

# Ordinary 4

**Salem United Methodist Church**

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**March 14, 2021**

Step one. Notice glory.

Step two. Go see it.

Step three. Respond. "Here I am."

Step four. Take off your shoes.

As with many Bible stories, if we're used to them, we're used to them. And if they're new to you, they may sound a bit odd. This one is full of oddness and mystery and perhaps the part that makes the most sense to us is that Moses would need to take his shoes off to approach holy ground. That's not entrenched in North American culture, but it's at least something we've heard of. We know that some religions require removing shoes. We at least recognize this as something we may do. If you went to someone's house and saw shoes stacked by the door, you might take your shoes off just out of politeness. We get this.

Because we get it, we might rush right past it for the most extraordinary moments in the passage.

For goodness sakes, the bush isn't burning up! And it TALKS! Shouldn't we focus our attention there??

Don't focus on something as mundane as removing shoes to approach God.

Show us the miracles!

We could focus there. But this week, we're talking about shoes. If you're following along in our Lenten book, you'll be in for an entire week focusing on shoes.

I've brought some shoes today, just to start the conversation. I have heels, to wear with dresses and certain slacks. I have snow boots for walking on icy days. I have sneakers for long wet walks that will dry well. I have sneakers that are a bit dressier for going out of the house. I have my favorite low black boots. This is most of my shoes. Definitely more than Moses owned. Less than other people own. I wear different shoes for different purposes. They're to protect my feet from the elements, from sharp things on the ground, and they're also for fashion. They're almost all very comfortable because I got tired of having sore feet.

Sometimes, when we're getting dressed, we're thinking of the message we're sending. How do you want to look? Professional? Relaxed? What do you dress up for? Why? Is it just for you or is it for others, too? Why do we pick things with known brands rather than from thrift shops? Why buy new rather than used?

If you're in a store and you need help, you'll look for someone with an identifiable uniform, right? And if you see a police officer in uniform, you instantly identify them. Lifeguards, medical professionals, mail carriers, waiters and waitresses, we often recognize them through their clothing.

What happens when these trappings fall away? When I was in seminary, I did a unit in the hospital as a chaplain. When everyone is wearing a hospital gown only their personality and appearance can distinguish them. Rich, poor, styles, values, we didn't know.

In a hospital gown, we lose our silent armor and its incredibly vulnerable.

Perhaps some of you have experienced this.

When my grandma was in the hospital, she would tell each nurse that *she* had been a nurse. She never talked about this otherwise-it was another lifetime for her. But in *only a hospital gown*, she needed to establish credibility with the nurses. She needed them to *see her*.

So, here's Moses. Fallen prince. Wanted for murder. Tending sheep in the wilderness. If this sounds exciting and new to you, check out the book of Exodus for the rest of the story. Its even more interesting than the movie The Prince of Egypt gives it credit for.

This guy has lost all his trappings of wealth. All his identifiers. He's definitely married into a good family. And he was chosen for being a good guy and helping the daughters. (again, read it yourself for the details!)

But Moses, I wonder if he had any idea who he really was.

He grew up as the adopted Hebrew son of the Egyptian princess. He had a Hebrew midwife, who was really his mother. Can you imagine how odd his childhood must have been? How could he have ever fit in? When he was born all the boys of his age were supposed to be killed. All of his peers weren't supposed to have been born. If he hung out with the Egyptian boys? Well, he's from the slave race. There's no way he fit in.

Now, he's grown up and wants to help his kinsmen. That's what gets him in trouble for murder. And nobody thanks him for the help. Even the Hebrews turn on him. He's a man who never fits anywhere.

For someone like me, that's hard to understand. I'm a Christian who grew up around other Christians. I'm white, and most of the people around me have been white. I'm a woman, most of the people I've been around believe in equality between men and women. I went to Duke to try to spend time with people different from me. But I've never truly been an outcast anywhere-not since I was in daycare in Elementary school.

But some of us have. Some of us at this church, in this town, in our state and world, in our families even, some of us have been unable to fit. And not for a lack of trying! Some of us have tried and tried to be what others wanted from us. Tried to talk “right,” dress “right,” act “right.” Tried to win acceptance through accomplishments, charity work. From watching the same TV shows, attending the same clubs.

We’re like Moses, shouting, “Here I am! I am here! Just call out to me and I will respond!”

*“Here I am” is the ancient “right” answer when God speaks to you. We hear it from prophets all through the Hebrew Scriptures. “Here I Am” is the best thing to say. It means you are listening, that you are ready.*

So, here he is, the guy who never really fits in. He even names his first son “Gershom” to say, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.”

This guy notices God’s glory and is called over by name. He is recognized. Can you imagine what that felt like? To have the glory recognize you and know your name? To call you out from your wilderness?

And to respond to that glory? He has to take off his shoes.

Its... so ordinary. Such an ordinary response to glory, right?

But that’s all it takes. He has to take off his protection from the elements. Take off his masks. Take off his security. Take off his identity. Become bare before God. Be willing to show up just as he is before God’s glory. Become vulnerable before the Lord.

And in the face of that request, in the face of God before him, Moses hides his own face in fear.

Being open, honest, vulnerable? That *is* scary. That’s scary in the best of situations. Before God’s perfection? Downright terrifying.

I know that shoes and vulnerability are different things. However. We are people who act, who have masks, who try to live up to other people's standards. If God says, "Geez, Moses. Just be yourself. Let go, trust me." Moses won't know where to begin. You can't just flip a switch and let go of all the expectations and criticisms of the world in an instant.

So, what if God is giving Moses a first step. What if taking off his shoes isn't about his bare feet, but it's about beginning to peel away the layers that separate him from God? What if it's a tangible step that feels ordinary because that's the best way to begin a life of an extraordinary relationship with God?

So, what about us? Do we keep our shoes on before God? Do we try to tell God how good we've been before we ask for something? Do we worry about how to pray because we don't know if we're doing it right? If God will like our prayers? Are there parts of you that you keep to yourself because you aren't sure you want to share it with God? Little things you aren't proud of? Big things you're afraid of?

God doesn't want you to hide. God doesn't want you to keep things to yourself. Moses immediately jumps in the next section into telling God why he doesn't want to accept this commission. Why he's the wrong guy. That's not a man who's hiding. He's immediately honest about trying to get out of this. And God doesn't smite him! God just solves the problems until Moses has no more objections. Its funny, you should read it.

God lets Moses be the hot mess that he is.

God's gonna do the same for you.

The first step today? Take off your shoes before God's glory. See where it leads.