

*Texts: Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17*

*Subject: God's Name Revealed*

*Theme: So You May Know*

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, October 3, 2021; *Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Near the end of this month, Ivy and I will celebrate our wedding anniversary, and in the 15 years we've been together, we've changed a lot. We've been through a lot. We've grown as a family, and as a couple. Our relationship has changed. It can feel like we're always getting to know each other. That might be scary to some, and when we're young and dating we might think that we've found someone to spend our life with, and don't expect anything to change ever. But that's just not how it goes. Life happens. You move, to meet new people, you grow, and so do they. Why should we stay the same? It's science. When new elements are introduced to an equation, an experiment, or a system, things change. Ivy and I will look back now and then in awe and wonder, thinking, "Did that really happen?" "Can you believe we made it through that?" Through it all, we have grown deeper in our relationship, and know each other better every day. I think.

I was thinking about some of our first dates and when we were *getting to know each other*. I think we both wanted to learn about each other's history, including past relationships, in an effort to know each other better, and to find out what we were getting into. We learned early on how to communicate, to set priorities, and to work together. And I'm glad to say it's helped give us a foundation for a strong marriage, and hopefully, a long future together. So far, so good.

Moses' life got off to a rough start, but it sure seems like God was with him from the beginning. When the ruler in Egypt was trying to keep the Hebrew people from having sons, Moses was able to survive and thrive thanks to the women in his family, and maybe a little help from God. Scripture tells us his name comes from the incident, since Pharaoh's daughter "drew him up from the water."

The first thing we often know about someone is their name. Names are important. Our names signify our identity, how we'd like to be known by others. Maybe they change over time. If you knew a little boy named Kenny, he might go by Ken nowadays. It would not be right to call them by that old name. Maybe our names have deep meaning because of a historical or family connection, or were popular at the time you were born. I met someone recently named Jason, and we knew we had to be about the same age. Besides people, we name things that matter to us. We name our pets, because we care for them, and I suppose so we know how to call them when they run away, or how to tell one animal from another. We name boats and businesses, schools and churches, camps and even cars. It gives the general category a specific identifier. Such was the case in Moses' time. Moses, was an Israelite raised in Egypt, where there were many gods. When he set out from there, into Midian and places beyond, the surrounding cultures each had their own gods. But does Moses know this God?

We can assume Moses grew up knowing the stories of his faith, of Sarah & Abraham, who were faithful - of Rebekah & Isaac, who loved deeply - of Leah & Jacob, who wrestled with God. But to many, Moses was an outsider. He was saved by the daughter of Pharaoh. But after intervening to protect one of the Hebrews who was being

beaten, and killing the Egyptian assailant, he had to run away to Midian, and live among them as a foreigner and work as a shepherd.

They didn't know him. They didn't know his God. But way out at the edge of the wilderness, where the mountain meets the desert, God got his attention. Moses would want to know this One who was calling to him from the burning bush. He didn't have caller ID, so he wants to know who's talking to him from the burning bush. Who is it? The voice is identified as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." So they have some friends in common.

God sets a priority. God has a purpose and a mission to free the Israelites from their labor in Egypt and to continue to bring about the promises made to Abraham. God's going to send Moses to confront Pharaoh and command him to free the people of Israel. If you're going to have an audience with a head of state, you better be sent by someone important. It's all very overwhelming, and Moses is afraid they won't believe him back home, so he needs a name, something to stand on, some letter of recommendation. That would be helpful - if when we start dating someone, we could obtain a letter from our previous relationship. "Here's the good, bad, and the ugly, take this information, and do what you will." No maybe that's not a good idea.

So God answers, saying "I AM WHO I AM." That sounds strange to us. Now we can think about ways "I AM" can be translated in Hebrew - it might be "I WILL BE" or, "I cause to be what I cause to be," which is more interesting, coming from this God who made the whole universe. The name is purposely obscure. First it was understood that no one could see God and live, so Moses hears a voice, and he hides his face. This is how God chose to communicate. But also, God wants to be known by more than a name.

God wants to be known by what God has done, what God does, and what God will do, especially though this particular human being.

We don't know God in the abstract. We know God who shows up for us when we are in trouble. We know God who steps into our lives and by the blessings we have received. We know God who hears our prayers and acts for the sake of communities at risk. This is the same God who draws near to us when we suffer as individuals too, who comes along side us in the presence of a neighbor or friend or family member. We know God through the Word and water, through wine and bread, and we know God because of a cross, because of an empty tomb, because of the one who shared the good news of God's love - a fire that doesn't stop burning.

Now they've opened a dialogue, and like any good prophet, Moses protests his calling. We're finding out a lot about God in the story, but the question of Moses' identity is central here as well. God has already called him by name. "Who am I?" Moses asks, "that I should go speak to Pharaoh?" He can't imagine that would be something he would do. God promises, "I will be with you." Moses identity isn't in what he did back in his past. He is fully known in the God who accompanies him.

The God who knows is the God who wants to be known.

God has heard the cry of the people. Finally. Even if the people didn't seem to cry out specifically to God, or to lament, their cries of pain and desperation, of exhaustion and frustration rose up, and at long last, God heard their suffering. God noticed, and called Moses to notice God - in the bush. God would be working to make the powers that be in Egypt take notice as well.

But Moses didn't feel equipped to speak out. He objects, and says he is not a skilled orator, to speak to the king of Egypt. God promises to give him the words. But even still, Moses begs, "please send someones else." God gets a little frustrated here, but sees Aaron coming up the road, and says,"He indeed shall speak for you to the people". They've got to work together.

The relationships God has given us are blessings. The ones who speak words of faithful encouragement to us are a gift from God, who blesses us this way so that we can move forward, serve one another, and be of strength when one is struggling. We've all been through a lot in the past 18 months - from politics to a pandemic, and more, and many relationships have been strained. God's people are crying out. They are burdened under the weight of disease and despair, pain of isolation and mental illness, idols of productivity and profit. We are crying out to God. Thankfully God knows us. And even when it seems like God is far away, God hears us.

God is made known through what God does. The one who knows us creates and liberates. The God who loves us protects, and guides, heals and helps. The one who saves us dwells with us, comes to be with us as one of us, and dies for us. God raises up a Savior for us, and continues to speak to us, to be in relationships, and know us deeply and intimately. God is still speaking to us and through us and calling us to speak up and out and stand up for love and justice, and trust that God will be with us too.

Now Moses knows who God is. And that God can be trusted.

Soon, Pharaoh will know.

And in Christ Jesus, who knows us, and calls our names in baptism, the whole world will know. Amen.