to do his will and set all people free from the slavery of sin. Let us listen to Moses’ account:

You’ll have to be patient with me. I have never been the best public speaker. Never have been. You were perhaps expecting some great and powerful figure? A leader full of authority and self-confidence? There was a time when I expected that, too. But I’m just a tired old man with a tired tongue. So you’ll have to be patient with me.

Growing up in Pharaoh’s house, I thought poor speaking was the worst of my troubles. But you know the story... I wasn’t Egyptian royalty; I was actually a Hebrew slave, rescued through river water, saved by a basket, my own personal Noah’s Ark. That was all so long ago. But I don’t need to bore you with all the details. You know about the murder, and the escape from Egypt. You know about the parting of the Red Sea and the pillar of fire and smoke. You’ve heard of the Tablets of Stone and the Golden Calf. But I want to tell you something about me, before the funeral, before I am finally laid to rest. I have seen and done so much, you could get the idea that I am something of a hero. But looking back at the whole story from the top of this mountain, I simply feel ... inadequate.

You know... [*ashamed*] I didn’t want to go. I didn’t want to go back to Egypt. I didn’t want to be the leader of God’s people, those stiff-necked people I learned to love so dearly. I certainly never set out to be the mouthpiece of the Almighty! Me!! With my lack of speaking ability! Talk

about the wrong decision! I told him that, too; I told the Great I AM that I wasn't! I wasn't a good choice! I wasn't a good leader! I can't bring weighty words with my poor speaking! There at the burning bush I told him I wasn't up for the job. But he didn't listen to me. "Oh, dear Lord," I said, "Please send someone else." It wasn't that I didn't want to go back (though I didn't want to go back); it wasn't that I was afraid (though, honestly, I was afraid). Mostly, I just felt ... well, not up for the job. I wasn't brave enough or smart enough or holy enough! Why would they listen to me? But in the end, my own inadequacy didn't matter, not to God. God decided to use ME so he did. I wasn't alone. God gave Aaron and Miriam to share the burden of leadership. God put his staff in my hand to work his miracles at his Word. And he sent me and my inadequacies and my inability to speak well and my murderous ways out to do his bidding.

I didn't look like a hero, leaving sheep behind to call on Pharaoh's court. Pharaoh didn't believe me; the people of Israel didn't believe me; I didn't believe me, either! But the Great I AM is greater than the gods of Egypt. The Great I AM is greater than my inadequacy. The Great I AM will accomplish his purpose, even when his people are weak and doubting, confused and rebellious, incompetent and afraid. Like me.

I learned firsthand that God can use inadequate people to do his saving work. The plagues took on the gods of Egypt one by one; these miracles came at God's holy Word, through my poor voice. The lamb's blood covered over our houses, and the Angel of Death passed over, just as God promised. The armies of Egypt were drowned in the waters of the Sea. I saw it all happen. I was part of it all. But never was I in control. It wasn't about me. It was never about me. If only I hadn't forgotten that truth!

You see, at the burning bush I was focused on me; that's why I asked God to send someone else. And God was not pleased—I was focusing on my weakness instead of His promise. But the longer I led this beautiful and stubborn people, the more confidence I gained. I became their leader. I spoke for God. I even saw the heaviness—the glory—of the I AM and my face shone with the reflection.

I learned dependence on God in my weakness; but I forgot dependence on God in my strength. It was just after Miriam died. We had been wandering in the wilderness for years and years. And the people still grumbled. They still lacked trust. They still blamed me for their hard and fearful hearts. So the Lord told me to speak to a rock, that the people and their cattle could drink and live. I no longer had Miriam's help, but I didn't need her anymore.

I had been leading God's people and doing God's work. So I told Aaron to assemble everyone together. I took the same staff God gave me at the burning bush, the same staff that worked miracles in Egypt—I took my powerful staff in my powerful hands and I put

myself on the same level as God. “You hard-hearted, stiff necked people!” I yelled in righteous anger. “Your grumbling has offended our honor, God’s and mine. But we will bring forth water from this hard rock, as we did before!”

And though God had commanded me to speak to the rock with my weak speaking voice, I chose to take that powerful staff and strike the rock twice, to show who was in charge.

Oh, the people got their water. But I, who was saved through water, was also condemned through water. I forgot the most important lesson of being God’s servant: it’s not about me. Since I made Moses as important as God, I’m stuck on this mountain, while Joshua prepares the people for their final march home.

From here I can see the Land of Promise—just there—over the ridge. But I won’t be going in. We buried Aaron in the wilderness, and God himself will bury me here, on this crag. And I will have to wait for the day of resurrection before the Promise of the Land is fulfilled to me. Being barred from the Land might seem like a steep price to pay for hitting one lousy rock. It sometimes feels that way to me.

But my sin wasn’t simple disobedience. I made myself as important as God. I stopped depending on his Word. I thought I could do it on my own. He should have buried me right then and there, at that Rock of Testing. But I’m glad he didn’t. I got another chance to learn that, whether I feel powerful or inadequate, it’s not about me.

After we buried Aaron, and I was all on my own, the people became impatient yet again. This time the Lord sent poisonous snakes: their bite burned; people died. But when they returned to Lord and confessed their sin, I prayed for them—it was always my honor to pray for them—and God gave a way for the people to be saved. This time I wasn’t supposed to speak. This time I had no need of the staff. This time it wasn’t about me, at all. Instead, I was told to take some metal and shape a snake just like the ones biting and killing God’s people, and put that bronze snake up on a pole. I have to admit, shaping a serpent seemed kind of strange at the time. I mean, I saw the finger of God write the commandments: you shall have no other gods, no graven images. And the same God who told me to pulverize a golden model of a herd animal was now asking me to shape a bronze model of a snake! A snake of all things! Can you believe it? We know all about the Snake, the Tempter, the Enemy who got us kicked out of the Land of Promise in the first place. A snake taught us idolatry to begin with.

But the bronze snake on a pole wasn’t supposed to be worshiped; it wasn’t an idol or a talisman. Instead, the snake became a symbol of sin, our sin. The bronze serpent was a sign of the punishment and death our sins deserved. That twisted shape, lifted up before God,

became sin for us: our constant grumbling, our failure to trust, our stubborn rejection, our hard hearts, strung up on a tree. And anyone who looked at that curse lifted up in the wilderness saw the promise of God, and lived.

From here I can see the Promised Land, still far off. In the distance, I can hear the people begin their journey home. The Lord will come again, soon, to plant my old body in the warm, fertile ground. While I wait for the Lord to come, that bronze serpent is a comfort. It's a reminder that God is going to keep leading his people without Moses. God will fulfill his promises, in his way and in his time. And when the people sin, when they rebel, when they grumble and turn away, God himself will provide a way, a means of forgiveness, a sign of God's anger poured out and satisfied, lifted high on a pole and all who look there will live. Amen

### **Spoken Hymn – Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us**

Savior, like a shepherd lead us; much we need your tender care  
In your pleasant pastures feed us for our use your field prepare  
Blessed Jesus you have brought us; we are yours

You have promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be  
You have mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free  
Blessed Jesus You have loved us, love us still.

### **Prayers (Perfect Son of God, **cover us with your holiness that we might live for you**)**

God of impossibility, thank you for showing us through your servant Moses that you are capable of using the weak things of this world to show your strength. Grant us the ability never to give up on ourselves and our capabilities and to never give up on you, Perfect Son of God, **cover us with your holiness that we might live for you.**

In this Lenten season, Lord, we come to you because we know we are sinners and not good enough to win salvation for ourselves. Help us to remember that we are only made right with you through the suffering and death of your Son Jesus on the cross. Perfect Son of God, **cover us with your holiness that we might live for you.**

Lord, you sent Jesus to be our Savior, yet he was not born in a castle. He lived a humble life. He came not to be served, but to serve. May we mirror the way of Christ in our approach to tasks and our approach to others. Give us servant hearts that seek to satisfy the needs of others before our own. And give us grace not to pursue fame or fortune in this world, but



treasure instead the riches of heaven, won for us by Jesus. Perfect Son of God, **cover us with your holiness that we might live for you.**

Only Jesus lived the perfect life. Help us to remember that as we encounter imperfections in our bodies, our world and our lives. Be with those suffering with the imperfections of illnesses and injuries, conditions and diseases, especially Marlis and Margie, Terry and Sonja, Jeff and Kirk, Mike and all those that we now name in our own hearts... Guard and guide them to healing and recovery of body, mind and soul, as you will. Perfect Son of God, **cover us with your holiness that we might live for you.**

Grant us each day the wisdom to know what your will is for our lives, and fill us the comfort of the cross of Christ, upon which your will was done for our benefit. Let us never forget that we are deeply precious to you. Perfect Son of God, **cover us with your holiness that we might live for you.**

All these petitions we offer in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who did the will of God and lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### **Lord's Prayer**

***Our father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

#### **Benediction**

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."' So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." Amen

#### **Closing Spoken Hymn – The King of Love My Shepherd Is**

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine forever.

