

Theme: **God's Will and My Inadequacy**

Text: Exodus 3 & 4 and Numbers 20 & 21

Date: February 21, 2018

Season: 2nd Wednesday Lenten Service

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

May God's will be done in your life despite your inadequacies.

You'll have to be patient with me. I have never been the best of public speaker. Really, I've never have been much of a public speaker at all. That's right, believe or not. Moses, that's me, is not a good public speaker.

You were perhaps expecting some great and powerful figure? A leader full of authority and self-confidence? A legend walking the earth like a demigod? There was a time when I expected that, too. But I'm just a tired old man with a tired tongue. So, you'll have to be patient with me.

[pauses, then tiredly:] I am older than I look. And I don't speak that well either. I never have. *[pauses, as if remembering]* Growing up in Pharaoh's house, I thought poor speaking was the worst of my troubles. But you know the story... I wasn't Egyptian royalty; I was actually a Hebrew slave, rescued from the river water by a basket, my own personal Noah's Ark. That was a long time ago. But I don't need to bore you with all the details. You know about the murder, and the escape from Egypt. You know about the parting of the Red Sea and the pillar of fire and the cloud. You've heard of the Tablets of Stone and the Golden Calf. But I want to tell you something about me, about how God's will can work in our lives despite all our inadequacies.

I've seen and done so much, you could get the idea that I am something of a hero. But looking back at the whole story from the top of this mountain, I simply feel ... inadequate. You know... *[ashamed to look at the audience]* I didn't want to go. I didn't want to go back to Egypt. I didn't want to be the leader of God's people, those stiff-necked people I learned to love so dearly. I certainly never set out to be the mouthpiece of the Almighty God! Not Me, with my lack of speaking ability! Talk about the wrong decision! I told him that, too; I told the Great I am that I wasn't the one He needed! I wasn't a good choice! I wasn't a good leader!

There at the burning bush I told him I wasn't up for the job. But He didn't listen to me. "Oh, dear Lord," I said, "Please send someone else." It wasn't that I didn't want to go back (though I really didn't want to go back to Egypt where they could put me to death); it wasn't that

I was afraid (though, honestly, I was afraid). Mostly, I just felt ... well, not up for the job. I wasn't brave enough or smart enough or holy enough! Why would anyone listen to me?

But in the end, my own inadequacy didn't matter, not to God. God decided to use me, Moses, so He did. God gave me Aaron and Miriam to share the burden of leadership. God put His staff in my hand to work His miracles through His Words. And He sent me with all my inadequacies, my inability to speak well and my murderous ways out to do His bidding in Egypt.

I didn't look like a hero, leaving sheep behind to call on Pharaoh's court. Pharaoh didn't believe me; the people of Israel didn't believe me; I didn't believe me, either! But the Great I am is greater than the gods of Egypt. The Great I am is greater than my inadequacy. The Great I am will accomplish His purpose, even when His people are weak and doubting, confused and rebellious, incompetent and afraid. Like me.

I learned firsthand that God can use inadequate people to do His saving work. The plagues took on the gods of Egypt one by one; these miracles came from God's holy Word, through my poor voice. The lamb's blood covered over our houses, and the Angel of Death passed over, just as God promised. The armies of Egypt were drowned in the waters of the Sea, just as God promised.

I saw it all happen. I was part of it all. But never was I in control. It wasn't about me. It was never about me. If only I hadn't forgotten that truth! You see, at the burning bush I was focused on me; that's why I asked God to send someone else. And God was not pleased—I was focusing on my weakness instead of His promises. But the longer I led this beautiful and stubborn people, the more confidence I gained. I became their leader. I spoke for God. I even saw the glory—of the great I am and my face shone with the reflection of God. That's really the reason why my hair is as white as it is now.

I learned now to depend on God in my weakness; but I forgot to depend on God in my strength. It was just after Miriam died. We had been wandering in the wilderness for years and years and the people were still grumbling. They still lacked trust in God. They still blamed me for their hard and fearful hearts.

So, the Lord told me to speak to a rock, that's it. That's all I had to do and the people and their cattle could drink the water and live. I had been leading God's people and doing God's work. So, I told Aaron to assemble everyone together. I took the same staff God gave me at the burning

bush, the same staff that worked miracles in Egypt—I took my powerful staff in my powerful hands and I put myself on the same level as God.

“You hard-hearted, stiff-necked people!” I yelled in righteous anger. “Your grumbling has offended the honor of God and me. But we will bring forth water from this hard rock, as we did before!” And though God had commanded me to just speak to the rock with my weak speaking voice, I chose to take that powerful staff and strike the rock twice, to show who was in charge.

Oh, the people got their water. But I, who was saved through the water, was also condemned through the water. I forgot the most important lesson of being God’s servant: it’s not about me, it’s all about God. Since I made me, Moses, as important as God, I’m here on the top of this mountain, while Joshua prepares the people for their final march home.

From the top of this mountain I saw the Promise Land. But I won’t be going there. We buried Aaron in the wilderness, and God himself buried me on the top of this mountain. And I will have to wait for the day of resurrection before the Promise Land will be fulfilled for me.

Being barred from the Land might seem like a steep price to pay for hitting one lousy rock instead of speaking to it. But my sin wasn’t simple disobedience. I made myself as important as God. I stopped depending on His Word and I thought I could do it on my own. He should have buried me right then and there, at that Rock of testing. But I’m glad He didn’t. I got another chance to learn that, whether I feel powerful or inadequate, it’s not about me, it’s all about God.

After we buried Aaron, and I was all on my own, the people became impatient yet again. This time the Lord sent poisonous snakes and their bite was deadly. But when they returned to Lord and confessed their sin, I prayed for them—it was always my honor to pray for them—and God gave me a way for the people to be saved.

This time I wasn’t supposed to speak. This time I had no need of the staff. This time it wasn’t about me, at all. Instead, I was told to take some metal and shape it into a snake just like the ones biting and killing God’s people and then put that bronze snake up on a pole.

I have to admit, shaping a serpent seemed kind of strange at that time. I mean, I saw the finger of God write the commandments: you shall have no other gods, no graven images. And the same God who told me to pulverize a golden calf was now asking me to shape a bronze model of a snake!

A snake of all things! Can you believe that? We know all about the Snake, the Tempter, the Evil Foe who got us kicked out of the Promised Land in the first place. A snake taught us idolatry to begin with. But the bronze snake on a pole wasn't supposed to be worshiped; it wasn't an idol. Instead, the snake became a symbol of sin, our sin. The bronze serpent was a sign of the punishment and death our sins deserved.

That twisted shape, lifted up before God, became sin for us: our constant grumbling, our failure to trust, our stubborn rejection, our hard heartedness, is nailed up on a tree. And anyone who looked at that cursed snake lifted up in the wilderness saw the promise of God and lived.

From the top of this mountain I can see the Promised Land, still far off in the distance, I can hear the people begin their journey home. The Lord planted my old body in the warm, fertile ground. While I wait for the Lord to come on that last day, that bronze serpent is a comfort. It's a reminder that God is going to keep leading His people without Moses. God will fulfill His promises, in His way and in His time.

And when the people sin, when they rebel, when they grumble and turn away, God himself will provide a way, a means of forgiveness, a sign of God's anger poured out and satisfied, lifted high on a pole and all who look there and believe will live.

Oh, don't feel sorry for me. I learned to believe in all the promises of God and was even given the privilege to talk with God's Only Son, just before He defeated that old evil foe by making the payment for all our inadequacies on that cursed cross and then rising again from death, on the third day, to give us all the eternal Promised Land.

Yes, my inadequacies created problems for me and others, but God's will took care of them all without any of our help. God's will being done in our lives will take care of all our inadequacies and will help us to put our trust in Him alone, forever.

That's what I wanted to share with you tonight and before I leave let's pray for God's will to be done in our lives to help us deal with our inadequacies. Amen.