

'I Am Who I Am' (Exodus 3)

“Come in to my office, Sunshine,” was what I heard a head of house saying to a pupil that had been sent to see him. I was a very new, very green teacher and Mike, the head of house, seemed to have a way with the pupils. He was known to be as hard as nails, but very, very fair. One time the school had a bear loaned to it. It stood just over a metre high at the shoulder. Fortunately it was a stuffed bear from a local natural history library that would loan schools some of its exhibits for a week at a time.

One of the classes Mike showed it to was a low ability fifth form, now called year 11 class. During the lesson he said to the children, “Next week, we are getting a full, life-size gorilla. But you are to tell no-one about this, OK. It is our secret that a life-size gorilla is coming in next week. Promise not to tell anyone.” The whole class nodded and then the bell went for the end of lesson and thirty pupils all rushed out of the lesson, and shouted to their mates, “Hey, we just had a lesson with the stuffed bear, but next week we’re getting a life-size gorilla!”

“Come in to my office, Sunshine,” was what Mike use to say to a pupil who was in trouble and had been sent to his office. He knew the pupil’s name and I knew that he knew the pupil’s name, so one time I asked him, why he called the pupil ‘Sunshine’ and not use his name. Mike’s answer was that when he wanted to tell the pupil off, that calling him by name was too friendly, but when the pupil also knew that Mike knew his name but called him or her ‘Sunshine’ that this would unnerve the pupil slightly.

Whether you use a name or not. Whether we know a name or not. Can it make a different? In this country we can give our names very easily. In fact you get rung up by a cold caller the first thing they give you is their name and they ask for yours or say, “Hello, my name Veronica, how are you today, Richard” as if they have know me for years and years and years, but they are a cold telephone caller.

But names are important. Don’t you just hate it when people slightly get your name wrong? Like calling me Mr Owens instead of Mr Owen. This evening we look at a name, a very important name. Turn with me to Exodus 3, page 59

“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. 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. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight— why the bush does not burn up." 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." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 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 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. 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. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.””

“But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 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." 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?" 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.’” 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 for ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”

“Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’ ”The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.’ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. ”And I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed towards this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbour and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”” (Exodus 3:1-22 NIV)

“Whom shall I say sent me to them? What is your name?” Was the question that Moses threw at God, and God answered him, found in verse 14

“...”I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”” (Exodus 3:14 NIV)

I AM has sent you. I AM WHO I AM or I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE. So within the one name we have the present, the future, but there are also thoughts of the past as we read on in verse 15, God continues

“...”Say to the Israelites, ‘I AM, 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 for ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” (Exodus 3:15 NIV)

God's name is forever, and is from forever and so must also be present. So let us look at this name a little closer. The name God gives himself is related to the verb *to be*. One dictionary definition gives for the I AM of Exodus 3:14 begins with

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This is the Tetragrammaton. The four letters which make up the name of God in Hebrew. In the Hebrew language there were originally no vowels and so it was just 4 consonants, YHWH. Then came a problem in a way, the y could not say the name of God because it was so precious, so holy. So they called him *adonai*, meaning, *lord*. Then the vowels were put in and the vowels of the word *adonai* were put into the Tetragrammaton to remind people not to say the sacred name and this then gave rise to Jehovah, the Tetragrammaton with the vowels of *adonai*. The actual word is Yahweh based on the verb to be.

So what does this word mean? Well the dictionary goes on

1) to be, become, come to pass, exist, happen, fall out

1a)

1a1)

1a1a) to happen, fall out, occur, take place, come about, come to pass

1a1b) to come about, come to pass

1a2) to come into being, become

1a2a) to arise, appear, come

1a2b) to become

1a2b1) to become

1a2b2) to become like

1a2b3) to be instituted, be established

1a3) to be

1a3a) to exist, be in existence

1a3b) to abide, remain, continue (with word of place or time)

1a3c) to stand, lie, be in, be at, be situated (with word of locality)

1a3d) to accompany, be with

1b)

1b1) to occur, come to pass, be done, be brought about

1b2) to be done, be finished, be gone

Part of Speech: verb

The name of God is based in the verb *to be*.

This tells us firstly that God is a being and not an idol. All around in the area there were idols that were worshipped. Moses himself would have grown up with idols; he would have seen others worshipping them. But for God there are no idols because he is real, he is a living being.

But the name says a lot more about God.

Faithfulness – if God is there then he is faithful. Verse 16

“Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’” (Exodus 3:16-17 NIV)

I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt (Exodus 3:16). God watched over them and his faithfulness still extends to this day. We read in John’s gospel

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)

God has always been faithful to the world that he created. God was always faithful to his people, the Israelites, even when they went away from him. The first few chapters of Hosea, when Gomer, Hosea’s wife goes off and leaving Homer and prostituting herself with other men is a picture of the children of Israel doing the same with other gods, other religions. But Homer goes and gets Gomer back and so God kept doing that with his people.

God was faithful to his world coming as Jesus to save that world, and God now is faithful to his people, the church and keeps near to them, even when sadly they do not keep near to him. God is faithful to us.

Constancy – besides God’s faithfulness we also see the constancy of God. He is and that is that. Verse 6 and verse 15 both say

“...‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’....” (Exodus 3:6 NIV)

Look back in the past, I was there and I am now. I am constant, always the same. So does this mean that God is without emotions. Of course not. We read in the gospels of Jesus weeping over the grave of his friend Lazarus. We read of God being angry, of God being joyful. Just prior to Christmas someone told me that in their Quiet Time that morning, they were feeling a bit down, but then they read in the Message translation of the Bible

Your GOD is present among you, a strong Warrior there to save you. Happy to have you back, he’ll calm you with his love and delight you with his songs.
(Zephaniah 3:17 MSG)

And it was the thought of God singing over this person that delighted and lifted them. God was so happy because of them.

God has emotions and yet God is constant. And we have in the New Testament

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.” (Hebrews 13:8 NIV)

He is, but this is not an excuse for the church to be so constant that it becomes irrelevant. A few years ago, when I had a Sabbatical, Sue and I spent some time in North America to look at some churches and the way they were doing church. During our stage there we went to an Amish community and for them time has stood still. They have no zips, only buttons, they drive no cars, only horse and carts, they use no farm mechanical machines, only the sweat of their brow. They are stuck in the nineteenth century and to a certain extent have become a tourist attraction, although they still do carry on their way of life.

God is constant which does not mean that he does not change with the times, but it means he is always there, always dependable, always faithful, always I AM, forever Yahweh.

But also notices why Moses was to know his name. It was not to stay where he was. It was not to have a great celebration and then move on back into his life as a shepherd. Verse 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.’" 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.’...” (Exodus 3:14-15 NIV)

God was sending Moses back to perform a task. Remember that Moses was going back to the very place that he had run away from. He was returning to the very people from whom he had run away from. When he killed the Egyptian taskmaster who was whipping one of his own people, the Israelites, Moses ran because it was an Israelite who confronted with the words when Moses tried to meditate in an argument between two Israelites

“The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known.” (Exodus 2:14 NIV)

And when these words reached the ears of Pharaoh, Moses had already left. So God was sending him back to the place he had fled from. Not a nice place to be for Moses, but Moses knew the name of God, I AM. The name that spoke of being, of faithfulness, of constancy, but God had a job for Moses to do.

We too have a task given to us by God, by I AM. We are to take his message out, but God too is with us, his being, his faithfulness, his constancy and so we can go with confidence. It may be to a hard place and that can be different for each of us here this evening, but God will be there. It may be scary and Going for Growth is scary because it is stepping into the unknown, into the zone of not being in control, but like Moses we are not alone. God is there and like Moses he will have an Aaron for us.

Let us know I AM as one who calls and then sends us, sends us into his world to take his message.