

Exodus 3.7-16a

Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey; to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the

Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me. Moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

He said, “Certainly I will be with you. This will be the token to you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Moses said to God, “Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I tell them?”

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and he said, "You shall tell the children of Israel this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God said moreover to Moses, "You shall tell the children of Israel this, 'Yahweh, 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 my memorial to all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and tell them, 'Yahweh, the God of your

fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me,

Moses was invited – even commanded – to go to the Israelite people and lead them out of the bondage in which they had labored for so long. Moses realized God's people were in dire straits in Egypt. Still, we could say Moses was a good politician, because he knew that the people would not

follow a leader that they did not know. Moses needed something to add some punch to his pitch to the people.

So Moses asks God this question: *“Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I tell them?”*

Moses realizes that the people will ask some questions about him and his authority to lead. The people will want to

get somethings on the record before they pack up and march into the wilderness in defiance of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army.

Who is this God? What is his name?

That is the central question that Moses asks in his series of questions that reveal his own concerns and doubts. God, who are you? What is your name?

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and he said, "You shall tell the children of Israel this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

In Hebrew letters for this name are YHWH – a name that is unpronounced to this day. No one really knows how to pronounce this name of God. Originally, the Hebrew scriptures were only written with consonants. Centuries later,

vowel markings were added to the Old Testament – except for YHWH.

Traditionally, religious Jews today do not often say the name aloud. This is because it is believed to be too holy to be spoken. They often use substitutes when referring to the name of their God. They use HaShem ("The Name") or Shem HaMeforash ("the indescribable Name").

When the Old Testament was being translated into German, the German consonants JHVH were used. In 1611 the English translation known as the King James Version brought the German letters along and supplied some vowels – Jehovah. More correctly, the English pronunciation of the Hebrew is YHWH, then adding some vowels, we get Yahweh.

This is the compressed history of God's special name. It comes from the Hebrew word (scholars think) that means *to*

be. So, the translation in this passage is *I AM* – the God who is; the God who is present; the God who is here; the God who lives.

With this name the first stirrings of understanding of who God is began to dawn on this community of slaves who would be called out to the land of promise. It was the God

who is I AM to whom they responded and followed out of Egypt.

What was it that pulled them toward this God who is? It is the same thing that we experience. There was an emptiness in life – a constant struggle and oppression.

St. Augustine once wrote about God, “You have created us for yourself and our hearts cannot be quieted until we find our repose in you.”

Ultimately, that is what we are seeking – all of us – our repose in God – the place where we belong. It is not ease of life, or protection from suffering, or freedom of action, or security. What we seek is that intimate, loving, personal relationship with God.

Who are you, God? “I AM THAT I AM. I am what you are seeking and needing. I am what you will show me to be in your life. I am what you allow me to be.”

The great German theologian of the last century, Karl Barth, wrote that life...”is a succession of present moments. Sometimes we sacrifice the present to either the past or the future. Either the guilt, failures, and pain of the past holds us back from the present; or the present is sacrificed to our plans, dreams, and hopes for the future.

Really God is speaking to us now – in this present moment. God is here now with us. I AM THAT I AM.

Let me take this Old Testament thought into the New Testament. In the Gospels Jesus uses this term “I AM” quite freely in referring to himself:

- In the Gospel of Matthew. For example, Matthew 11.29 - Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for **I am** gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls; Matthew 18.20 - For where two or

three are gathered together in my name, there **I am** in the middle of them.

- In the Gospel of Mark. For example, Mark 8.29 - But who do you say that **I am**?
- In the Gospel of Luke. For example, Luke 22.27 - **I am** among you as one who serves.

Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus use the phrase “**I AM**” to refer to himself more than in the Gospel of John.

There is a grouping of sayings in the Gospel of John by Jesus that are called the “I AM sayings.” They are used as a description of who Jesus is:

- I AM the Bread of Life
- I AM the Bread that comes down from heaven
- Again, I AM the Bread of Life
- I AM the Living Bread
- I AM the Light of the world

- I AM the one who testifies about myself
- Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, **I AM.**
- I AM in the world
- Again, I AM the Light of the world
- I AM the sheeps' gate
- I AM the door
- I AM the Good Shepherd

- Again, I AM the Good Shepherd
- I AM the resurrection and the life
- I AM the way, the truth, and the life
- I AM in my Father (three times)
- I AM the true vine
- I AM the vine

These self-descriptions by Jesus harken to the God of the Old Testament – Yahweh, I AM. The God who is present with us.

And so that is significant – even crucial – for my life and my living. God is present in you, with you, and for you through Jesus Christ.

It is important for me to learn – I don't know about you, but I would guess it is important for you, too. It is important for me to learn that this life is more than just marking time. For Moses and the people of God, the 40 years in the wilderness was not just a time to get through in order to get to the Promised Land.

This life – your life and my life – this life is where God is present. In each day God is present and inviting you and me

in to a deeper, more personal and intimate, loving relationship with him.

Every day, every moment, every event is a revelation of the God who is in our lives. I AM is with us. I AM is our God.

And with that life takes on greater meaning and purpose. Life becomes not something to be feared, but an adventurous journey with the ever-present God.