



## “The God We Can Know”

March 6, 2022

Exodus 3:1-14

Rev. Amanda Moseng, Pastor of Discipleship

2537 Lee Road  
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-4136  
Telephone: 216-321-8880  
Website: www.COTSumc.org

God wants to be known. The story of the Bible is that we serve and love a God who desires to be known. God does not hide from us. God does not avoid us. God wants to be known by us. God wants to be in relationship with us. We see threads of this woven all throughout scripture. Starting at the beginning, even after Adam and Eve sinned and hid from God, God came looking for them. God appeared to Abraham, establishing a relationship and a covenant to create a great nation from his line. God appeared again to Isaac and Jacob, renewing that covenant. God appointed prophets who would speak to God’s people, delivering words of judgment, setting expectations, offering hope, but always leaving room for renewed relationship and a fresh start. Eventually God did a completely new thing and came directly to us in Jesus. God wants to be known. God makes Godself known to us.

This brings us to our scripture story for today. Here we see Moses, the one who was put in a reed basket as a baby and sent down the Nile river because of Pharaoh’s genocide of all male, Hebrew babies. Moses was found by Pharaoh’s daughter who raised him in the palace as a Prince of Egypt. Moses, a Hebrew, lived as an Egyptian. One day he noticed an Egyptian guard beating a Hebrew, one of Moses’ own people. Moses lashed out, killing the Egyptian guard. When Pharaoh heard about this, Moses decided to flee. In Exodus 3, where our story begins, Moses is in Midian tending his father-in-law’s flock. He led the flock to the edge of Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God. It is here where Moses would encounter God through the burning bush. Moses is intrigued by the burning bush, seeing as how it was on fire but not being consumed, and decided to take a closer look. As he approached the bush, God called out to him, “Moses, Moses!” Moses responded “Here I am.”

God reveals to Moses that God is intimately aware of their situation in Egypt. Verse 7 reads “Then the LORD said, “I have seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,<sup>8</sup> 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.” I have seen their misery. I have heard their cry. I know their sufferings. I have seen. I have heard. I know. God is fully aware that God’s people are suffering and in pain. God is going to act. These actions of God are characteristic all throughout the Exodus narrative and the journey through the wilderness. God continues by saying “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.” I have come down to deliver them. I have come to bring them up out of that land.

Then the narrative turns with a command for Moses: go. Moses, you are the one I will send to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. Moses questions his ability to do such a monumental task. “Who am I that I should go?” God assures Moses with the promise that God will be with him. “Good, good, but what name shall I give when they ask who sent me?” Why did it matter to Moses that he would know God’s name? What’s in a name? Names were particularly significant in the ancient Near East. A name implied identity, distinctive essence, and in the case of someone giving orders, official authorization.<sup>1</sup> It conveyed authority. Moses was not going before Pharaoh on a personal whim, and this was a risky move. He needed something more explicit than the promise God would be with him. He needed a name. “Knowing one’s name transferred some of the namesake’s authority.”<sup>2</sup> Knowing God’s name conveyed that he was going under the command and with the authority of God. He needed God’s power, which would hopefully work things out in Moses’ favor with Pharaoh.

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*. Vol. 1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2019), 222.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Fuquay, *The God We Can Know* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014), 15.

And here we have the name of the day, the first Biblical appearance of God's name. God speaks: "I AM WHO I AM." That certainly clarified it, didn't it? I think Moses got more than he bargained for. God provided not only the divine name, but an ontological divine mystery, meaning the mystery of God's existence and being. It was not a simple response such as "Amanda," a name with a clear-cut meaning. Across history this divine name has raised more questions than given answers. Rivers of ink have tried to clarify and theologize and philosophize the divine name "I AM WHO I AM." Other potential renderings include "I AM WHAT I AM" or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." Words cannot fully capture Jehovah. Our words will never be enough. But God says to Moses "I AM WHO I AM... say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" It is a reminder that God is present. God is enough. God is drawing close. God wants to be known. God intimately knows and sees God's people and is acting on their behalf.

This serves as a reminder for us. This passage reveals that God wants to be known but also that God knows us. God sees us. God hears us. God acts on our behalf. God is not a remote deity that wants to be removed and separated from us. God does not place distance between us and God. God is a relational God who wants to be in relationship with us. God enters into the moments of our lives that bring us pain, that cause us to suffer. God whispers to our hearts, "I have seen your pain, I have heard your cries, I know how much you are hurting. I am here." Friends, God desires to know us just as much as God wants to be known. God wants to be present with us in all moments of life, not just the difficult times. God's presence is not always easy to recognize, and it can feel absent at times. Sometimes God's presence feels mysterious and difficult to understand. And yet, the story of scripture reveals a God who wants to be known, a God who is always moving in our direction. So much so that God did the unexpected. The unconventional. God came directly to us in Jesus Christ.

The fullness of God is made known in Jesus Christ. The CEB translation of John 1:18 reads "No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known." The incarnation, God taking on flesh and dwelling as one of us, reveals the fullness of God's desire to be known. The very same verses from our Exodus passage about God seeing, hearing, knowing, coming down, and lifting up the Israelites can be said about Jesus Christ and the incarnation. But in this case, God literally came down in Jesus Christ.

Today marks the first day in a new sermon series for Lent: The God We Can Know. This series will explore the "I Am" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. There are seven statements all together but we will be studying 6 of them:

- I am the Bread of Life
- I am the Light of the World
- I am the Good Shepherd
- I am the True Vine
- I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life
- I am the Resurrection and the Life

The other "I am" statement that we will not explore is "I am the Gate" in John 10:7. When Jesus uses these "I Am" statements, Jesus is identifying himself with the God of Moses. "I AM WHO I AM" is the foundation for the rest of the "I Am" statements that reveal more about who God is. These "I Am" statements include easily relatable concepts, such as bread and light. These "I Am" statements include rich images that came out of Jesus' Jewish faith. He was using imagery that would have resonated with his first century Jewish audience. For example, when Jesus refers to himself as the bread of life, this would have been a familiar image. In Jewish teaching, the Torah, or the way to salvation, was often referred to as the bread or the nourishment of life. Images of light are central to Judaism. To this day, above the ark in a Jewish synagogue, where the scrolls of the Torah are kept, is an eternal light symbolizing the teaching and the soul. Jesus referred to himself as the True Vine. A vineyard was often understood as an image of the way God cared for, protected, and tended to God's people. Jesus used language and imagery that would have resonated with his original audience. This symbolism spoke to Jesus and the community he ministered to. "The 'I am' sayings... use symbols that come from the common fund of ancient Near Eastern religious and human experience. Through these common symbols,

Jesus declares that people's religious needs and human longings are met in him. Just as the Great I AM would be with Moses in his challenges, so Jesus vows to be with us in ours. In Jesus our greatest needs are met."<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus we know a God who is willing to be present with us and who identifies with our challenges. Jesus lived the human experience. He loved and lost. He grieved. He was treated unfairly. He was betrayed. He suffered. He faced death head on. He died. When we go through struggles, grief, fear, disappointment, betrayal, rejection, anything that life throws at us, we can know with confidence that Jesus understands and knows. We can hear Jesus saying "I am able to satisfy, comfort, bring meaning, and offer hope. You are not alone. I see. I hear. I know. I am with you." This understanding does not necessarily change our circumstances but brings the assurance and reminder that we serve and love a God who knows us and a God who wants to be known. Because at the end of the day, we want to be known. We want to be understood. We want someone to stand in solidarity with us, to share in our sorrow and pain. We find that in God. God is with us. The Great "I Am" is with us now and always will be.

Today as we prepare to receive Holy Communion, we are reminded once again that Christ is present to us in this sacrament. God's love for us was made known in Christ's death on the cross. In Holy Communion we remember that his life was given for us. Christ's death tore down the dividing wall and opened the way for us to know God personally. God's love and grace are made known and freely given in this sacred act. Know that you are known and loved by a God who wants to be known, who welcomes us all with open arms. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Fuquay, 18.