

MOSES – Confronted by God
(or, “What Do You Think
God Is Calling YOU to Do?”)
Exodus 3:1-15
August 31, 2008 – Ordinary 22
Oakland Avenue PCUSA
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Genesis 3:1-15 (NRSV):

1 *Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.*

2 *There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.*

3 *Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”*

4 *When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”*

5 *Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”*

6 *He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

7 *Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,*

8 *and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*

9 *The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.*

10 *So come, I will send 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 *He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”*

13 *But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”*

14 *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

15 *God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you;' This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations."*

In one Charles Schulz PEANUTS CARTOON, Charlie Brown and Linus Van Pelt are leaning their elbows on the brick wall, looking out at us readers, and pondering the questions of the world.

LINUS VAN PELT: I'd like to make a lot of money..... but I'd hate to be a SNOB..... I've given this a lot of thought.

CHARLIE BROWN: So, what have you decided?

LINUS VAN PELT: So, I've decided to be a very rich and famous person who doesn't really care about money..... and who is very humble.... but who still makes a lot of money and is very famous... .but is very humble and rich and famous.

CHARLIE BROWN: Good luck!

So, who are you? Do you ever find yourself wrestling with the Linus Van Pelt question of who you want to be? Finding one's own identity.... finding one's own uniqueness..... finding one's own individuality.....or finding one's own self.... is one of the most important discoveries that a person can make. And often it is not until this discovery is **made** and **understood** and **accepted** that a person is then freed and strengthened to push on to **other** discoveries and contributions and experiences.

HELPING PERSONS TO FIND THEIR OWN SPECIAL IDENTITIES IS THE WORK OF THE CHURCH. It is the work of the church school. It is the work of the Presbyterian Campus Ministry at Winthrop. It is the work of all of the organizations of Oakland Avenue PCUSA.

And the reason that this is so is because one of the major teachings of Holy Scripture – if not THE major teaching of Holy Scripture – is that **YOU AND I ARE CHILDREN OF GOD !**

That is who you are. And it is from that beginning point that we start our search to find out our own uniqueness and individuality and self.

I AM A CHILD OF GOD, that's who I am! And in addition to that, I am James Thomas Richardson!

Perhaps one of the sad commentaries on our day and our culture is the number of evils that constantly try to lead us astray.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL try to enslave us in identity with them.

MATERIALISM tries to coerce us to identify with the almighty dollar.

RACISM wants us to find our identity only in skin color.

SELF-LOVE wants us to identify only in “I-Me-My-Mine.”

And, in contrast, the Church and Holy Scripture tell us: YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. THAT’S WHO YOU ARE!

And that is why Christian parents have their children baptized. That is why Christian parents want their children to confirm their baptismal vows. That is why Christian parents bring their children to Sunday School and PYF. That is why Christian parents sit with their children in worship on Sunday. That is why Christian parents want to tell their children loudly and clearly as they begin their search for identity: YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. THAT’S WHO YOU ARE!

And it is from that beginning point that we start our search as children and teen-agers and adults to find out our own uniqueness and individuality and self.

THE STORY OF MOSES in The Book of Exodus involves one man’s struggle with the question: “WHO AM I?”

Born of Hebrew parents who were slaves in Egypt, Moses was then raised in the palace of the Pharaoh as the Egyptian son of Pharaoh’s daughter. One of the pivotal verses in the story is this: “One day when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people.” [Exodus 2:11]

Now, that is not only a *pivotal* verse, it is also a *puzzling* verse. For it is the only verse that deals at all with the question of Moses’ identity, not as an Egyptian but as a Hebrew! We are not told how this came about. The Bible is silent on the subject. In the providence of God, Moses understands who he is.....a Hebrew! There is a lot of guessing as to how this realization and recognition came about, but we are not told. All that can be said is that in the providence of God, Moses understands who he is.....A Hebrew!

Perhaps you recall what happens next in the story. In anger, Moses kills the Egyptian who is beating the Hebrew slave, and then Moses flees the country when Pharaoh tries to kill Moses in return.

Later, in a foreign country, Moses shows kindness to the daughters of a Midianite by protecting them from some cruel shepherds and then helping them to water their sheep. The result is that Moses ends up marrying one of the daughters of the Midianite.

Today’s passage begins following the time that Moses has settled in the land of Midian, has married, and has had a son named GERSHOM. We are told that Moses had gone to work as a shepherd for his father-in-law, a man whose name was JETHRO. There are two interesting things about Jethro: (1) He was a citizen of Midian, and (2) he was a priest of Midian.

Those of you who wish to do so would probably find it interesting to do some more study on Jethro than we are able to do this morning.

(1) Just one of the interesting things about Jethro about which you could do some reading is the fact that some Biblical scholars trace Jethro’s Midian ancestry back to the great Hebrew patriarch ABRAHAM through Abraham’s third wife (Cf. Genesis 25:2 and I Chronicles 1:32).

(2) Another interesting thing about Jethro involves his being a Priest of Midian. A careful reading of the Exodus story of Moses up to today's passage will reveal that we are nowhere told of any connection between Moses and Yahweh God.

We are not told that Moses worshiped God. We are not told that Moses' parents worshiped God. We are not told that Pharaoh's daughter worshiped God.

So, the question can be easily raised, and is raised by some Biblical scholars, as to the role of Jethro, Priest of Midian, in the development of *the theology of Moses*.

During the forty (40) years that Moses lived with his father-in-law, Jethro, how much was Moses influenced in his understanding of God by his father-in-law, Jethro, Priest of Midian, who was perhaps distantly related through Abraham's third wife?

It is a simple story. One day while Moses was tending his sheep, he came to Mount Horeb (which is another name for the later-famous Mount Sinai). The Exodus writer refers to Mount Horeb very plainly as "the Mountain of God." And it is there at the Mountain of God that Moses has his experience with the bush that burns but is not consumed. Again and again in the Bible, we get the symbol of the presence of God in a flame of fire. Evidently the Exodus writer wants us to understand that something miraculous is afoot here.

And the miracle is not necessarily the burning bush itself! That is the attention-getter! Burning bushes can be explained by escaping gaseous material or volcanic mountain seepage.

THE MIRACLE IS NOT IN THE *FLAME* FROM THE BUSH.

THE MIRACLE IS IN THE *VOICE* FROM THE BUSH.

And it is by that voice that Moses is confronted by God. It is by God's Word that Moses is confronted.

Now, it does not matter to me if you have very literally heard the voice of God speak to you. But it does matter to me whether or not you have ever heard the Word of God speak to you. Do you get the difference here? Have YOU ever heard the Word of God speak to you?

There are many interesting and informational things in today's passage, but since we are limited by time, I want to hold up only three.

(1) THE FIRST THING THAT WE LEARN FROM TODAY'S PASSAGE is that it is God who first confronts Moses. This tells you and me who are members of OAPC that the God whom we worship is the God who will reach out and confront us right where we are: tending sheep or washing dishes; doing homework or demonstrating a product; writing a letter or attending a meeting.

The God whom we worship is not an absentee God, off somewhere else in the universe. Rather, the God whom we worship is One who confronts people when and where God wants to make confrontation. Sometimes it takes the form of a dramatic confrontation as in the case of Moses; and other times it take the form of a quieter, continuing, growing confrontation as in my own personal case.

(2) THE SECOND THING THAT WE LEARN FROM TODAY'S PASSAGE is that God knows us by name. When the voice spoke out of the burning bush, there was no "Hey, YOU!" Rather, God called him by name: "Moses, Moses!"

The God whom you and I worship is the same God who took the time to give each of us separate fingerprints and different personalities and unique DNA blueprints.

So, it is not too much to expect that God would know us by name, is it? And it is the teaching of Holy Scripture that God does know us by name. Again and again the Bible tells us of God calling out people by name: Abraham! Jacob! Moses! Jeremiah! God knows us by name.

I am not just a social security number or one of the animals in a herd. I am unique! I am myself! I am a child of God! God knows that I am James Thomas Richardson.

(3) THE THIRD THING THAT WE LEARN FROM TODAY'S PASSAGE is God's name. It is YAHWEH. Translated from the Hebrew to the English, it is "I Am Who I Am." "I Will Be Who I Will Be."

Now, there are two reasons that it is important that Moses and we learn the name of God.

FIRST, it is important for the name itself. The name is a verb. And it tells us that the God whom we worship is a God of **action** and a God of **creation** and a God of **being**. God is not some golden calf or a bronze Buddha sitting motionless.

YAHWEH is the God of Being who causes other things to be. And in order to say "**I Am Who I Am**" most clearly, YAHWEH God chose to become a human being In Jesus Christ. That is the identity of God.

It is important for us to know the name of God for the Name itself.

SECOND, it is important that Moses and we learn the name of God for what is implied in the action of one telling one's name to another.

Telling one's name is the revealing of one's most intimate self.

When I tell another person my name, I am opening myself up to that other person. And that is exactly the reason that it is important that I protect my name and make it stand for something. Dare I mention the name of John Edwards?

When I tell another person my name, I do not want it to signal to that person that I am weak or cowardly or hateful or insensitive. I want my name to stand for **honesty** and **generosity** and **love** and **Jesus**.

Today's passage, if it does nothing else, ought to help you and me to raise the question: WHAT DOES MY NAME INDICATE ABOUT ME? When a person thinks of my name, what comes to that person's mind?

And as the People of God collectively, as members of Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church, we can carry that "name" question one step further. When persons outside of our congregation think of

Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church, what comes to their minds: that we have a pretty place for a wedding, or that OAPC cares about people who are hungry or in trouble or are alone?

What's in a name? That is what Linus Van Pelt was wondering when he and Charlie Brown were leaning their elbows on that brick wall.

And that was also what Moses was wondering when he was confronted before that burning bush.

The next time that you are leaning your elbows on that brick wall wondering about your own identity, relax.

You are a child of God!

Relax!