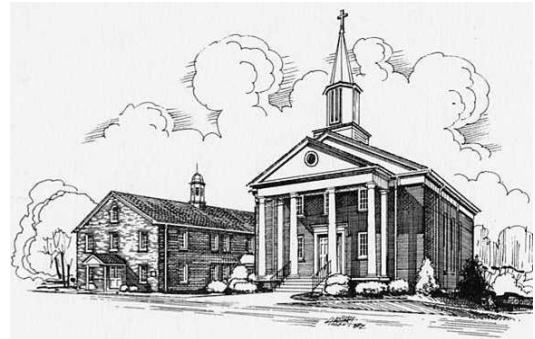


**The Lessons Appointed for  
Use on the  
Third Sunday in Lent**



Year C  
RCL

Exodus 3:1-15  
Psalm 63:1-8  
Luke 13:1-9

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Exodus 3:1-15**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to

look at God.

Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 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, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send 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?” He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall

worship God on this mountain.”

But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘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.”

Psalm 63:1-8

*Deus, Deus meus*

1 O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; \*  
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you,  
as in a barren and dry land where there is no wa-  
ter.

2 Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy  
place, \*  
that I might behold your power and your glory.

3 For your loving-kindness is better than life itself; \*  
my lips shall give you praise.

4 So will I bless you as long as I live \*  
and lift up my hands in your Name.

5 My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness, \*  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,

6 When I remember you upon my bed, \*  
and meditate on you in the night watches.

7 For you have been my helper, \*  
and under the shadow of your wings I will re-  
joice.

8 My soul clings to you; \*

your right hand holds me fast.

**Luke 13:1-9**

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on

this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"



## SERMON

Me: Knock, Knock

Congregation: Who's there?

Me: God

Congregation: God who?

And there we have the ultimate question of religion: God who? Who do you worship? God as He is in Himself, or God as you imagine Him to be? What name do you apply to the Most High? Every person called to a religious life must answer this question. It is not a trivial question, and it is not to be approached casually, but prayerfully with confession of our inadequacy. God who?

We join Moses in the encounter which begins his journey. Moses finds himself in conversation with something he can't really understand which is ordering him to do outlandish things, so he asks a very human

question and gets a very unsatisfying answer.

But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

The language we speak pushes and shoves us into forms that make sense in that language, but which also can mislead us. In the phrase, “Moses said to God”, the English language has informed us that “God” is God’s personal name. From that, it is a small step to say that we worship God, who is the one true God, and those who worship some other name, like “Allah”, are evil heathens, deserving of our fear and hatred, and I wish I wasn’t called to point this out to you. I’ve driven two families away from this church over the issue of Islamic-Christian relations and I don’t want to make any

more of you angry with me, but the fact remains that neither “God” nor “Allah” is God’s personal name. Neither Arabic nor English existed at this time. Looked at more broadly, to name it is to claim it and God is not yours to claim.

The unsatisfying answer Moses received to his very human question was this:

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”

In Hebrew, the phrase translated here as “I AM WHO I AM” is *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, which probably means as much to you as it does to me, but I read a lot of material on Hebrew grammar on your behalf this week. Here’s what I learned from Professor Christine Hayes of Yale:

**Moses says: May I say who sent me? He asks for God’s name. The Israelites will want to know who has sent me, and God replies with**

a sentence, “Ehyeh asher ehyeh.” This is a first person sentence that can be translated, “I am who I am,” or perhaps, “I will be who I will be,” or perhaps, “I cause to be what I cause to be.” We really don’t know, but it has something to do with “being.” So he asks who God is, God says, “I am who am I am” or “I will cause to be what I will cause to be.” So Moses, wisely enough, converts that into a third-person formula: okay, he will be who he will be, he is who he is, [which in Hebrew is] “Yahweh asher Yahweh.” God’s answer to the question of his name is this sentence, and Moses converts it from a first-person to a third-person sentence: he will be who he will be; he is who he is; he will cause to be ... what he will cause to be, and that sentence gets shortened to “Yahweh.” This is the Bible’s explanation for the name Yahweh, and as the personal name of God, some have argued that the name Yahweh expresses the quality of being, an active, dynamic being. This God is one who brings things into being, whether it’s a cosmos from chaos, or now a new nation from a band of runaway

**slaves.**

Well said, but then the professor adds a really interesting observation. She says:

**But it could well be that this is simply God's way of not answering Moses' question ... So I've often wondered if we're to read this differently: Who am I? I am who I am, and never you mind.<sup>1</sup>**

I think the professor has it just right. "I am who I am, and never you mind." I am the ground of being<sup>2</sup>, the first cause<sup>3</sup>, the source of all. You are mine, body and soul, for I have created you and it's high time you got over yourself. Our relationship is not one between equals. That is the besetting sin of mankind – God is "THE GREAT I AM," but we continually want to be our own "I AM." We make plans and determine that we will fulfill them no matter what. We can't stop thinking of

1 Open Yale Course, Lecture 7, Chapter 5 ("Descriptions of God in the Bible"), professor Christine Hayes

2 Paul Tillich

3 St. Thomas Aquinas

the great I AM as an old guy in a white robe and thus we cannot cast ourselves at the feet of the great I AM as He is, even though submitting ourselves to the unknowable, unrepresentable source of all being is our calling, our reason for being.

When used as a stand-alone description, I AM is the ultimate statement of self-sufficiency, self-existence, and immediate presence. God's existence is not contingent upon anyone else. His plans are not contingent upon any circumstances. He promises that He will be what He will be; that is, He will be the eternally constant God. He stands, ever-present and unchangeable, completely sufficient in Himself to do what He wills to do and to accomplish what He wills to accomplish. This is what Moses is being told. This is what you and I are being told. To align ourselves with the great I AM is our greatest imaginable happiness.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

Professor Hayes of Yale University ends her discussion of the name of the Holy One with this suggestion: “Who am I? I am who I am, and never you mind.” The old guy in the white robes sitting on a throne is the Greek god Zeus, the god of thunder and lightning but a mere cardboard cut-out when compared to I AM WHO I AM. I WILL CREATE WHAT I WILL CREATE. I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE. Our only hope is to abandon claims of our own sovereignty and sufficiency and cast ourselves upon the mercy of I AM.

Until we meet again,

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.



Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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