

“Who Am I to the I AM?”

a sermon based on

Exodus 3:1-15

and delivered on-
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at

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Can we go back to that passage in Exodus: the story of the “burning bush,” or maybe what should be called the “not burning bush”? After all, when we really listen to the passage (not just what we expect to hear), it makes a point that the bush DIDN’T burn. Really! Let’s listen again, shall we?

“And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, ‘I will turn aside and see this great sight, **why the bush is not burnt.**’” (Ex 3:2-3 RSV)

Why did Moses turn aside? It wasn’t because he saw a burning bush. Maybe he’d seen burning bushes before after a lightning strike. It’s possible. People in California see burning bushes all the time during wildfires. Something different was going on, here: something unexpected. Right? That’s what caught Moses’ attention.

Then he hears a voice, “Moses, Moses!” “Here I am.” “Take off your shoes. You’re on holy ground.” (Ex 3:4-5) Was he looking around to see who was calling out to him? That would be the natural reaction. Wouldn’t it? That’s what I’d do. Wouldn’t you?

Then, before he gets to turn his head to the side, the voice says, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Ex 3:6) Now Moses is terrified. He hides his face, lest he see God. How many of us really want to see God? Be honest. What would that moment be like?

Except that it’s in the Bible and we have certain expectations, but would it have been that surprising if after seeing what he saw and hearing what he heard if the next line wasn’t that Moses hid his face but that a puddle appeared at his feet?

Think about how many times in the biblical witness when an angel appears to someone. What is the first thing they say? “Be not afraid.” Right? Why would they say that if it wasn’t terrifying? Here, not only does the angel of the LORD appear as a flame in the midst of a bush, but then Moses hears God himself. Wouldn’t that be terrifying?

So, Moses is already pretty wound up when God tells him, “I’ve seen the suffering of my people in Egypt, and I want you to go tell Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go.’”

How does Moses reply? “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex 3:11) “Who am I...?”

A lot of the time when we preachers get ahold of a passage like this, we do so in the context of the excuses that people give. We do it with Jeremiah, who says, “I am only a boy.” (Jer 1:6) Mary, “How can this be, since I am a virgin.” (Lk 1:34) Or even a little later when Moses complains that he stutters. (Ex. 4:10) But, is that what Moses is doing, here? He hasn’t really had a chance to think that far.

I don’t think he’s giving an excuse. Yet. “Who am I?” That’s a serious question. “Why do you think I’m the guy to do this?”

Think about this: “You want ME to go to Pharaoh? You do know that he and I aren’t on the best of terms right now? Don’t you? I’m wanted for murder: not just any murder but murdering one of his taskmasters to spare a slave. What about those Israelites? Those Hebrews? You do know that they don’t really think of me as one of their own? Don’t you?”

This doesn't make sense. So Moses asks, "Why me? Who am I? How can you the Lord God Almighty trust me to do this? Not only am I not worthy of your confidence, but I am a pariah to Pharaoh and the Hebrews." That's a little different take. Isn't it?

To drive the point, Moses doesn't even know God's name. Scholars debate on whether this is the first time that God's name has been revealed. If that were the case, however, would telling the Israelites that name have been convincing unless they or the leaders already knew?

Who am I to you, Lord? I don't even know your name. I don't have the faintest idea of what it means to be one of your chosen people. I was raised as an Egyptian; and not just any Egyptian but as a prince in Pharaoh's household. What do you see in me?

This is a telling point. When God reveals his name... when God says, "I AM WHO I AM," the next thing he says is, say to the people, "I AM has sent me to you."

What God is saying, is that you, Moses, are worthy because I said so. Abraham was worthy not because he was so perfect (The guy married his half-sister and was willing to let a couple of other guys take her to spare his own skin.) Abraham was worthy of a promise because, "I (God) said so." Isaac and Jacob (they had their flaws) were worthy because "I (God) said so." "You, Moses, are worthy, because I say so."

That's something God wants you to hear right now. You are worthy of God's love. You are worthy of God's mercy. You are worthy of God's promise, because God says so.

I ended my backpacking trip last week by climbing to the top of Summit Peak in the Porcupine Mountains. At the top, there is an observation tower. I was pooped but I climbed it anyway. From that vantage I could see all of the peaks I'd traversed during the week down to Lake Superior and back. I could see the vastness of Lake Superior. I couldn't see across this vast body of water which I know relatively tiny compared to the oceans or the size of the earth, and that the earth itself is tiny in comparison to the sun, which is itself a small star amongst one galaxy among billions in the universe.

With the psalmist, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." (Ps 8:3-5 NRSV)

Maybe that was Peter's problem when Jesus started talking about his impending death. He didn't understand why Jesus would consider him worthy of such a sacrifice. Isn't that a problem for each of us a lot of the time?

It works against us in two ways. We either avoid confronting sin in our lives so that we can avoid how "unworthy" we are, or we avoid God and church because we know that we really aren't up to snuff? I've heard that. I've been there. I wonder every week why I should get to speak to you on behalf of God ALmighty. That's one reason I don't eat breakfast on Sunday mornings.

In the beginning when God created human beings in his image... in the beginning when God tweaked those strands of DNA so that as they were passed down and blended through each of our ancestors, he did so with a purpose to reveal himself to creation. Just as a mother can't stand the thought of photo of her child being torn up or thrown away, God treasures you.

In Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross, he invites each of us to lay aside all those things that might keep us from being worthy so that we will know – each of us – I am the embodiment of the One who is the I AM.”

Maybe it doesn't feel that way. Maybe you've never "heard" God speak to you, like Moses. But does that mean he hasn't? Moses recognized God's voice in that bush because he knew that something different was happening, and it made him open to the possibility.

Although I've never heard God's "voice," I've heard God speak maybe three times in my life. Each time, was a time that I expected or needed to hear him. I don't know how to describe it better. I don't think those are the only times God has spoken, merely the times that I noticed.

Maybe you feel like somethings missing because you've never had a moment like that. Maybe you doubt that if there really is a God who created this vast universe that he could care about an insignificant individual on an insignificant little planet that he could really care that much about you. But he does. When we just consider that possibility ... when we dare to ponder that truth.. we get a whole new outlook on who we are. You are special because you're very life flows from the breath of God. Because of that, God says, "You are important – you matter - because I AM." AMEN