

A Sermon Preached by
Fr. Ralph Osborne for the Third Sunday of Lent, Year C
March 7, 2010 at St. Thomas Church, Menasha, Wisconsin
[Exodus 3:1-15](#) | [Psalm 63:1-8](#) | [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#) | [Luke 13:1-9](#)

The purpose of God for our lives can cause us to be afraid. We really want to be in charge of our own lives. We don't want anyone or anything to control us but ourselves. Submitting ourselves to the will of God puts us in a vulnerable place. Submitted to God, our beliefs, opinions, desires and needs become secondary to a purpose that we are not always made aware of.

When I visited St. Thomas back in October, 2009, I was taken with the signs by the doors that say, "Welcome home". The idea of home is an emotional and spiritual powerhouse for me. I learned early on that this world is not my home except that I get a glimpse of home when I am in the presence of God's people. So, we have these signs that at first sight are very comforting. Lots of things are comforting until we start to really think about them. Imagine never attending here and seeing those signs. What a warm and inviting sentiment. With a little pause though, we could wonder...home? Do they already know my name? Do they know who I am? Can they see my faults? How can this be home? We, who are regulars here, believe that we are a friendly family who can make anyone feel at home, but our signs do not say, "Feel at home here." What is true is that we trust that the Spirit of God is here and God knows the name of all who enter. God knows the life story, the needs, pains and hopes of all who come into these doors. Our home is with God. That is comforting and scary. The regular attendees of St. Thomas work to announce the nearness of God through voice and action.

Moses grew up in Egypt. When he was an adult, he had a difficult situation where he killed a man who was abusing a Hebrew. Not trusting the court system, he fled to another land. He settled down and married and had children and was doing O.K. He was living on the Lam. He had left that old life behind, but things were just getting worse in Egypt. The situation of the Hebrews just got more and more terrible. At the peak of their pain, they cried out and God heard them. Their cry and God's response is the turning point of the entire Old Testament. God heard their cry and remembered his promise to them and he knew their pain. From that point, everything was different even though it looked like nothing happened for the next forty years.

Because of this activity and compassion in the heart of God, he lit up a bush where Moses was hanging out. God spoke to Moses and called him to a purpose to set His people free. Setting people free is the heart of the gospel. In the heart of the call, was also the gospel message to set Moses free. God was sending Moses back to Egypt. God was sending Moses back to the place where his picture was still on the post office wall. It could be a death sentence for Moses to go back to Egypt. He had turned away from there long ago and now God wanted him to turn back. God's purpose to set an oppressed people free was more important than Moses' personal history and fear. Yet, following the purpose of God would set Moses free. You just can't know that in advance.

You are called by God, and I am called by God. We often pretend that we live an autonomous life, a life that God does not interrupt. O, we come and worship and tell God we love Him, but we are in charge and God doesn't make an appearance where He is unwanted. We believe that our name is not known unless we say it. We don't really believe in burning bushes. The truth is that God does show up uninvited. God does know your name and mine too. The

freedom of God is an awesome thing. God is calling you to a purpose for which you don't get to know all the details. God summons us to a purpose. His purpose.

It is not unusual to run from the purpose God has for us. Moses argued. Who am I to do this task? I'm not smart enough, I don't talk so good, I don't even know your name, the people won't believe in me. Moses found all sorts of reasons from the past to prove to God that the future God was planning was not possible. You know what he got? Moses got a promise that God will be with him. He didn't get a guarantee that it would all work out the way he thought it would. He didn't get a guarantee that he could do it the way he saw fit. God told Moses that he would not be alone. God would be with him.

In Lent we repent of our belief that our past determines our future. We turn to God and the future God intends. We give up our focus on what was and how our past will determine all that comes and we say yes to God's call to a different future. We repent of the belief that our lives are our own and we are the only ones who know our name. You could say that we are a fig tree. We are a plant of God. We are created and nourished by God and all the resources of God. We are planted with a purpose to bear fruit. There is a time for maturing and then the owner expects fruit from the tree. In the Middle East, fig trees bring life. They are an important source of food for the people. When the tree does not bear fruit it is cut down. What a scary thought. God expects us to bear fruit. What a hopeful message to me that the fig tree gets a second chance. The gardener, who is Jesus, asks God for more time. Time is not endless, but the fig tree gets a second chance. We get a second chance. It is called grace.

While it is true that we are a planting of God and are to bear fruit, home is home. With God is where we belong. There is no home apart from God. The One who created us, knows us better than we know ourselves. He loves us with a passion that is unmatched. God's desire is for our life to be abundant. It is why Christ became human flesh. We cannot be at home, living an isolated, self focused life. There is no fruit in that life. We are meant for community, for family. We are made in God's very image! We worship God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The being of God is community. As we live in God, we are in community with each other and we bear fruit. The vulnerable ones who God puts in our path hear the message of freedom and we walk home with them.