

My car is 13 years old now. When I bought it, it came with a remote key fob. I had never had one before and it always made my day. I liked it when I walked away from the car, and couldn't remember if I'd locked it. Just point and shoot. Car locked. I liked it when I couldn't quite remember where I'd parked the car. I'd send out those remote vibes into the general area, and the car would respond. I liked it when I had grocery bags in my arms. I'd point and shoot and the trunk would open.

And then the remote fob broke. And I'm too cheap to spend \$75 for it to do what I went 40 years without. So I'd never opened the hatch back without the remote before. Since there was no keyhole on the hatch doorand I assumed that I had to go back to the driver's side, and open the hatch back from there.

Here's my confession I did that for FOUR years. Until someone helped me out with a huge grocery haul. And he touched underneath a strip on the back of the car and opened the hatch. Who knew? Not me! I didn't let on, but boy, did I feel stupid. I **assumed** that there was no other way to open the hatch back. For four long years.

I realize that's a silly place to begin a sermon. But it really got me thinking about re-adjusting assumptions and self-expectations, and making excuses. That dirty hatch back got my attention this week.

The story from Exodus today involves some assumption re-adjustment on Moses' part. A re-adjustment that begins with God grabbing Moses attention from the Burning Bush. When Moses stops what he is doing to look more closely at this physically impossible phenomenon, a bush that burns without being consumed ---- he encounters God and is drawn into, pulled into really, God's holy work.

This is the beginning of a long a struggle, between Moses and God. God's voice came from that burning bush --- something Moses rightly might have assumed would never happen. Moses was challenged to let some old assumptions and expectations go and grabbing on to new ones in faith.

Moses seems to have carved out for himself a pretty good life after having fled Egypt. You may recall, he ran from his former life as a prince in Pharaoh's palace, after having killed an Egyptian supervisor who was mistreating a Hebrew slave. This is the place his rage has gotten him --- in the wilderness, tending sheep for his father-in-law.

God gets Moses' attention in an extraordinary way, calls his name out loud, and after Moses responded with 'here I am' and took his shoes off ----- the hard work begins. That holy work -- that holy struggle, the efforts to align one's expectations with God's will --- takes place on what God calls holy ground.

Beyond the story we heard this morning, in the 4th chapter of Exodus, Moses continues to struggle even when he is in the presence of God and knows it, when he seems to have no doubt who God is, even when he is given a name --- I AM --- he can carry with him. Struggling, wrestling, uneasiness with who God is and who God could be in our lives seems to be a part of having have a relationship with the Holy.

This holy ground of dialogue and struggle is where all the people of God find themselves today. This dialogue is holy, and hard work: What assumptions do we operate under and are they still working? What are our expectations and do they match up with God's expectations of us? How can we use this self-examination to shape our future, the future God has in mind for us?

God is patient with Moses. God takes the time to explain to Moses, more than once, who God is. Even while Moses works on God's identity, he struggles with his own. Who am I that you have chosen me? What gifts do I have, I can only see impediments and offer excuses. God responds: I will send you. I will be with you. I will teach you what you shall do.

Moses starts off on this path of excuses and will not stop. They're really good excuses actually. His first --- "What if the people don't listen to me?" That's a major problem for a man who killed someone and then ran into the desert, leaving oppressed people, his people, behind. Why **would** they listen to him?

God responds "I will send you. I will be with you. I will teach you what you shall do."

Moses counters with; I hate speaking in public, and I'm just not good at it. God responds: "I will send you. I will be with you. I will teach you what you shall do."

Then God gives Moses what he needs to do the job --- a staff, a crutch really, which will serve to remind Moses and all who he encounters that God is with him.....he assigns his brother Aaron to be his companion and speak eloquently when Moses cannot.....

Finally, when Moses realizes his good excuses could not and not ever wear God down, he gives up the struggle and says, **I just don't want to do this. Please, please; send someone else.** At that point the scriptures say for the first time, that God is angry. God has given Moses everything he needs; assurance that God will be with him, the companionship and equipment he needs.

God responds: I will send you. I will be with you. I will teach you what you shall do.

So Moses goes. Both humbled and strengthened for the task ahead. Moses assumed he needed to be better, stronger, more beloved, perhaps even a different person, in order to do God's work. God did not respond to Moses's objections by telling him God would make him better, stronger or more loved. Only that God would be with him.

God didn't expect perfection from Moses and doesn't expect perfection from us. God expects us to meet and struggle with God on Holy ground. We must learn not to set our standards higher than God's. For that is not only arrogant it is sinful. It is sinful because, like Moses, we tend to use our imperfection as an excuse for *not* being in relationship with God, for *not* doing God's work. And God won't buy that excuse.

Moses struggled with the questions we all must work out for ourselves. *Who is God? Who am I in relationship to God? How can I serve God's people?* All are questions that not only lead us into relationship with God but are at the very center of it. All are questions which define, sharpen and even drive the relationship. Thank God we have each other to challenge our expectations, to articulate our questions, to hold up those mirrors so that we may see ourselves more clearly. Correcting assumptions, revising expectations and listening more closely for God's voice is part of the Christian journey. It is what we are especially called to focus on during the season of Lent.

Having God bust our assumptions wide open leads us to move deeper and further into relationship with him. Hearing God's voice coming from a totally unexpected place is a little like hearing God's voice come through the language of the rite I liturgy for me. I assumed when I first heard it, that rite I's time had passed, and there was no longer any use for it. But I can now sense that spark of the Holy in the beauty and unfamiliarity of the language and hope you can too. I have found its always a good thing – not always an easy or painless thing, but always a good thing when God breaks through my assumptions.

As we continue through this season of Lent may we hear more clearly God's voice: "I will send you. I will be with you; I will teach you what you shall do." May God, who was patient with Moses, give you grace to be patient with yourself and with each other.