

*Third Sunday in Lent*

March 7, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Exodus 3:1-8, 10-15

*Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up." When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. (NIV)*

What's in a name? Sometimes a name can reveal a lot to us or call to mind many great or not so great things, can't it? We hear the names Lincoln or Hitler and all kinds of thoughts come to mind. In my mother-in-law's daycare one time she had kids who were named Cain and Jezebel. I recall saying to her that my guess was their parents were not too well versed in the Bible. Certain names just jump out at us - Moses, Abraham, David, Jesus - are all names that pack a punch.

But what name would you use to describe God? There are many names revealed to us to describe the Lord we worship, aren't there? Each one reveals to us a little more about the one true God. So what name would we use? What emphasis would we want to be made known when it comes to our God and His holy name? If God had a driver's license what would we want it to say to identify Him? This morning as our Lord reveals Himself to Moses in a unique way I want us to consider this question: **What's in God's name?**

The way in which God reveals Himself and His name to Moses is a bit startling, even shocking at first, isn't it? Moses is tending his father-in-law Jethro's flocks, at Horeb, a mountain whose one peak we know as Mt. Sinai, and God appears. There was the LORD, Yahweh, our Jehovah God as a burning bush. God chose to reveal Himself as a fiery bush that would not burn up. If that wasn't enough to get the heart pumping then God tells Moses: *"Do not come any closer... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."*

What does God reveal about Himself and His name here? He is the holy, all powerful, eternal God - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is a God you might want to think twice about trying to approach on your own. The Bible calls our God a jealous God and a consuming fire. Now we can understand Moses' reaction. "***At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.***" Like Elijah centuries later pulling his cloak over his face after hearing God's gentle whisper or Isaiah standing before the Holy one crying: "***Woe to me!...I am ruined,***" this reaction is natural for any sinful human standing before a holy God.

Make no mistake Moses was a sinner. He tried to take matters into his own hands as Israel's deliverer and murdered an Egyptian. He then had to flee Egypt for his life. While forty years of tending sheep taught Moses a little humility, a little needed humility, Moses still was not worthy to stand in the presence of a holy God. When God tells Moses what He has chosen for him to do, we see his sinfulness again as Moses offers excuse after excuse. God's name reveals to Moses his great need for help, his need to repent.

I pray we never forget this about our God. He is a consuming fire, a jealous God, a God who is just and holy. Perhaps it would be good for God to come to us once in a while in a burning bush. When we come into this church we do well to remember we are standing on holy ground. God Himself is present. He reveals Himself to you and I right here through His Word and Sacraments. Do we recognize how unworthy we are to come before the Holy One? Do we show God the respect and reverence His holy name deserves? Like Moses, we are sinners who need to hide our faces. While we've never seen God appear as a burning bush, God does give us reminders of our sin, and our helplessness, and that a day of judgment is coming. Perhaps that reminder comes in the form of an 8.8 earthquake. Do things like that grab our attention? Jesus, in our gospel today, tells us that such things are a reminder for all sinners of our need to repent.

What's in God's name? God's name reveals Him as a raging fire who hates sin. It reveals the truth that sinners like you & me could never stand alone in His presence. Yet, that is not all that in His name, is it? I don't think consuming fire is the name we would choose to put on God's license to identify Him. For there is much more in God's name. He is a God of grace. He is a God of mercy. He is a God of love. He is a God who keeps His promises. He is faithful. These truths just overflow in these verses before us this morning, don't they? God is about to do for His people what He had promised. ***The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."***

When Moses hesitates to go as the Lord commands, God says: "***I will be with you.***" As a sign God also promises that Moses will be back on this very mountain again to worship with God's people. When Moses again flounders saying: "***Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?'***" God answers with one of the most revealing passages in all the Scriptures. "***God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"***" What's

in God's name? Everything that He is and reveals to us about Himself. God is a personal being. He is timeless, changeless, and constant. He has no beginning or end. He always is, and was, and will be.

The Hebrew letters for "I Am" are the same letters used for the Hebrew word we translate LORD - all capital letters. The name Yahweh or Jehovah - the God of free and faithful love - the God of the covenant - the independent God who remains faithful to His promises. That is God's name - the name God tells Moses to use to identify Himself - the name many Jews considered so holy they feared to utter this name aloud. True to this name "I AM," He rescued His people. Yahweh delivered them from their misery and slavery and brought them into the good land He promised.

But there is also loaded meaning in these verses for us who never walked through the Red Sea or enjoyed the milk and honey of Canaan. Do you know who this "I AM" really is? Do you recognize the name of this God which says: ***"I have indeed seen the misery of my people...So I have come down to rescue them."*** This is the angel of the Lord, which often in the Old Testament is a manifestation of the second person of the Trinity.

This is God from all eternity who would one day be born in Bethlehem. He is the One who would tell His enemies that before Abraham was born: ***"I AM."*** He is the one who would preach to all who would listen: ***"I AM the way, the truth, and the life."*** He was the One who would come to the grave of a dear friend and say to His weeping sister: ***"I AM the resurrection and the life."*** He is the One who, when the betrayer led his enemies out with torches, and swords, and clubs in the Garden and said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, came forward and said: ***"I AM He."*** He is the One who finally gave His enemies what they were looking for to condemn Him. For when He stood before the Sanhedrin and the high priest asked him: ***"I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God,"*** He replied ***"I AM."***

This same "I AM" God who appeared to Moses and came to rescue His people from their misery, came down to save all people. He is the "I Am" who came to rescue us from our misery and save us from the slavery of our sin. In Lent, we see the great lengths our faithful God was willing to go to do it. The One who always IS was put to death - for our sin. The eternal God, became man and was crushed on Calvary's cross - to redeem us. God reveals Himself and His love to us through Jesus, our Savior. That is the name above all names.

And one last point. ***"God also said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."*** Notice God does not say He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but He IS their God. He is not the God of the dead but of the living. That's the assurance that is ours in the empty tomb of Jesus. Our sins are paid. Death is defeated. We can now step with confidence into the presence of a holy God and one day will live in His presence forever. What's in God's name. It is a Name to remember - a name that will never change - a Name we love to adore - a Name, the only Name, that saves. Amen.

