

## ***“Who, Me?”***

A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship  
The Fourth Sunday of Stewardship Season  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC  
October 28, 2018  
Text: Exodus 6:1-13

The sermon I had intended to write for this morning is not this sermon. I had intended to write about Moses and his uniquely tumultuous relationship with God, a relationship that defines the past, present and future of the Jewish people. I had wanted to provide an opportunity for us to ponder together how much we have to learn from Moses’ and the way he interacted with God, the way he loved God, the way he trusted God. I hoped we could see just a little of ourselves in Moses as we observed God explaining to him the plans and hopes God had for the people whose groaning God tells Moses has been heard and inviting Moses to be a part of their redemption. That is the question to which Moses responded, figuratively if not literally, “who, me?” Moses did not feel adequate to the role to which God wanted to assign him, but God wasn’t taking no for an answer from Moses. And the rest, as they say, is history – literally. Ours as Christians and the people of Judaism.

That’s the sermon I intended to preach, but that was before yesterday and the attack on the synagogue in Pittsburgh by an avowed white supremacist who took his anti-Semitic rage out on 11 innocent people who thought they were safe in their house of

worship. They were there for regular Shabbat services and a bris, a naming ceremony for a newborn baby. Horrific doesn't begin to describe the attack where the man shouted "all Jews must die" as he pulled the trigger. What is happening to us? How do we stop this carnage and heartache? Who will do *something*? These are the questions echoing in my heartbeats and ricocheting through my brain as I sat down to write this sermon entitled, "Who, Me?"

The sad truth is it wasn't just a shooting rampage at a synagogue in my hometown that happened last week. As if that weren't bad enough. This was also the week when pipe bombs – 13 at last count – were sent to Democratic leaders and campaign contributors at the highest levels. We don't know the whole story of the bomber yet but what we do know suggests he was influenced by the hateful rhetoric too much a part of what is passing for national discourse these days. Clearly words can now quite literally hurt us as individuals, and as a nation, far more than any of us could have imagined just a few years ago.

Then, as I was doing some reading last evening, I came across another shooting incident in Kentucky this past Wednesday that had completely slipped my notice. Maybe you missed it too. Buried under all the pipe bomb news I guess. In this case, the shooter had tried to get into a nearby black church first and when that didn't work out as planned he headed into a grocery store – a Kroger's for heaven's sake – and shot two

African-Americans in their 60's who were just out picking up a few things. He shot them in the back, killing them instantly. Then he nonchalantly walked out of the store and when a white man saw him holding a gun, he shouted to him not to worry, he wasn't going to shoot him, because he didn't shoot white people. Racism is alive and well, and out of control.

So, dear friends, I'm sorry but I just couldn't preach the sermon I had planned on preaching today because my heart is just too heavy. My sadness at what is going on in this country I so love is too great. Life is difficult enough with just our own stuff to worry about each day. Bills to be paid, families to be worried about, medical concerns to be dealt with – the list goes on. But all that is manageable – these worries of everyday life – when the rest of life, the rest of the world we live in each day, feels safe and secure. We can handle these horrific news stories when they happen someplace else. We feel bad about them happening. We feel awful for the people involved. But, let's be honest, we also think – I'm glad that wouldn't happen here. That's what I thought too. That's what kept me sane. Until yesterday when a synagogue from my home town, a place I remember driving past as a child, was targeted for an act of unmitigated hatred, death and destruction. I dated a Jewish boy in high school very briefly – I was a shicksa so his family didn't approve – and I think this was the synagogue they might have attended. Maybe he still attends

there, I don't know. Maybe he was there yesterday. I don't know that either because the names of the dead and injured haven't been released yet. But my heart is breaking anyway, whether Phil was there or not.

My heart is groaning as are the hearts of so many during this sad and frightening time in our country. Perhaps your heart is groaning too. I'm thinking it probably is. I don't know why it wouldn't be. So, at the very least, we are all in this together. We have each other for support and comfort when life is just too hard, when the days are just too awful, when the news is just too scary. That's what it means to be a community of God's people together. We are, in fact, a community – a family – whom God has brought together in this moment for reasons only God really knows. But, this morning, the fact that we are together here in this sacred place, saturated by the prayers of so many for so long, is what gives me the strength I need to move forward into this new day, this new week. This community of God's beloved people here in this place coming together to groan together on days like today, and to laugh and celebrate together as we have so often on happier occasions is what calls us forward into the future God has in mind for us. And it is not a future of fear and shadows and violence. It is not a future where hateful shouts drown out words of love, sung and spoken. Instead, I choose to embrace a future

filled to the brim and dripping over with hope and love, compassion and justice.

Dear friends, I simply refuse to let hate win. I refuse to give in to anger and despair even though there are days when it would be so easy to do so. I refuse to meet hate with hate. I refuse to give up on people who disagree with me. I refuse to give up on the possibility that tomorrow will be better, that the ability to understand and care about someone who thinks differently from me is beyond my reach. I refuse to be less than who God created me – and all of us – to be. Dear ones, we are created in God’s own image – let us never forget that. God’s own image! God’s own image filled with light and life, with hope and possibility, with faith that dawn awaits on the other side of the darkest night.

Now that I think about it, perhaps that’s why Moses was able to talk with God as he did. Perhaps Moses got it – really got it – in a way the rest of us only ever aspire to. Maybe Moses was somehow able to think “who me?” to himself at the same time he responded to God’s invitation to be the person to free his people with a timid yet powerful “yes” that still reverberates today. Moses listened to God’s wonderful speech in today’s text about everything God was going to do and why God was going to do it and thought – holy cow, does God really think I’m the one to do this??? Clearly, God did. And, the thing is, Moses did it. He didn’t think he could, but he did it anyway. One step at a time,

doing just what God told him to do. Sometimes it worked out. Sometimes it didn't because the people Moses was trying to save were a rebellious people. That's repeated often in the stories about Moses leading the Israelites in their 40 year quest to find the promised land of Canaan. But today's text adds one small disclaimer to that description of this proud and rebellious people – they didn't listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

They didn't listen because of their broken spirit and cruel slavery. They didn't listen because they were hurting so bad they couldn't hear the promise of a better tomorrow. They couldn't see the breaking dawn beyond the long, dark and scary night. They didn't listen to Moses, but Moses still listened to God. Moses still did what God told him to do for the people. Moses nudged and nagged them, he begged and cajoled, he railed at them, and he kept them going. He did it because it needed to be done and God had asked him to do it. God didn't ask him if he felt like doing it. God didn't ask him if he wanted to do it. God saw that it needed doing and that Moses was the one to do it. And, that was that.

So where does that leave us, dear friends, on this day after the storm has ended and the clouds are clearing. Anger and vitriol still fill the airwaves and the violence left in its wake still shocks and saddens us. My heart is still broken about the synagogue in Pittsburgh, the grocery store in Kentucky, the

schools all over this country, the concert venue in Las Vegas and so many more places where hate has stolen lives. My head aches from the angry words, blaming words, divisive words flying so fast and furious. But my heart, *my heart* will not surrender, will not give in to despair. My faith will not crumble and blow away like dried up autumn leaves. It will not crumble because my faith is not something I created for myself. My faith is the gift of God to me, the gift of grace unearned but gratefully received. My hope grounded in this faith will not be crushed beneath the weight of endless bad news and scary possibilities. My God, the same God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, my God will carry me forward into the future on those days when my own legs fail me. My God, the same God whom Moses spoke to as a friend, my God knows my fears before I speak them, knows my heartaches before I can give them voice. My God goes before me, walks beside me and protects me, always.

Does this mean bad things never happen? No. Does this mean I won't have days when I think I'll explode if I hear one more pieced of bad news? No. Does this mean every day will be happy and all the world's problems will just disappear if I just pray hard enough, love Jesus enough, try hard enough? No. It's not that easy and it never was. Nothing about God or faith or life is easy or simple. And if you think about it, nobody every said it

was. Moses got that. Jesus got that. I think I do too. How about you?

Well, what dya' know... Maybe I did preach that sermon about Moses after all. Isn't God amazing... Amen.