

Sermon for February 28, 2016 – Lent 3

Exodus 3:1-15 (NIV84)

Theme: **The LORD is . . .** *Our merciful God and eternal Savior.*

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” ⁴ 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.” ⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² 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.” ¹³ 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?” ¹⁴ 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.’ ” ¹⁵ 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.

Our names are incredibly important. Our entire reputation is bound up in them. For example, if I mention the name “Aaron Rodgers” most of you will immediately think about the Packer’s quarterback, all you know about him and whether or not you like him.

But there is also another way names can tell you about someone. Sometimes their very meaning gives us insight into who a person is. For example, consider the name “Abraham” (which means “Father of a multitude”) or Jesus (which means “the Lord’s Savior.”) The meaning of both these names perfectly describe the men who bore them.

Names are important and often tell a story: if this is true regarding human names, how much truer is it regarding God’s personal name: the LORD. Let us learn not only what this name means, but the awesome comfort His reputation offers us, under the theme: **The LORD is . . .** *Our merciful God and eternal Savior.*

Part One: Our merciful God

Our sermon text finds 80 year-old Moses tending the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro in the rugged desert region of Sinai. It had been 40 years since Moses fled Egypt. Back there he was a prince – the adopted Hebrew son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He grew up seeing the oppression of his people until, one day, he decided to do something about it. He killed an Egyptian to protect a fellow Israelite. When his crime became found out he fled Egypt and had lived in exile ever since – wondering when God would fulfill the promise He had made to his forefathers concerning the Promised Land. Many had given up on that hope.

When Moses led his father-in-law’s flocks to Horeb – a mountain on the far side of the Sinai desert - *there the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.*

Who is the “angel” that appeared to Moses? The core meaning of that word is “messenger” and does not always refer to the spiritual beings we imagine when we hear it. The angel of the LORD in our sermon text is God’s special messenger who knows the LORD completely and reveals him fully. And who can do that? Only Jesus, the very Son of God, who himself said: “*no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*” (Luke 10:22 NIV84) What we have before us, therefore, is not the account of a mere angel appearing to Moses, but of Jesus himself.

Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” ⁴ 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.” ⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ 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 first thing Jesus revealed to Moses about himself is that He is completely holy. No sinful human can stand in his presence. This is why Moses was afraid to look at God.

The LORD deserves – yes, even demands our uttermost fear and respect. But, do we always show it? How do we approach him in prayer? In humility and repentance - understanding that we deserve nothing from him because of our sins? Or do we treat him as if he is some sort of magic genie in a bottle: imagining that he has to answer our every wish and desire?

The LORD is not our personal genie. He is the eternal, almighty, all holy God who – centuries before Moses was born - made specific promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: namely, that he would watch over their descendants, allowing them to grow in number and inherit the land of Canaan. He never forgot that promise. Whatever promise God makes, He keeps.

⁷ *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. ⁸ 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—the home of the Canaanites,*

Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

God is not oblivious to the suffering of his people. He saw the brutality done to them by their oppressors. He heard every single one of their cries for help. He knew their sorrow. For reasons that only God knows, He delayed in rescuing them – waiting for the right time to come.

Now was that time! He would save his people and deliver them to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He himself would do this, and Moses would be His chosen instrument to accomplish it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do not gloss over this section of Scripture, thinking it has nothing to say to you. See that the LORD is revealing himself as our merciful God, who sees, hears and knows all. Yes, the LORD sees all your suffering and tears of sorrow on this sin cursed earth. The LORD hears all your cries to him for help. I know that days, weeks, even years may pass with no answer, but this does not mean that He has not heard you. He has and promises to work in all things for the benefit of those who love him. Only be patient and wait for his deliverance. His delay is not because He doesn't care, but it's for reasons that we can't even begin to understand. Patiently put your hope in God. He will not disappoint you, but keep his promise to deliver you at just the right time – just like he did for the Israelites

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² 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.”

Can you imagine being commanded to tell the most powerful ruler of the world to let God's people go? No wonder Moses was afraid! But here is the thing: the LORD is not a God who asks someone to do something impossible and leaves them alone to do it. No, our LORD is an ever present God – standing beside his believers, equipping, training and upholding them all for the task he has given them to do. We believers are mere tools in the hands of God. He is the one working through us, accomplishing everything he desires.

What a comfort this is! I can't tell you how many times I have prayed: “LORD, I don't know what to do. Please stay with me and work what you desire through me!” And I could say that prayer in all confidence that God would do what I asked. How so? Because, just as He promised Moses, so has Jesus promised us: *surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* (Mat 28:20 NIV84)

Part Two: Our Eternal Savior

¹³ 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?” ¹⁴ 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.' "

Wow, what a verse! In it God reveals his personal name – and boy, does it ever tell a story. **“Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.** God’s name is: I am who I am. He is not some impersonal force like the Buddhists worship. He is an “I” – that is a personal being. He is “am” – that is “being” or “existence” personified. His name tells us that he is eternal - that he is not subject to time or space. His name tells us that everything that exists, exists because of him. His name tells us that he is perfectly free – subject to no one and no rules. “I am who I am” – that is the LORD’s name, and it is with this name that He reaches out to us as our Savior, as the next verse indicates:

¹⁵ *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.*

I want to talk to you about the name LORD as it appears in all capital letters. This Hebrew word does not actually mean “lord,” in the sense we commonly understand it. You see, at some point in Israel’s history, the people became so concerned with misusing God’s real name that they said “Adonai” (which means “lord” or “master”) whenever they came across God’s name. But this is not the actual meaning of God’s name (hence the reason it is spelled in all capitals). No his name actually means: HE IS!

This name (LORD in all caps) is the most common name for God in the Bible – used slightly more than 6000 times in the Old Testament. And when it is used, it is most often in the context of his saving love toward his people.

Now, there is another name I need to bring into the mix. Earlier on I mentioned that Jesus was the one talking to Moses. Do you know why I said that? Because our Gospel lesson recorded Jesus saying: "*before Abraham was born, I am!*" (Joh 8:58 NIV84)

Jesus is the LORD, our merciful God and eternal Savior. He, together with the Father and Holy Spirit, is the one who created all and for whom everything exists. When mankind fell into sin and became enslaved to the devil, he did not give up on us but, in love, decided to save us. He came to us in the person of Christ to suffer and die for our sins so that we could live with him forever in heaven.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: names are important. They tell a story. What does God’s name “LORD” reveal to us? That Jesus is our merciful God and eternal Savior. Hold on to this truth and take comfort in this fact whenever you feel the pain, sorrow and guilt which are all a result of living on this sin cursed earth. The LORD hears your cries and will deliver you at the appointed time – just as he did for the Israelites during the time of Moses. How can we be sure? Jesus' life, death and resurrection for us prove this beyond any shadow of a doubt. "*Don't be afraid; just believe*" (Mar 5:36 NIV84) and you will see the LORD fulfill his promises, just as His name proclaims. Amen.