



Mission Impossible

Exodus 5:1-9

Since 1996, the *Mission Impossible* movies have recorded one box office success after another. Amidst impossible challenges and incredible dangers, Ethan Hunt, played by Tom Cruise, has saved humanity from nuclear war, the bubonic plague, and a multiplicity of rogue terrorist groups. I am personally convinced that Ethan Hunt should be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. These highly entertaining movies have taken in \$3.5 billion at the worldwide box office. Each mission is top secret, covert, extremely dangerous, and begins with the well known words, “Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is...”

Over the last few weeks on Sunday mornings, I have been exploring with my congregation at First Presbyterian the life of Moses. Last Sunday we tried to imagine how Moses would respond if God had said, “Moses, your mission—should you choose to accept it—is to return to Egypt, convince the Hebrew people that I sent you, and persuade them that I am about to bring them out of bondage and slavery into a promised land.”

Moses knew his mission would be difficult and dangerous. He had lived in Egypt some 40 years earlier and had, in a moment of rage, killed a man. Now God was asking him to return to Egypt, challenge Pharaoh, and bring about the circumstances which would emancipate the Hebrew people from the horrors of captivity and slavery. This was indeed a Mission Impossible.

They believed... (Exodus 4:29-31)

At the end of Exodus chapter 4, a note of hope emerges as Moses and Aaron meet with the elders of Israel. They are persuaded that God has provided Moses to enable them as a people to break the bonds of slavery and leave Egypt. I suspect that Moses went to bed that night relieved, riding the crest of emotion and euphoria. Having tasted success, I wonder if he felt a bit more positive than he had initially. Perhaps

Moses imagined that Pharaoh, after considerable discussion, would reluctantly acquiesce: “Moses, okay, I can see your point. After all, these are your people.” It would be like a lightning score in sudden-death overtime.

It is worth remembering who Pharaoh was. He was considered a descendant of the gods. Throughout Egypt were colossal statues, structures, and sculptures bearing his name towering toward Egyptian skies. Pharaoh was worshiped as a living deity.

Moses did not get the response he wanted. Pharaoh not only summarily dismissed Moses’ request, but also ordered the Hebrew people to work harder for daring to ask for their freedom. Suddenly things were not going the way Moses had hoped. He had not made things better. If anything, he had made things worse. Now the Hebrew people, who were initially hesitant, were fearful and angry at Moses. Talk about being disappointed, discouraged, and perhaps disillusioned. Moses was indeed facing an impossible mission.

Why have you brought trouble? (Exodus 5:22)

As chapter 5 of Exodus develops, a defining moment arrives for Moses. Amidst his questions of why things were not working out the way he had imagined, we read that “Moses returned to the LORD.” This is a significant development because Moses could have walked away, surrendered to the belief that the mission was impossible, and returned to Midian on the far side of the desert where his wife was and where he had made his home for the last 40 years. Yet he chose to remain. *A crisis does not make us who we are; it often reveals who we are.* Moses was learning that when God places His hand upon a life, He may call that person to reach down into the hidden places of the soul and stand strong when things don’t work out, despite loneliness and deep disappointment.

Beginning to grasp the immensity of the task before him, Moses could see what happens when sin takes hold of a heart. The person experiences sin as enticing, attractive, and deceptive, and is then held in bondage and slavery to sin’s tranquilizing, addictive nature. The person becomes comfortable with the sin and a certain

lifestyle, believing this lifestyle is right and mightily resisting any attempt to change.

Because his massive building program would have been impossible without slave labor, Pharaoh depended heavily on the Hebrew slaves. If he set them free, his building project would grind to a halt, the morale of the Egyptian nation would be affected, and it would ultimately impact the economy. Pharaoh was not going to acquiesce to Moses; too much was at stake to do the right thing. Moses was learning that the more ingrained the behavior, the darker the cul-de-sac.

When Moses “returns to the LORD,” I imagine God’s interaction with Moses, reminding him, “Moses, this is only round one. You don’t walk away after the first day, surrender, and give up. Moses, keep your eyes fixed on me. I am the LORD. I am with you. I have you.” Moses was learning what each generation has learned since. We can prayerfully climb up into the lap of God and rest in Him when our schedules press in on us, our prospects are thin, our hope burns low, others disappoint or turn against us, dreams turn to dust, walls close in, the prognosis is not good, our heart breaks, we are disappointed, disillusioned, hurting, hesitant, and bewildered.

Circumstances that turn against us force dependence. Circumstances that force dependence teach us patience. Circumstances that teach us patience make us wise.

Humanly speaking, Moses had every reason to give up and walk away, to believe it was over. But God had His hand on Moses. Moses needed to decide, as we also must: *Are we going to live cautiously or courageously?* We were not made to embrace mediocrity. It would have been easier for Moses to live in Midian, but not better; easier but not more significant; easier but never more fulfilling.

God spoke to Moses as He speaks to us: “Rely on Me amidst hurt and pain. Walk with Me when you are disappointed and disillusioned. Attempting the impossible is your Mission. You chose to accept it and I will be with you.”

Dr. Gibbons messages are available online at FirstPresGreenville.org (click the Media tab) and on Fox Carolina, Sundays at 10:30am.