

Sermon – July 25, 2021
“What is his name?”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 3:1-15

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we seek to follow Jesus on our mission field. Amen

Good morning everyone! As we begin this morning, I would like to offer praise for some of this congregation's service in Christ during the past week. I want to thank Judy and Kevin and all of the volunteers for their help sharing Christ with kids at our VBS / Good News Club. Thank you, Jesus, for working through our team and speaking into the lives of children and adults. I would like to thank the Fairfields Fall Festival planning group for their ongoing work to prepare for a festival. I also want to thank our faithful volunteers who continue to meet the public through the yard sale. And finally, I want to thank the team that went to Lewisetta and did so much work there. Thanks to all of you for your service this past week. May we all continue to find opportunities to serve in our community while giving God the glory for all we do.

For those of you reading along in Exodus, you will know the highlights that are passed over as we jump forward each week in Exodus. Let me share what I consider to be the essentials that help us with the progression and context of our story. Moses is raised for a time in his family's home, is taken to Pharaoh's home and is raised there for many years. At some point, Moses begins to think that he is to help Israel and seeks to work with the Hebrews. In his intercession on their behalf, he kills an Egyptian and when he discovers his actions are known, he flees from Egypt's leadership. He settles in Midian, meets the priest of Midian, and marries

one of his daughters. Moses and his wife have two children, and Moses settles into the daily life of being a father and a shepherd in the wilderness. The slavery in all of its violence and cruelty continues for Israel as does their cry to God. With this background, we step into today's scripture. On the day we join Moses, he has left his normal routine in the wilderness close to home and has come to an area around Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai. In this place, Moses looks and sees a bush that is burning but is not consumed, and his curiosity causes him to turn aside from his shepherding and seek to see this site. God uses Moses' curiosity to lead him to an encounter with God. In our own lives, God can and will use our curiosity to lead us into a deeper relationship with Him. Once our attention has been moved from our normal routine and we turn aside even following our own desires, God is able to use them to draw us into an encounter with Him.

As Moses approaches the burning bush that is not consumed by fire, he hears his name called, "Moses, Moses" and his reply is the same reply Abraham gave when God spoke his name. The Hebrew word is Henehie or "Here I am." Notice that God's first order is to stop Moses where he is. He commands him to come no closer but to remove his sandals, for Moses is standing on holy ground, ground made holy by God's presence. God has an impact on creation, ground that was just ground is made holy by the arrival of God. Moses is told to remove his sandals as a sign of respect and acknowledgment that he is in a holy place.

Notice that God tells Moses who He is, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." This news from the voice coming from the burning bush changes Moses' curiosity to fear and he hides his face fearing that if he sees God he will die. God has drawn Moses to this place and will begin to transform Moses from a shepherd to one whom God can work through to bring deliverance to Israel. As God explains to Moses why He is speaking through the burning bush to him, we should notice two key phrases in God's explanation, God has come down and he will bring his people up. The idea of God coming down means God is going to act. We see this same idea with Jesus where he comes down from heaven to earth. When God comes down, God will act decisively in the lives of His people. The idea of bringing His people up, here to a promised land, is God delivering His people. For Israel, God delivers them out of cruel slavery; through Jesus, delivery is from bondage to sin and death. A question that we might ask is, "If God has come down, why doesn't God take care of Pharaoh?" The answer is that God acts through people to accomplish His will.

God is seeking people who will cooperate with Him to bring about His kingdom, to bring to completion the covenants made with the patriarchs.

What God tells Moses next is one of the most challenging statements of the Old Testament. God tells Moses, “So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” Think about what God just told Moses. God has told Moses that He is calling him to go from being a father and keeper of sheep in some remote empty wilderness to stand in front of the most powerful leader of the world and tell him, “The God of the Hebrews sent me to tell you those slaves you have been holding onto and exploiting, set them free.” Pharaoh believes he is God. Pharaoh is the king. His word is action. There is no discussion with a king; your life is in his hands when you are in his presence. And God has just told Moses that he is to go confront Pharaoh and lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses might be afraid to look at God, but he does not like this call of God. In the midst of fear of dying from looking at God, while standing on holy ground, Moses understands what this call might mean, and he has a few objections. We might expect Moses to jump up and say to God, “Thank you for choosing me. I am your man. I am going to go head off to Egypt to confront Pharaoh.” But Moses lived in Pharaoh’s house. Moses has seen firsthand how a Pharaoh works and he is not ready to accept this call from God. Moses resists God’s call. Moses, who is hiding his face, is now fully able to talk with a God who has told him what God expects. Moses has a few questions for God and is trying to understand how a shepherd, a wanted man in Egypt, could become a deliverer of Israel. Moses is yet to understand that God is the one who will do the work through him. The first question that comes to Moses’ mind about this call is how will the Israelites, those he is sent to deliver, know it is God who has sent him. God has not appeared to any in Israel telling them this good news, and Moses may be uncertain of who this god is who would send him into a confrontation with the leader of the mightiest nation in the world. Moses tells God, “If I go to Egypt to the elders of Israel and tell them my task and they ask me the name of the one who sent me, what shall I say to them?” God’s response to Moses has been the source of confusion and debate since it was given. God replies first with, “I am who I am,” or “I will be who I will be,” or “I create what I create.” Translators have struggled with how to understand this response from God. It is almost as if God’s reply is that it does not matter who He is or what His name is. He alone is the one who creates, sustains, and acts. This first response to Moses’ request from God is somewhat of a refusal to give Moses a name for God. God seems to be telling Moses that they

know His name and his question is not the best response in their discussion of God's call. Then God tells Moses to tell Israel, "I Am has sent me to you," and God continues on, telling Moses, "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 my title for all generations." For this name to have meaning to the leaders of Israel, they would need to know it already, so God does not seem to be giving Moses a new revelation through this giving of His name, but instead is reminding Moses of His name and His ongoing actions for Israel throughout history. This is not a new God and a new name for Him, but the God of the patriarchs, those with whom God entered into a covenant, a covenant to which God remains faithful. From this response we understand that God's name is "I Am" and God's name is connected to His presence with Israel in the past, present, and future. The traditional rendering of "I am" is "Yahweh," a name which the Hebrews held to be sacred and instead used "Adonai" so they would not have to speak God's holy name. We will typically find this name as LORD in all caps in our Bibles. God's sharing of His name with Moses makes clear that the God speaking with Moses now is the same God who spoke with his ancestors in the past and will be God for all time for His people.

A more important aspect of this exchange between God and Moses is the concept of calling. As Moses was called by God from the burning bush, we are called today by God into a new relationship with Him. Through the actions of Jesus, we are all first called to salvation. Jesus died on the cross so that we might be reconciled to God, and it is through Jesus that God calls us into a relationship with Him. We are called to enter the kingdom of God. We as sinners, unholy people, are called into a new relationship with God. It is God who shines light into our dark hearts and enables us to move into belief in Jesus. Many of us will recall a moment in our lives when God's call came to us. It may have been in a conversation with a friend or maybe a grandparent or other relative was used by God as the burning bush in our lives. Perhaps as a young child at a Vacation Bible School, God called you into this relationship. The key point is that just as Moses is changed from a shepherd to a deliverer, so we also have been called to step into a new journey with Jesus to God. We who are believers should all be able to see in our lives a change of trajectory from what we once were to a new trajectory, one that is constantly moving us towards who we will be through Jesus. If we cannot look at our lives and see such a transforming moment, then we need to realize that we may yet need to accept the loving call of God for our life. We may, like Moses, resist God's call. We may have questions that we need to

have answered. We may still be counting the cost in our lives of what it will mean if we follow Jesus fully. We may also be seeking to find Jesus in our own strength instead of allowing the presence of God to work in our lives to bring transformation. This is a place for discernment. This is the day, a moment when we are called in this place to look at our lives and discern if we have accepted God's call, and if not, then turn to God now, believe in Jesus as our savior, and enter into the transforming relationship God is calling us to.

We should also understand that just as Moses is called out of the life of a shepherd to be the one through whom God will deliver Israel from Egypt, we also receive a second call from God, a call into kingdom service. We don't just become a citizen of the kingdom of God and live our lives as we always did. When we become a citizen, we have responsibilities of kingdom citizenship, of becoming one who serves in the kingdom. Coming to church for worship is not kingdom service; worship is coming together with the body of Christ to be before and praise the God who has brought us from death to life. Kingdom service is a call to be servants in the now of God's kingdom. Our call into God's kingdom is also a reflection of Jesus' call to reconcile us to God. Our call by God into His kingdom is accomplished in the light of Christ's accomplishment on the cross. As we respond to God's call, we should develop a deeper connection within ourselves to God's faithful, never failing presence in our new life. We will still struggle in life just as Moses will struggle with Pharaoh in the coming events of the Exodus. Yet in our struggles, we should recall that God is not just with us but is in us as we are also in Christ. This new kingdom comes with an indwelling presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit that draws us into our calling. If you can't discern this change and new trajectory in your life, then ask Jesus now to come, not to this place, but into your heart.

We are not just called to salvation, but to be active citizens in a new kingdom. We are to be salt and light in all of the places we are sent. We are to be the gathered body of Christ. We are foremostly to be those who are living out the great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." We are commissioned by Jesus to be those who are making disciples. We are to be at work in the kingdom bringing this great commission forward. Each of us will have a unique, individual aspect of work in the kingdom, but that work will always be part of the making of disciples. We may be called like Moses to use our gifts and graces that we have developed through our life circumstances. For

Moses, this was access to Pharaoh, and for us, our work may use capabilities and desires we have. The key is to look at our situation and seek to use our strengths for God. I cannot give you each a piece of paper that tells you what your individual call is or will be. What I can tell us is that whatever it is, it will be used by God, empowered by God, and strengthened by God to bring people into His kingdom. Those who come into God's kingdom receive first the gift of salvation and are also sent to use their gifts to disciple other people. We are to be a church that is living out this great commission. We are to be a group of disciples who are teaching other disciples to make disciples. As Christ followers, we are not just church goers, but disciple makers, and we need to endeavor to be at the work God has called each of us to as we follow Christ.

The last point that I want to make this morning comes from God's request for Moses to remove his sandals as he is standing on holy ground. God's presence in creation, on the side of Mt. Horeb, makes that place a holy place, and Moses is asked to remove his sandals in recognition of the holiness that God brings. We as believers also have Jesus within us. Our bodies are to become holy vessels. If we truly have the presence of Christ in us, our natures will become holy. We should be able to look at our lives and find a beginning point followed by constant movement forward towards the image of Christ that is within us. Behaviors and sins that we once had should begin to fall from our lives. Our thoughts should be conforming to Christ's thoughts and our actions to his actions. We should be on a journey with this holy indwelling presence to becoming holy beings. This calls for us to look reflectively at ourselves and see if we are growing in holiness. Are we being conformed to the image of Christ we find as we read his word and learn about his love? This is the question each of us must answer daily. If we find we are not moving into this image, then we need to ask Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to help us address whatever is blocking our progress. This is where we will benefit from spending time with other believers, sharing our struggles, and receiving grace in the form of Christ's loving forgiveness and encouragement from one another. If we will take time to examine ourselves, we may find God asking us to remove a behavior from our lives that is not holy or that blocks us from progressing in holiness.

Pray with me: Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and savior. Jesus, come and speak your love into our lives. Jesus, come and help us to become holy vessels. Lord, open us anew to your indwelling presence, call our names, and send us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the Kingdom of God. Amen.