

February 4

“When Things are Simple”

Moses and the Staff

Scripture Focus: Exodus 4:1-5

1 Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’?”

2 Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

Special Music:

“Gifts From God”

Chris Tomlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfLGfulNnG4>

WHATCHA GOT?



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2 Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

“A staff,” he replied.

3 The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.”

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it.

4 Then the Lord said to him, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.” So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

5 “This,” said the Lord, “is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.”

SIMPLE THINGS

Oh, the joy of simple things,
The things we take for granted.
The sun comes up, the sun goes down,
Our blessings are all supplanted

By selfish whims of fancy
And dreams of what could be
Instead of reaching out and touching
The essence of our spirit's key

The gentle breezes in the air
The flowers and the trees
The sound of children laughing everywhere
Seeking only to appease

The nature of a world gone mad,
Covered by a fog
With people searching in the dark
To find the light of God.

But God gives us the simple things
To show the world the way
A staff in hand, a promised land,
A torch against the gray.

**But we often fail to see
How simple things can change
The ugliness of the world at large
And how God can rearrange**

**The simple for the grand
His wonders to behold
Built on the rocks of simple things
Turning dusty things to gold.**

**God will always take the things
That he has given us to hold
And change them into what we need
To see his truth unfold**

**Bringing light to a weary world
And chase the fog away.
Turning our trinkets of useless things
To show a better way.**

**Yet, so often, we fail to see
The value of what's in hand
How a mighty God can use simple things
To carry out his plan.**

Human beings pride themselves on trying to build a better mousetrap, to overthink things. There is nothing wrong with thinking big, but we often believe that thinking big requires us to have big tools. Just how many different types of potato peelers does one need? Why will we spend \$20 on just the right screwdriver when we have at least one or more screwdrivers that will do the same job? How many attachments do we need for our Kitchen Aid mixers? If you are anything like me, you have tools, kitchen utensils, office products, balls of string, pieces of wire, and other whatnots that we have used once (or possibly never) taking up space in our drawers and cabinets, just in case we might need them tomorrow. I am really trying to get rid of that clutter in my life, but it seems to multiply no matter what I do.

I really only need one potato peeler. I don't need five sets of sets of screwdrivers. There is a good chance that I will never use that gadget in the kitchen drawer that someone gave me because I have no idea what it is for. If it isn't simplifying my life now, it probably never will, and I should find it a good home with someone who knows what it is and how to use it. But hey, I may be doing something in the kitchen tomorrow and suddenly realize what it is for and ask myself why I never realized how to use it. How did I ever live without it in the past? I mean, some creative mind produced it to meet a specific need, so it must be important. Important enough to keep in the drawer so that I have it when I manage to figure out what it is for.

Really? The odds of me finding out how to use it are pretty much zero. It isn't that I am a packrat, but someone gave it to me to improve my life. And I

appreciate it even if I don't understand it. But that is where clutter comes from. And truly, the last thing I need is more clutter in my life no matter how well-intentioned my friends are.

The other day I was making some gnocchi for my friends at Dinner Tonight. It required some mashed potatoes. I realized that I did not have a potato masher. I truly don't need one very often. I thought about rushing out to get one so that I could mash the potatoes. I then realized that I had a perfectly good mixer that I could use to mash those potatoes. It would do a better job than I could do by hand and would be faster as well, even if it took a little longer to clean up. And yes, it worked just fine. I did not need to rush out and buy a potato masher just so I could make the gnocchi. But the next time I was in the dollar store, I found myself at kitchen tools and spotted a potato masher. "I needed one of those the other day and it's only \$1.25." But I didn't need one. I had already proven that. I could easily get by without one. And I kicked that messenger off my shoulder for giving me bad advice about needing one.

But it really shouldn't be that way. I shouldn't let my life get so out of hand that I feel like I have to accumulate things just for the chance that I might need it one day. I'm probably not the only one who finds themselves in this predicament. Wives often complain that their husbands have too many tools and too much hardware that they will never get around to using. Husbands often complain that their wives have too many clothes, shoes, or kitchen gadgets. To some extent, that survivalist attitude is kind of built into our psyche and we don't believe that our mates understand our need (hear that word need?) to collect those things

that someday might be used. When we pass from this earth, are our children going to have to deal with those tools we acquired but never used, those dresses and shoes we bought but never wore?

Moses left Egypt after killing the Egyptian guard and moved to another land to begin a simple life. It must have been quite a change for him when he realized that he didn't need all the refinements that he had gotten used to while living with Pharaoh. It must have been a relief for him to cast off the responsibilities that lay on his shoulders serving in Pharaoh's household. Life became simple for him. He was able to marry and have children. He often spent his days watching and caring for sheep. He didn't need much to satisfy his needs; the clothes on his back, a roof over his head, food to eat. And he had a staff, probably a shepherd's crook, which was common for shepherds to carry. It wasn't something elitist. It was fairly common and considered a necessity for those who herded sheep. It could be used to guide sheep in the right direction, but could also be used to fend off bears, lions, and wolves. It was even helpful for just walking around the countryside to maintain stability. But the important note here is that the one that Moses was using wasn't anything special. Just your everyday, run-of-the-mill shepherd's crook.

I suppose a shepherd could get attached to his crook just as a carpenter might have a favorite hammer. After all, out in the field, a shepherd had to rely on his crook and was probably a little leery of an untested crook. The shepherd's life and the lives of his sheep depended on the strength and quality of their staff when it came to trouble. If a crook broke at the wrong time, pain and suffering

could result. It could also result in loss of life. A shepherd could be identified by his crook and his ability to wield it correctly.

Last month we talked a little about Moses and the burning bush and how that moment was a defining moment for both Moses and the Children of Israel. I would like to return to that scene where Moses approached the bush, stood on Holy Ground, and had a dialogue with his Creator. What an awesome and intimidating moment that must have been as Moses conversed with God despite his fear and lack of confidence. How could any of us master our fear, standing inside of that miracle as the voice of God blesses us and gives us purpose for our lives?

And so, we continue with the story, picking up after the initial shock as worn off. And we read:

1 Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?"

This is a conditional statement that Moses makes. He's already told God that he is not the man for the job. And to prove it he's telling God, "I can tell them that you sent me, but who in their right mind would believe me? They will remember me as the guy who had it all and ran away. A murderer. A has-been. A person selfish enough to leave his people to the abuse of Pharaoh."

Can't you just hear God sigh? Moses is talking to God and he is trying to present various scenarios as to why it is not a wise choice to choose Moses to lead the Israelites. He is looking for a way out. How foolish to think we can

outwit our Creator. But we do it all the time. “Father, I just don’t have the time. Father, I am too old to be doing this. Father, I am too poor to handle this matter. Father, I need to think about how this might affect my friends and family.” You know we can come up with a thousand reasons for not doing something. And I assure you, God has heard them all. He isn’t impressed.

2 Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

“A staff,” he replied.

A staff. The tool of my livelihood. Worn and fitted to my hand. A common, everyday tool for a shepherd. A staff. My staff. A symbol of what I have become. A vivid illustration of why I am not your man. Maybe if I was still in the house of Pharaoh. But that is in my past. Here and now, I am a lowly shepherd, and this staff proves it. This crook is a symbol of who I am today how far I have fallen, of how unimportant I have become.

But God isn’t playing his game of logic. God is not going to let him give in to his excuses. Instead, God is going to answer the question that he asked with a sample of what is to come.

2 The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.”

God is telling him to throw his protection, his job, his commitment to his father-in-law to the ground. I don’t want to read too much into that. But Moses does as God asks him.

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it.

Well, that was a bit of a surprise. Enough of a surprise that Moses ran away from the snake. Can't say I blame him much. He had been carrying that crook around and never knew what it was capable of. But Moses had to realize that it wasn't about the staff, it was about the presence of God and what he can do when we rely on him. God will drive the excuses right out of us if we give into his presence and allow him to use us.

**3 Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail."
So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back
into a staff in his hand.**

Woah! It was one thing for God to turn the staff into a snake. That was scary enough. But now God is telling him to pick up that snake by the tail. What do we do with that fear running through our head when God tells us to run toward danger, to chance making the ultimate sacrifice, to face our self-preservation as opposed to fulfilling the purpose God is calling us to? Are we going to pick up the snake, just as God asks? Or are we going to continue to run in fear? I think we should realize that at this point, Moses isn't concerned about Pharaoh or the Israelites. Sometimes the obstacle in front of us becomes more important to us than the ultimate goal. "I know that God wants me to do that thing, but first I have to get past this thing in front of me. I need to face the reality in front of me before I move on to the possibility of what's in store.

The trouble with thinking like this is that we can get stuck believing the problems we are facing now are more important than the work God had prepared for us. We lose perspective. We become so hesitant to pick up the snake that we

stop thinking about where we are supposed to be going and how this is keeping us from getting there.

That snake can represent so many things in our lives; finances, health, age, skills, time. We forget that God's got it covered. He wouldn't ask us to pick up the snake if didn't already have the result planned out. After all. This journey is one that he put us on. By picking up the snake, God is working through us to show who he is to the world around us. But we have to have the confidence and faith to believe what he is asking of us. Our foolish excuses don't mean a thing to him. He has all the bases covered. He knew that when Moses picked up that snake, it would turn back into a staff. It was Moses who had the doubts, just as we have our doubts. But God still expects us to trust him and reach out and pick up the snake even though fear has its grip on us.

5 “This,” said the Lord, “is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.”

If you do this thing, Moses, they will know that you are my messenger, my child, my choice, the leader that I have given to them to take them out of the hand of Pharaoh. How can we expect to be a symbol of redemption in this crazy world if we don't believe that God has it under control? How can the light of Jesus shine through us if we question our own salvation? How can we example Jesus to the world if we think that the Crucifixion and the Resurrection are just good stories for us to read and tell? Was Jesus born of a virgin or not? Did Jesus suffer and die on the cross or not? Was the stone rolled back by God or not? Is

the Holy Spirit present in our lives or not? Have we picked up the snake or just let it slither around on the ground keeping us from moving forward?

This week, I challenge us all to pick up the snake. Make a difference in the lives around us. Let us accept the challenge that God has laid at our feet. Let us engage with our purpose by trusting what God is telling us. Are we the sons and daughters of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob? Let us embrace the words of Christ telling us to love each other, take care of each other, be his light in the world and serve as his hands and feet. Pick up the snake so we can get on with our work.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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