

Have You Ever Thought About Creeking?

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Exodus 19:1-9a

Good morning. In my private prayers over the years, I've had conversations with God that included whether or not I would preach a sermon if ever asked. I guess my answer was put to the test when Pastor Keith asked me if I ever thought about preaching. So be gentle with me, as you are the first congregation to experience my "YES!". My introduction gave you a little about who I am, where I came from and what I do. So today, since I am fairly new to this church, I thought I'd start with a little story about myself when I was around four years old. Many of you know my dad, Ken Peacock, and his wonderful singing talent. Most church memories I have include my dad singing in the choir, singing a solo or doing a Cha Cha move on stage in a play...well, that one wasn't so much in church, rather a community theater...but I digress.

My family typically sat towards the back of the church we attended. This one Sunday, my dad was scheduled to sing a solo. I don't remember where my dad was located before the solo, but I do remember my mom saying something to me that would soon tell me where my dad was and change the direction of my path (and probably some hearts of onlookers that day).

I was a pretty typical kid, probably somewhat restless and needing something to occupy me while being required to sit still. Lots of memories of doing quiet activities such as coloring or looking through hymnals swirl in my head. But occasionally there was also a stern look or threat of some kind from time to time. I'm sure on this day my mom could have just wanted me to quiet down or sit still, so she said something to the effect of "Dad is getting ready to sing, why don't you stand up here so you can see him." I believe now that she wanted me to stand up on the pew next to her so that my short, four-year-old stature could see above the heads in front of me to get a good view of my dad while he sang. The only problem was that instead of hearing the words "stand up here" I heard the words "GO UP THERE".

So, like a good little obedient girl (and before my mom could catch me), I wriggled my way out of the pew, into the aisle and sauntered down towards the altar to get to where I thought I was told to go. As I reached my dad, who by this time was starting to sing, I knelt down at his feet and looked up in admiration of my earthly father who was always someone I considered to be my superhero. I remember saying something like, "Daddy, oh Daddy", awaiting his attention to be turned towards me and maybe some other instruction. Isn't that just what we could imagine if we were meeting with our heavenly father? A look of admiration, expressing adoration and awaiting to be acknowledged? I wonder if that's just what our heavenly father wants from us, too.

Well, I did receive my next instruction. As any good performer would do, my dad continued singing. The show must go on, right? To give you a clear picture, I think he was wearing a choir robe and had a songbook in one hand. Then with his other hand that was free, he gently reached down to take my hand, raised me from the floor and started walking up the aisle to lead me back towards my mom, never missing a beat of the song. I remember people staring at me, and I wondered if I had done something wrong, but I was never punished for anything.

What was the song, you ask? A very well-known hymn called "He Leadeth Me." The main chorus goes:

*He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.*

This was the solo my dad sang that day while leading me back to my mom.

I love that story, and I believe it was impactful for my parents because it has been brought up on multiple occasions throughout my life. But, to be honest, there is somewhat of a conflict I have with this story – as beautiful as it is. I am almost hesitant to bring this up for fear of tainting the memories for my family. The conflict entails the fact that I was obedient, not to my mom (although in my mind at the time I WAS obeying my mom’s orders), but I was obedient to my own thought - an interpretation of what was heard versus what was actually said. I heard what was said and then sprang into action without confirmation that what I heard was correct. I still do this today, just ask my husband.

READ: Exodus 19:1-9a

19 On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. 2 After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

7 So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

9 The Lord said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.”

Prayer: *May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen. (Ps 19:4)*

So, when I think about what God instructed Moses to tell the people of Israel in Ex 19:5 “if you obey me fully”, a few questions start to emerge, because that’s no small request. 1. How did Moses know God was the one talking and giving instructions? In other words, what is Moses’ and God’s history together? 2. Why did Moses believe what he was hearing? After all, he did obey the instructions. 3. Why did the people listen to Moses (at least at this point in the story)? Mind you, we still have the Ten Commandments and the Golden Calf up ahead. I will try to answer these questions today.

The first question is: How did Moses know God was the one talking and giving instructions?

Well, if we look at what transpired just before this exchange, then we will find that Moses had completed the task of parting the Red Sea and delivering the people of Israel from slavery and oppression – a very specific task that was orchestrated by God every step of the way.

And just before that, leading up to the plagues on Egypt, Moses experienced God talking to him from a burning bush – you all know that story, right? To recap - Moses was working, tending his father-in-law's flock, and minding his own business. But then he got distracted...BIG TIME!

The burning bush was a sight unlike any other. It was a plant engulfed in flames but did not behave like forestry does when it catches fire. WHAT!?! Moses would have been crazy NOT to check it out, because curious minds want to know, right? So, when he did, the story tells us that Moses heard God calling out to him from the burning bush. How do we know this? Well, because Moses responded to **something** that called his name. The last part of verse 4 in Exodus 3 states that Moses said, "Here I am!" to something that he heard coming from the middle of the bush. I don't know about you, but if I heard my name being called by someone I couldn't see, coming from something as peculiar as a bush that was burning but not being destroyed by the fire, I'm not entirely sure whether I would answer! But Moses did. And aren't we so glad?

To be extra clear about who was talking, the next verse is God's warning to Moses about how to appropriately respond "Do not come any closer...Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground" (Ex 3:5) and then a formal introduction in verse 6: "I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". Kind of has a Darth Vader feel to it, doesn't it? You know the one where we as kids talked into a box fan saying, "Luuuuukkke.....I am your FATHER!" My apologies to die hard Star Wars fans for taking this line out of context, but to me, it's more well known **out** of context than its original intent. Either way, George Lucas could have been on to something in the theme of Star Wars – but again, I digress. That's for a different time...in a galaxy far, far away...which was part of a universe the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob created...okay I'm done.

So, my second question in the Exodus 19 passage is: Why did Moses believe what he was hearing at Mt. Sinai?

Moses had a relationship with God and trusted God. An article from Psychology Today* points out that "trust is one of the most crucial building blocks of becoming emotionally intimate with someone. It's absolutely fundamental for a healthy, close relationship." If we know the story of how God delivered the people from slavery, guiding Moses (and Aaron) every step of the way, then we know that Moses trusted God was good for His word.

To be fair, we must not forget that Moses questioned God, which actually is a pretty realistic scenario of someone who was having difficulties trusting the source. Here are a few questions Moses asked God:

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex 3:11)

I want to stop here and pause for a moment. Let's recall that when Moses had not a clue as to who was talking to him from the burning bush, he readily raised his hand and said, "HERE I AM!!!" (Ex 3:4) He was all about making sure whoever was calling his name knew he was there. But now, when Moses

begins to understand that it was God who was talking and the task that is being laid out before him, he starts to backpedal. Let's move on to another exchange between God and Moses.

"Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." (Ex 4:10)

Now, Moses is providing reasons NOT to do what God is asking. Then Moses assertively puts his foot down:

"Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else." (Ex 4:13)

And here we are. The refusal. We just learned about Jonah's refusal to go to Nineveh, didn't we? But God answered Moses by sending Aaron to help out and make things easier for Moses.

And lastly: Why did the people listen to Moses?

In Exodus 19:8, we learn *"The people all responded together, [saying] 'We will do everything the Lord has said.'"* Aren't these the same people who just a few chapters back grumbled because they didn't have the food and drink they wanted? Didn't we discuss this in our Lifegroups last year about the whining and complaining that were going on while the people were in the wilderness for 40 years? Didn't they even go as far as to say that they would rather be back in Egypt as slaves than to be out in the wilderness starving to death? So, why on earth would they still listen to Moses, let alone pledge allegiance to this "God" who seemed to be the source of their frustrations lately?

Well, God offered proof of His existence and sovereignty. Between chapters 4 and 16 in Exodus, there are seven counts of the phrase, *"You will know"* (Ex 6:7; 7:17; 8:22; 11:7; 16:6; 16:8; 16:12). Why is that important? Because in those seven instances, God is making an argument about who He is and shows proof to back it up. Moses, with the help of Aaron, was God's mouthpiece. A direct connection between God and the people of Israel. They were shown proof, time and time again, about God's power and might as well as God's provision, care and compassion. You want to know what else? God sealed the deal in Exodus 19:9 by showing up in the form of a cloud visible for everyone to witness for themselves the interactions God had with Moses. God finished this verse by telling Moses, *"[They] will always put their **trust** in you"* (Ex 19:9 emphasis mine).

But get this...it took 40 years and God was STILL having to prove who He is to the people. Talk about the saying *it takes time to build trust!* Forty years is a lifetime for some!

So back to the part about obedience. Do you suppose that although the people of Israel may not have **wanted** the discomfort of living in the wilderness for all that time, God showed up in various forms to give the people what they **needed**? And that trust was built by Moses staying connected with God, and God following through with everything He promised?

Isn't that sometimes what happens with us? We grumble about our circumstances. We say things like, "If only I could win the lottery" or "If only they would give me that promotion" or "If only God would take away or bless me with then I would be happy/satisfied/full/content." But in the end, it is God who knows what's best for us, regardless of whether he does what we ask or not. Just imagine what would've happened if the people went *back* to Egypt in order to get their thirst quenched!

Wouldn't it be nice to have a guide like Moses to give us information straight from the horse's mouth? Keep in mind that Moses, himself, didn't know they were going to have to spend all that time in the wilderness – BUT he was obedient to what he believed was God's instructions, wasn't he?

There have been many times in my life where **if I had known** what kind of hardships I was going to have to face, I would have said a big, fat "NO THANK YOU"! But, there has always been something greater pulling me through the nastiest of storms. Something that I have had deep within me, guiding me in how I think and helping me make decisions. And you know something? Though some of you might think I would attribute this guiding wisdom to my mom (sorry, mom 😊), and sometimes my mom *has* been a wonderful source of insight, but this guide is something that is even greater than my parents – AND available to anyone for the taking who has accepted Jesus Christ into their hearts. And if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, that means YOU!

When Jesus walked the earth, He said and did a lot of things. One of them was to call himself The Good Shepherd.

In John chapter 10, Jesus states, *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me...My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

A couple of things stand out to me here. Number one, the use of the word "know" which is a variation of the word "knowledge". Anthony J. Saldarini writes that *knowledge* is "a term... that includes **experience, emotion, and personal relationship** along with **intellectual understanding**" (emphasis mine). Saldarini also notes, "... knowledge **of God** comes through Jesus and concerns the saving work that God does in Jesus. Knowledge assumes **faith in God and Jesus** as well as **obedience to them...**" He completes this description with a scripture quote of 1 John 2:3, *"And by this we may be sure that we know him [Christ], if we keep his commandments."*

And number two, Jesus states that His sheep listen to His voice, and they follow Him. AND HERE'S MY DILEMMA. Can I go back to the story I shared at the beginning? At four years old, I *knew* my mother – as much as a four-year-old can know their own mother. I spent four whole years with my mother. I had a personal relationship with my mother. I *knew* her voice. BUT...and hear me say this...I obeyed a different voice that day. A voice that I thought was my mother's voice, but it was not. I obeyed **my own voice** that had a **wrong** interpretation of the **right** voice. **I GOT IT WRONG!** Now, was it so bad that I got it wrong? No...I was four! It was actually very cute, and if I was a spectator watching my dad walk me back to my mom the way he did, I would have gushed over that like any doting person would. But guys, we can get God wrong – even as adults! We can interpret things wrong! We can THINK we know what God is saying, but we may not have the best interpreting skills to be able to understand the correct message. For all I know, Pastor Keith could have asked me, "Have you ever thought about **CREEKING**" instead of "Have you ever thought about **Preaching**". I brought some fishing gear just in case.

I promise that even though what I have just talked about sounds grim, and maybe you are wondering if and when you might have gotten God wrong; there is HOPE. Hope for us to improve our skills; hope for us to be in line with God's will for us; and forgiveness even if we aren't. Because if you have acknowledged Jesus Christ as the One and Only Son of God and you have accepted Jesus into your

heart, then you already have a guide, like Moses, within you, helping you out with how to think and choices you make. That guide is in the form of the Holy Spirit.

In John 14:15-17, Jesus tells His disciples, ¹⁵ *“If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor **knows** him. But you **know** him, for he lives **with you** and will be **in you**”* (Emphasis mine).

And in verses 25-26 of John chapter 14, Jesus says, ²⁵ *“All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you**”* (Emphasis mine).

So how do we tap into this knowledge and understanding of the Holy Spirit?

Well, we can pray. I’m not talking about a “Dear Jesus, bless me with a new house” prayer. I’m talking about a “Dear Jesus, I am broken and hurting. I need your help” prayer. There’s a difference. The first one is not a bad prayer, and maybe you legitimately need a new house. But without the acknowledgement of our brokenness and need for Jesus to intervene, because we can’t do it on our own, we are likely to see Jesus as a genie who grants wishes instead of Jesus as the Son of God who forgives, extends grace, and grants mercy when we get things wrong.

We can also use other resources to learn more about the Holy Spirit. There are pastors, professors, lay people, spiritual mentors, and other Christian friends and family who may be walking closely with God who can offer guidance and direction. There are libraries with a wealth of written commentaries from theologians, and bible studies that you can join where you are able to have deep discussions with other believers. There are faith-inspired movies to watch and fictional books to read that also help to clarify or at least spark discussions to help move you along. A lot of insight can be gleaned from a VeggieTales cartoon as we already learned from Jeffrey earlier this summer.

And we can read for ourselves. The Bible is widely available to us in different versions, translations, and formats, ready for the taking. How can we expect to be on the same page as God is for our lives if we are not taking time to open up the same Book? If you are new to the Bible, and don’t know where to start, a good place is the Gospel of John because it points to the whole reason why Jesus was brought into the world and needed to be sacrificed for our sins in the first place.

I also want to bring awareness to the fact that in order for someone to be aware of the Holy Spirit, they need to be receptive to the Spirit’s instructions.

Sometimes the instructions from the Spirit are not what we want to hear. When the Spirit prompts us to go up and speak to someone when we normally are the quiet, shy type; we may choose against the instruction. When the Spirit prompts us to stay silent and we let our words gush out uncontrollably, then we have chosen to ignore the Spirit. Many times, in my work, I hear the phrase, “I don’t care, it’s not right! I’m going to _____.” I’m guilty of that too. But when we are dismissive to the Spirit’s nudges, we miss out on the opportunity to see God in action. We have no idea what God’s next steps during our moment of crisis could be, but when we choose to ignore the prompting to either do or not do something; say or not say something; or think differently about something; we are not giving God a

chance to intervene. We are basically telling God, “I got this! I don’t need you. I’ll call you when a bigger crisis comes along.”

I have one more story to share from my childhood. Growing up we lived in the state of Louisiana for a few years where the waterway system was complex with plenty of creeks, streams, canals, and manmade ditches spread throughout the communities to prevent flooding. And with Hurricane Katrina, we all know how important the Louisiana water system is, and hopefully they are on top of improvements and maintenance. But back in the 80’s – yes, I’m dating myself – we as kids marveled at the greatness of the ditch behind our neighborhood.

Most of the time, the ditch was dry or had a small trickle of water where we would go down and catch minnows or crawfish and just enjoy being kids. But what we as kids didn’t know was after a big rainstorm or the fire hydrants were turned on, there was a deep rushing torrent of water without warning. After all, that was what the ditch was built for – NOT for kids to play in. Mom and Dad were adamant about my older brother and I not playing in the ditch even if the other kids were. In fact, they were so adamant that they told us we would be spanked if we were ever caught going into the ditch.

One day, my brother caught me in the ditch with my friends and went home to tell my mom. I guess she told him to come get me, so he did. You can imagine how scared I was because I knew the consequences of disobeying my mom. I cried all the way home. When I got to my mom, I told her that she could spank me if she wanted to. But she surprised me and told me that I had already punished myself enough by feeling guilty and told me not to do it again.

When I was in high school, Mom and I both wrote about this event for a school project. It’s interesting to hear mom’s perspective. She said, “*A mother’s love always tries to seek the best for her child, and I felt that in talking to Pam about her disobedience and how she felt about being disobedient...went far beyond [the] act and the spanking consequences.*” In other words, Mom said, “I forgive you.”

Aren’t we thankful that *even so*, we are forgiven? Even IF we choose to ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit, or misinterpret scripture, or disobey God’s commandments; we are STILL forgiven! And THAT is the BEAUTY of the HOPE that we are given through the precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

Let us pray. *Dear Jesus, we are thankful that your mercy doesn’t stop when we get things wrong. Thank you for your sacrifice for us to receive forgiveness. We ask for guidance now as we learn more about tuning in to your Spirit and acknowledging your voice. Be with us as we go about our week and turn our attention to you in the moments where it’s needed. In your precious and Holy name, we pray. Amen.*

I would like to close with singing the hymn “He Leadeth Me” in its entirety.

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