

Melanie Rosa “Enough and More than Enough”
Lakewood UMC

November 4, 2007
Exodus 36:1-7

I am going to say a word, and when I do I invite you to see a face, think of a face and a name that comes to mind when I say the word. Are you ready? The word is “Reluctant.” Do you see a face? I see a face. I see the face of a little girl holding tight to her mother’s hand on the first day of Kindergarten. I see the pimply face of a teenage boy trying to muster up the nerve to ask a beautiful girl out on a date. I see the face of a woman going in for her first treatment of chemotherapy. And I see my own tired face, about to do a funeral, or anticipating the relocation of our church.

Reluctant. When I hear that word I also see Moses. He was as unlikely a leader as you are ever going to see. He did not want to be a leader, and he did not choose the destiny that was thrust upon him. Growing up in the palace of Pharaoh as an Egyptian, even murdering an Egyptian and hiding his body, running off to be a simple shepherd in obscurity, Moses gets a call from God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses tries really hard to ignore this call, but God’s persistence and burning bushes could not be ignored. So Moses tries logic—he attempts to avoid this destiny by raising numerous objections, scattered throughout the 3rd and 4th chapters of Exodus.

“Who am I that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

“When they ask me the name of God, what will I tell them?”

“Suppose they do not believe that God has really appeared to me?”

“I can’t speak well—I stutter, I stammer, I am slow of speech, I’m an idiot!”

And my personal favorite: “O God, please, send somebody else!”

Reluctant. I can see it in his face. I know that face. That’s your face. That’s my face.

Of course, God is so persistent, that Moses finally, although reluctantly, agrees to take these people on a journey to an unknown destination. That means that first, Moses has to convince at least 600,000 families to leave Egypt, a place where they and their ancestors had lived for almost 500 years. Things are not that great in Egypt, the Israelites are slaves, but they have grown accustomed to their slavery. In fact, even as slaves they are comfortable and content. Now Moses tells them that they should pack up and leave. He says “Trust me, although I am not exactly sure where we are going, we need to go now.” So they set off, and besides the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, things did not go very well.

They experienced thirst, exhaustion, and some people did not make the journey at all.

Those who did make the journey complained incessantly: “Moses, you are trying to kill us, Moses why have you done this to us? Moses, we hate it here, Moses, we want to go home.” I can just imagine Moses saying, “Do you think I like this any better than you do? I did not want to do this in the first place! Do you think this is easy for me?” This pattern continued for nearly 40 years: things got tough, the people blamed Moses, Moses turns to God, and God comes through.

God comes through miraculously and persistently—time and time again. God provides a pillar of light by day and a fiery pillar by night, God provides clean water and food in abundance and protection from many forces within and without. Nowhere did God come through more beautifully than in the construction of the sanctuary in the wilderness. About 3 months after leaving Egypt, and after Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, God tells the Israelites to build a sanctuary so that they can observe proper worship. Here they are in the middle of the desert, and God commands them to build a Sanctuary. This would be a portable tabernacle, something to hold the Ark of the Covenant, which they could take with them to the Promised Land.

So Moses summons everyone with construction skills to come and help. He asks everyone else to contribute offerings toward this holy undertaking which will provide a place for the worship of God.

What happens next is nothing short of a miracle. Rather than continuous complaining, the people step up. They caught the vision of a place of worship in the desert, and they brought offering after offering after offering for the construction of a Sanctuary. In fact, those who were doing the construction finally went to Moses and said: “The people are bringing more than enough for this project! Please, tell them to stop.” So they were ordered to stop. “Please,” says Moses, “stop bringing your offerings, because we have enough. More than enough.” Can you imagine?

Our reluctant Moses never set foot in the Promised Land himself. But he saw it from a distance. The final chapter of Deuteronomy tells us: “Moses climbed Mount Nebo facing Jericho. God showed him all the land from Gilead to Dan, all Nephtali, Ephraim, and Manasseh, all Judah reaching to the Mediterranean Sea, the Negv and the plains as far south as Zoar. God said: “This is the land I promised to your ancestors. I have let you see it with your own eyes. But you are not going to go in.” Moses died right there on Mount Nebo, having never reached the Promised Land. To this day, nobody knows exactly where Moses is buried.

Now, I would never be so presumptuous as to compare myself to Moses, but there have been days when I would give anything to talk to him. I can relate to him on so many levels. We have embarked upon a difficult, and very exciting journey. We have our own idea of the Promised Land, far beyond our enslavement to a deteriorating building and a declining membership. We have begun a journey into the unknown and unfamiliar. Some people are excited and ready to go, and your enthusiasm is contagious. Others are sad, because they really do not want to leave this place. Some are loudly complaining, some will be leaving us.

But wherever you are on this spectrum, know that you have our blessing. God is going to continue to care for all of us, no matter what the future holds. God is still God, no matter where we end up as individuals or as a church. Think of how God cared for our spiritual ancestors in the wilderness. It was a sheer miracle that they even got out of Egypt and escaped the wrath of Pharaoh's armies. They were thirsty, and God provided the miracle of clean water. They were hungry, and God provided enough provision for them. They were scared and tired and God kept them going for 40 years. I hope our journey does not take quite so long. But I do know that there are things that only God can do, and I believe with all my heart that God has called our church for a time such as this. We have been called to do something truly great, and it is such a gift to be given the chance to create a spiritual legacy that will outlast all of us.

Next Sunday is our commitment Sunday. I want you to be praying all week about what you can pledge to this campaign, if you have not done so already. Talk to your family, talk to God, and then think of the most generous gift you could give, and double it. That's right, I said double it. Step out in faith and trust and God will bless you. I know that is true because it has happened in my own life again and again.

Fred and I feel honored to be able to make a financial pledge during the Advance phase of this Campaign, because we believe so strongly in this Bold New Beginning for our beloved church. Not only do we want to leave a legacy for others, but we are so grateful for all that this church has meant to us.

We have awesome children, and I am not sure they would be quite so awesome without the love and lessons they received in this church.

We have a good marriage, and I don't think it would be quite so good without this church.

I have some friends, who are kind and patient with me, who love me unconditionally, and I met them this very church.

I have a faith that assures me I am forgiven, I am loved, and that I will see my parents again someday.

I know that suffering transforms us, that no experience is ever wasted, that God loves us extravagantly, that eternal life is ours. Those beliefs have been tested and deepened in this church.

It is an honor to be able to give something back to make sure that this church continues to bless and teach others just as it has blessed and taught me. The gifts I have received here are priceless and it is such an honor to invest in our shared future. I know that with God there is always enough and more than enough.

James Michener was the author of 40 novels; they are epic and sweeping sagas depicting families and geographic locales as diverse as South Pacific, Poland, Hawaii, and Texas. He won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1948 and died in 1998. But you might be surprised to learn how Michener became a writer. This calling emerged from a severe personal crisis — a near-death experience, in fact. Michener had dreamed of becoming a novelist for years, but he was very reluctant — not fully confident of his potential or wanting to take the risks involved. But then a plane in which he was a passenger crashed, after making three attempts to land on the South Pacific Island of New Caledonia. Michener, a military correspondent with the Navy at the time, went immediately to his quarters, sat down and wrote, "I'm going to live the rest of my life as if I were a great man. I'm going to concentrate my life on the biggest ideals and ideas I can handle." He began work the next day on *South Pacific*. "I'm going to live my life as if I were a great man." What if we decided to live as if we were a great church, and could do great things for God? What if we got passionate about finding sad and hurting people and offering them the peace of Jesus Christ? What if we really believed our best years are ahead of us and not behind us?

When you act as if you are great, reluctance slowly gives way to resolve.

Moses was a complicated, interesting man. I am drawn to complicated people. I wish I had known Moses, but I almost feel like I do. He is an inspiring role model for me as I recall all that has gone before us, and anticipate the journey ahead of us.

Twelve years ago, I was called to be the Senior Minister of this church. Ever since that time I have been blessed beyond my deserving. I am so very grateful. But I am not surprised. For such is the grace of God offered to all who trust, hope and believe. Even the reluctant.

