

Let us pray: Loving and Leading God, open our hearts to your call this morning. May we be attentive to your word, may we have enough focus to examine ourselves, and may we learn to put our effort into what really matters. I pray that you would work through the words I have prepared to bring light and life to us all today, in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, amen.

On many job profiles, there's a section that describes "The Ideal Applicant". It lists the requisite experience, the training, the certificates and hands-on qualifications that would be an asset to anyone looking to fill the position. At least eight years working in a similar position. Able to program databases. Fluent in English and French. Or perhaps something less concrete: The ideal applicant is self-motivated, hard-working, a team player.

Those lists can often be pretty intimidating when you're applying. Most employers are likely aware that few people will be able to check off all the boxes on their "ideal applicant" list; it's more of a guideline than a set of non-negotiable prerequisites for applying.

I was reminded of the ideal applicant when I was studying our passage from Exodus today, Moses and the burning bush. When God speaks to Moses from the midst of the flames, informing him of his new position and telling him to head off to Egypt to speak to Pharaoh, Moses responds with "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? God, hadn't you noticed? I'm not the ideal candidate!" He had, after all, been raised as an Egyptian in the household of the Pharaoh, not a terribly sympathetic origin for a Champion of the common slave. He was an escaped murderer, having killed an Egyptian in what scripture makes clear was no accident. Following that, he had spent many long years as a shepherd working for his father-in-law in the wilderness. This was hardly the workplace experience that would make someone the ideal candidate for labour negotiations with a king. Moses thought that because he was not the ideal candidate, he should not be the one to carry out God's mission.

I sometimes think that I would be able to help Moses with his crisis of confidence. For the most part, I feel like a pretty prepared Dad. There's a pretty short list of things to take care of for the dad of a one month old. The ideal candidate keeps the child fed, burped and dry. And since fed is more a requirement of Michelle's job description, so far, I've often felt like I can certainly handle this whole baby thing. Sometimes, though, at 3:30 in the morning, when I know that Oliver is fed, and changed, and burped, and yet he still sits there and screams up at me, I'm not so sure that I know what I'm doing. I confess, there have been times I've been frustrated, a feeling I'm sure any parent can relate to. Few parents, though, receive the kind of support that I have. We've had baby showers to provide us with every little thing we could possibly need. I've been able to take a whole month's vacation to spend with my new son. We've had meals dropped off, we've been encouraged, I've lost count of how many people have looked me in the eye and said "If you need anything, anything at all, just let me know." Thank you for all of this. But even after it all, at 3:30, I still sometimes wonder if my little screaming baby is becoming traumatized before my eyes because I don't really know how to do this job. There are so many more qualified and experienced parents out there, and still, here I am, the least qualified, holding the baby. I'm still waiting on my copy of the "Parent's instruction manual". The ideal applicant would surely have read it.

But this is the message of the Gospel: The applicant need not be ideal. All through scripture, God works with and through the least likely people: Sarah laughed at God's promises. Noah was a drunk. Moses was a murderer with a stutter. Jacob was a liar. David had an affair. Lazarus was dead. Naomi, a widow. Paul, a persecutor. Jonah ran from God.

A core part of what we believe is that we are called to live as transformed people, made new by faith in Jesus Christ. That's what we are doing here at St. David's, it's why we participate, why we give our time, our talents and our resources to this church. We are all witnesses to the reality of God's mission in our world today. We also look at our own individual lives and we aim to live in the ways God is calling us. It can sometimes seem difficult. We just don't feel like the ideal applicant for the Spirit. Maybe, like Moses, our sins are from a lifetime ago, old hurts that have petrified into stone, become "just the way things are, I guess". Maybe, like me in the wee hours of the morning, we feel like we're missing some piece of the puzzle, like we're just doing our best and hoping we make no catastrophic mistakes.

So what can we learn from the scriptures this morning? Moses stood in the presence of God and revealed that he was not the ideal candidate, and he was empowered. He still relied on God and had to be alert for ongoing instructions, but God's liberation rolled on, the story continued, and his fitness was no obstacle to the work of the Lord. The Hebrew people were freed from under Egyptian rule, and Moses was a leader second to none, despite all his shortcomings.

So I invite you to think of your life, as we are all getting geared up for the fall again, and listen to the words of the first reading this morning, from Romans chapter 12: "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil." This is the life that we are called to, the kind of lifestyle for you to live this week, this year. You may not feel equipped to manage it, but God does not require an ideal candidate.

Praise God for the strength he has given us to do a measure of these things already. The Christian life is not an easy one, and we may not feel like the ideal applicants, but by the grace of God, we can let our light shine. This is good news. Hallelujah, and Amen.