

**I Will Be With You**  
**Rev. Jennifer Gingras**  
**The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC**  
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*Exodus 3:1-15*

*(I'm gonna kick my shoes off... because I have the feeling that this morning I'm standing on Holy Ground. Go ahead and join me if you like!)*

So there you are, happily minding your own business... or, to be precise, happily minding your father-in-law's business! Are you happy? Of course you are!

Your life isn't perfect, but nobody's really is. You have a family and a good, steady job. You aren't out changing the world, but you don't want to be. So you stay busy and work hard and provide well for your loved ones and when you come home, you can always count on being able to relax.

Sometimes painful memories and disturbing images darken your mood, but you don't dwell on them. What's the point of letting bad thoughts spoil the good life you enjoy? Sure, you've felt guilty from time to time over your past mistakes, unwise decisions, failed expectations, but that is all in the past. Feeling bad won't change anything.

But then you keep hearing about this unspeakable suffering, not too far away... men beaten, women abused, babies dying. The images haunt your dreams, but you push them out of your mind. And you think you are powerless to do anything about them, so you stay busy.

But then you see the thing... the thing that grabs your attention and disrupts the predictability of your life and makes you take a closer look.

For Moses, it was a burning bush that got his attention. Maybe God had tried to speak to him before... many times before. It has been forty years since he fled Egypt fearing for his life. For the Hebrews, his people, it has been generations of oppression and torment.

In any case, this time, Moses hears the call clearly as God says:

*I have heard the cry of my people, and I see how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Now I am sending you so that you can lead my people out!*

So much for the quiet life... Now this humble shepherd, this self-doubting refugee, has a new job! Set those oppressed people free! Proclaim liberty to the captives! Bring good news to the poor! Announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people!

Jesus used similar words, when he quoted the prophet Isaiah, to speak about the job God had given him.

It was the same job God gave Moses,  
the same job God gave David,  
the same job God gave Isaiah and all the prophets,  
the same job God gave Jesus, and Mary and Paul and Barnabas and Priscilla,  
the same job God gave to every one of Jesus' followers,  
the same job God gives today to the members of this church:  
Set free the oppressed! Proclaim the message of the Lord's salvation!

That's our only job here.

Not to chase after happiness, but to set people free.

Not to strive to be nice people, but to see that justice is done.

Not to live quiet and non-disruptive lives, but to stand and speak up!

Not to find peace, but to make peace.

And we say... But I am nobody ... and we're right. We are all a bunch of nobodies!

When each one of us leaves this scene, the world will surely go on. Maybe some will remember us, but most will not. Neither you nor I are essential to the future of this world. All we can do is eat and drink and enjoy a little happiness as long as we're here.

Because I am nobody... how can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

How can I challenge entrenched human institutions, or question age-old prejudices, or stand against the tide of public opinion?

How can I presume to proclaim a message of salvation for all people?  
God's answer is this: *I will be with you ...* It's all we really need to know.

We don't need to assess all the risks.  
We don't need to know there is a reasonable chance of success.  
And we don't need any guarantees.

All we need to know is: *I will be with you.*

But I am hardly the best choice for the job ... *say it with me...*  
*I will be with you*

But, what if something goes wrong, what if nobody listens, what if I fail ... *I will be with you.*

But I'm not a very strong person. I'm not a very spiritual person.  
I'm not the leader type ... *I will be with you.*

I don't even know what I believe some days or even if I believe. How can I bring good news to people when I'm not even sure of it myself?  
... *I will be with you.*

But why do your people suffer so much? Why haven't you done something to help them?  
*I have heard the cry of my people and I am sending you...*  
*and I will be with you.*

But, how do I know I can trust you? Who are you?  
*I am who I am. I AM! It's all you need to know.*

The prophets of our day remind us that you and I have not yet come to the Promised Land. We are still on the way. And so, our job is not to quietly tend the sheep of our pastures, going about our own business, enjoying the happily disengaged lives we have made for ourselves.

Our job is to go to Egypt ... to go to the places where people are suffering, to set them free, to announce God's salvation. Our job is mission...and the moment when we take our eyes off that... well, that's the moment that we struggle being church.

But, our resources are already stretched too thin ... *I will be with you.*

But, we are not the church we once were ... *I will be with you.*

But, we're all so busy... *I will be with you.*

I'll write a check, but you can't expect me to get involved...

*I will be with you.*

But, that's not the way we have always done it ... *I will be with you.*

But we don't have the kind of leadership or commitment we need...

*I will be with you.*

And that's really all we need to know. The God who calls also equips. Jesus showed us a better way to live. He did what he had to do, trusting that God would give him what he needed to fulfill his mission, which was never just about him. It was about the salvation of the world.

And the purpose of our lives – individually and as the Body of Christ - has always been about being a part of that which is larger and more enduring than ourselves... the love of God.

Friends in Christ, the life we're living now is the only one we've got. Don't spend it being scared, or not being ready, or not being what you should be.

The bush is burning. It burns for you. Amen.