

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR JANUARY 10 & 11, 2021**

Now Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, a priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² The Angel of the Lord appeared to him in blazing fire from within a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but the bush was not burning up. ³ So he said, "I will go over and look at this amazing sight—to find out why the bush is not burning up."

⁴ When the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to take a look, God called to him from the middle of the bush and said, "Moses! Moses!" Moses said, "I am here."

⁵ The Lord said, "Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He then said, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The Lord said, "I have certainly seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry for help because of their slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now indeed, the Israelites' cry for help has come to me. Yes, I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Come now, 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 that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² So he said, "I will certainly be with you. This will be the sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, "If 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?' what should I say to them?" ¹⁴ So God replied to Moses, "I am who I am." He also said, "You will say this to the Israelites: I am has sent me to you."

¹⁵ God also told Moses, "Say this 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, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.'

(Exodus 3:1-15 EHV)

You can read about the first 80 years of Moses' life in Exodus 2. His birth, then being placed in a basket in the Nile to avoid being killed by Pharaoh, then Pharaoh's daughter fished him out of the river, his own mother actually got to raise him the first few years of his life before he became a part of the royal household. There is also the account of Moses killing an Egyptian but failing to impress his fellow Hebrews then fleeing into the desert to avoid Pharaoh's wrath. He marries, has children, lives life as a shepherd. All of that fits on about a page in the Bible. One page. One chapter. 80 years, two thirds of his life. Takes about 2 ½ minutes to read out loud.

Then comes chapter 3. It's like taking off in a high-speed roller coaster. From 0-60 in six seconds. The next 200 pages of the Bible, through the end of the book of Deuteronomy, (takes hours to read) are dominated by Moses and the last 40 years of his life. For Old Testament Jews, Moses was the Man. And while Moses is a key character in this account, he isn't the main one. He isn't the focus of everything. God is. More specifically, the God who identifies himself here as YAHWEH, Hebrew for the name LORD.

80 years old, living the relatively quiet, peaceful life of a shepherd, no big plans for the future. Moses is enjoying what we could call semi-retirement. It's a normal day at the office, so to speak, when something catches fire. Not a laptop or phone charger or still lit cigarette butt sparking some roadside trash. It's a bush, in the middle of the desert, with no fire source available, no one else is there. Moses sees this bush burning,

but it's not burning up. He goes over to check it out. Imagine the surprise and fear when he hears a voice call out to him, **"Moses! Moses!"** To which Moses manages to respond, **"I am here."** (v. 4)

It turns out to be the voice of God. **"Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."** He then said, **"I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...I have certainly seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry for help because of their slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey."** (vv. 5-8)

At this point, Moses, hiding his face from the glory that is the Lord in the burning bush, is thinking, "Great, Lord, you're here. Go rescue the people." But then he learns that he's a part of God plan. **"Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."** (v. 10)

Moses, of course, awed by God's holiness, moved by his compassion, thrilled at receiving this calling, is eager to take up the challenge. No. He spends the rest of chapters 3 and 4 making excuses, five excuses altogether. The first two are here in our text. Here's #1 – **"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"** (v. 11) This has crossed our lips too. Who am I? I'm a nobody. I have nothing to offer. God's response? I know. Well, not exactly. He doesn't refute Moses, he doesn't argue with us about this. He doesn't address the excuse directly. He says, **"I will...be with you."** (v. 12)

"You, Moses, and you my people here today aren't anybody. But here's the thing – I don't call you based on who you are or what you've done. I call you to be mine in spite of who you are and what you've done." God's call is based on who he is and what he's done. God says he chose you before the creation of the world – so how could his choice be based on anything you've done? Paul says that you and I were born spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins, a sinful nature that shows itself in our fears and whining and complaining and making excuses and lack of trust in God.

God's choice and his call say nothing about us, but everything about him and his grace in Christ Jesus, who came to rescue us from spiritual slavery and eternal death. It's not about us, but about Christ, **"who loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** (Eph 5:25-27)

So God says to Moses/us – I will be with you. I'm not looking for extraordinary people. I'm looking for ordinary people who will trust an extraordinary God. Like Moses, David, Mary, Peter, Paul, you, me.

But Moses is ready with excuse #2. **"If 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?' what should I say to them?"** (v. 13) We do the same thing. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. So I don't have to do anything. People won't listen to me or believe me. So, whom shall I say sent me?

God's answer to our excuse is the same as he gave to Moses: **"I am who I am...You will say this to the Israelites: I am has sent me to you."** (v. 14) **"I AM WHO I AM."** I AM. In Hebrew, Yahweh. In English, LORD. Most English Bibles reflect the name Yahweh (also pronounced Jehovah) with LORD in all capital letters. Every time you see LORD in all caps in the Old Testament, that's Yahweh, this special name for the true God. The four Hebrew letters of this name are a form of the Hebrew verb "to be" which gives us the meaning "I AM." It's a name that speaks of eternity. Not I was, or I will be, but I AM. God just is. Always has been, always will be. The name Yahweh/LORD also emphasizes God's independence and faithfulness. He is timeless, constant, and unchanging. Luther said, **God has no beginning nor end and his name can never be, "has been" or "will be," but it must always be "is."** He is the same yesterday and today and forever: powerful, merciful, eternal.

Yahweh especially emphasizes God as Savior; it's the name God used when speaking of the covenants he made with the Israelites, both the two-sided covenant made at Sinai – the giving of the Law and the people's promise to obey – and especially his one-sided covenant of grace in effect since the Garden of Eden, really,

since before creation/the beginning of time. The name God used for himself at creation is the Hebrew Elohim, "God," which emphasizes his power and strength. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God didn't just come to them as Elohim, God of might and power. That would have meant the end of them. He came to them as Yahweh Elohim, the LORD God of saving grace and power.

Just how important is this name, Yahweh? The Lord said to Moses, ***"This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation."*** (v. 15) It's the most common name for God in the Old Testament, used nearly 6000 times, more than twice as often as any other name. The name Yahweh was so revered by later generations of Jewish people that they refused to speak it out loud, kind of a reverse Lord Voldemort "he who must not be named." That's too much, a bit overboard, but a refreshing contrast to the constant utterance of God's name today in vain whether by voice or by text. God's name is not a curse, a throwaway word or a text message that begins with "o" and ends with "g."

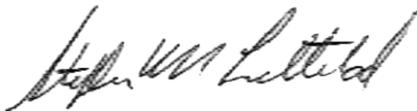
God's name is sacred, holy, saving, powerful, worthy of our respect, admiration, and praise. We know this, we say that we know this to be true, but do we really? How relevant is this Old Testament stuff, these obscure names for God? Kind of boring after a while. Is God really relevant today? Should he occupy a central/the central place in my life?

Casual, careless use of God's name. Wondering if God is relevant/real to my life/the world today. Setting up the premise that I am the sun/center of my personal solar system and everything else/everyone else, including God/Lord/Yahweh, revolves around me. How dare we do this! Better questions to ask include: How can we be relevant to God? Are we? How do we know God isn't bored with us? Who are we to ask all these questions and make all these excuses while making all sorts of demands on the Lord God?

The contrast between us and God is huge, especially here. Remember Moses stammering in response to the voice from the burning bush, "I am here"? Small voice. Small letters. Then the Lord says, "I AM." "I AM WHO I AM." Big voice. Divine voice. All caps. All power. All-encompassing. That's your God, my God. Powerful, awesome, over all, in all, through all, and yet personal. The name Yahweh tells us that God comes to us, that he has compassion, that he is present with us always.

And like Moses, the Lord/the great I AM God comes to you and me and says, "I have a job for you. I have a purpose for you. I will equip you. And I will be with you." And whatever that job/purpose(s) turns out to be, you and I are ordinary people blessed by, accompanied by, often carried by an extraordinary God, the Lord who is, who gives, who saves, the God who is on fire with love for you.

Yahweh identifies the Lord God as the I AM God, the Savior God of constant mercy and grace. The fire of Yahweh's love for you gives you identity and purpose. Don't go home and wait for something to catch on fire, to burn but not really burn: a dresser, the kitchen table, the flatscreen TV. You don't need a new sign/word, you've got plenty of Word from God here. Listen to Yahweh, learn from the Lord, and go forth in his name.



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