

“I AM”
Exodus 2:11-3:22
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #68
13th Sunday After Pentecost
25th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
8.30.20

Exodus 2:11-3:22 CEB

11 One day after Moses had become an adult, he went out among his people and he saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. **12** He looked around to make sure no one else was there. Then he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

13 When Moses went out the next day, he saw two Hebrew men fighting with each other. Moses said to the one who had started the fight, “Why are you abusing your fellow Hebrew?”

14 He replied, “Who made you a boss or judge over us? Are you planning to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?”

Then Moses was afraid when he realized: They obviously know what I did. **15** When Pharaoh heard about it, he tried to kill Moses.

But Moses ran away from Pharaoh and settled down in the land of Midian. One day Moses was sitting by a well. **16** Now there was a Midianite priest who had seven daughters. The daughters came to draw water and fill the troughs so that their father’s flock could drink. **17** But some shepherds came along and rudely chased them away. Moses got up, rescued the women, and gave their flock water to drink.

18 When they went back home to their father Reuel, he asked, “How were you able to come back home so soon today?”

19 They replied, “An Egyptian man rescued us from a bunch of shepherds. Afterward, he even helped us draw water to let the flock drink.”

20 Reuel said to his daughters, “So where is he? Why did you leave this man? Invite him to eat a meal with us.”

21 Moses agreed to come and live with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife. **22** She gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, “because,” he said, “I’ve been an immigrant living in a foreign land.”

23 A long time passed, and the Egyptian king died. The Israelites were still groaning because of their hard work. They cried out, and their cry to be rescued from the hard work rose up to God. **24** God heard their cry of grief, and God remembered his covenant with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **25** God looked at the Israelites, and God understood.

3 Moses was taking care of the flock for his father-in-law Jethro, Midian's priest. He led his flock out to the edge of the desert, and he came to God's mountain called Horeb. **2** The Lord's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames, but it didn't burn up. **3** Then Moses said to himself, Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't burning up.

4 When the Lord saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

Moses said, "I'm here."

5 Then the Lord said, “Don’t come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground.” **6** He continued, “I am the God of your father, Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God, and Jacob’s God.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, “I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. **8** I’ve come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that’s full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. **9** Now the Israelites’ cries of injustice have reached me. I’ve seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them. **10** So get going. I’m

sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

12 God said, “I’ll be with you. And this will show you that I’m the one who sent you. After you bring the people out of Egypt, you will come back here and worship God on this mountain.”

13 But Moses said to God, “If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they are going to ask me, ‘What’s this God’s name?’ What am I supposed to say to them?”

14 God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” **15** God continued, “Say to the Israelites,

‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God, and Jacob’s God, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me.

16 “Go and get Israel’s elders together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me. The Lord said, “I’ve been paying close attention to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. **17** I’ve decided to take you away from the harassment in Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land full of milk and honey.”’ **18** They will accept what you say to them. Then you and Israel’s elders will go to Egypt’s king and say to him, ‘The Lord, the Hebrews’ God, has met with us. So now let us go on a three-day journey into the desert so that we can offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.’ **19**

However, I know that Egypt's king won't let you go unless he's forced to do it. **20** So I'll use my strength and hit Egypt with dramatic displays of my power. After that, he'll let you go.

21 "I'll make it so that when you leave Egypt, the Egyptians will be kind to you and you won't go away empty-handed. **22** Every woman will ask her neighbor along with the immigrant in her household for their silver and their gold jewelry as well as their clothing. Then you will put it on your sons and daughters, and you will rob the Egyptians."

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week, we studied Shiphrah and Puah. God used them to set the stage for Exodus. These two Hebrew midwives of compassion were the first to stand up to tyranny in Exodus. Pharaoh instructed them to murder every Hebrew boy born. Because they respected God, God blessed their families and, ultimately, the Jewish people.

Moses was eventually born and he was spared. Pharaoh's daughter saw him in a basket in the river and adopted him as her

son. However, she instructed a woman who turned out to be Moses' biological mother to nurse him until he got older.

Now, Moses is an adult. He sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew and Moses kills him and buries him in the sand.

Unfortunately, Pharaoh finds out what Moses did and the future leader of the Hebrews runs away to Midian to tend sheep. There he meets his future father-in-law, marries Zipporah, and they have a son, Gershom.

While Moses' story up to this point is incredible, it's verses 23-25 of chapter two that get our attention. The Egyptian king died. The

Israelites are still groaning because they are enslaved and crying to be rescued. God heard their cries.

God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God looked at the Israelites, and God understood.

From Exodus 1:1 to Exodus 2:25, decades upon decades have passed. By the time Moses comes back to Egypt, we are looking at probably 100 years maybe more before the band of Hebrews cross the sea. It's 47 verses until this point in Exodus, but it's really been years.

Exodus 2:23-25 interrupts a long narrative, but tells us so much, just like the seven verses last week about the two compassionate

Hebrew midwives. Moses' tumultuous story is paused to give us a glimpse of *who is still acting* behind the scenes. Even though God seems silent this whole time, God is up to something.

It's been a long time and the Hebrews are crying out in terror and pain. The cries go up to God's ears. And what do you know? God was reminded of the covenant God had made with the Hebrews' ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel. Yes, God had pity on the children of Abraham. Yes, God hates slavery and genocide. Most importantly in this passage, **GOD REMEMBERED THE COVENANT**. The covenant from hundreds of years before: They would be more numerous than the grains of sand and the stars in

the sky and they would be the envy of all the nations. And all the nations of the earth would be blessed because of them.

That covenant started with God, Abraham, and Sarah. Years and years later, it started to come to fruition with a nation. And now at this point in Exodus, God was reminded of this covenant God had made with the patriarch and matriarch of the Hebrews. This covenant that took time with Abraham and Sarah will take MORE time to develop into reality with Moses as the chosen leader. Don't forget, they've got to wander the wilderness for 40 years.

Something even more peculiar than 2:23-25 happens in chapter 3. It's during Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush.

Pharaoh, who had made slavery and genocide legal, is dead.

Moses is tending to the flock for his father-in-law and he sees the burning bush at Horeb. God reveals Godself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God calls Moses to Egypt to rescue the Israelites. They go back and forth. Moses gives his excuses and God reassures him that God will be with him. However, it's in this mysterious and bizarre sentence in verse 14 that we know the covenant God had made all those years before is still in the works and will continue to be lived out over a long time. After Moses asks the LORD God who should he say sent him, God responds:

I Am Who I Am.

So say to the Israelites, "I Am has sent me to you."

I Am Who I Am. If that doesn't tell you all you need to know about God's mystery and God's timing, I don't know what will. Honestly,

for our 21st century North American mindset, this can go over like a lead balloon. Yet, at a closer look together, it can give us a sense of certainty that God has this under control. Some translations have it as *I Will Be What I Will Be*, which may help us a little bit.¹ But, I stumbled upon another translation of Exodus 3:14: *I Cause to Be What Comes into Existence*.²

If Moses is truly dealing with the LORD God who calls himself *I Cause to Be What Comes into Existence*, that would mean this is the same LORD God who called all of creation “very good” after humanity was made in the divine image. This same LORD who made creation is the same one who made a covenant with Noah and his family after the flood to never destroy the Earth by water

¹ Johnstone, William. *Exodus 1-19*. Smyth and Helwys: Macon, GA, 2014, p. 81.

² Frank Moore Cross.

again. This same LORD who made a promise with Noah then made several promises to Abraham and Sarah and their descendents that they would be a testament to God's glory among the nations of the Earth.

Yes, God's timing to us may seem a little slow. Yes, it may have been about 100 or so years since a new Pharaoh came to power who started the practices of slavery and genocide to keep the Hebrews in check. But at this point, the LORD God Almighty whose name is so sacred and is the God of the Hebrews' ancestors is telling Moses "Go and get my children. I'll protect you just as I protected your ancestors."

I Cause to Be What Comes into Existence. I Am Who I Am. I Will Be Who I Will Be. However you want to translate it, this bizarre and mysterious sentence tells us everything we need to know about God and God's timing.

This won't be the last time God OR the Israelites will need reminding of the covenant. As we journey through Exodus, there will be some tense moments. The Hebrews will want to go back to Egypt. God's anger will get hot.

But, this long-standing covenant that's been with the Hebrews since Abraham will continue on. For the Israelites living in exile in Babylon who are hearing this story of Exodus hundreds of years

later, whose homes and families have been destroyed, hearing the words in Exodus 2:23-25 when God remembered God's covenant in the midst of terror or when they hear God's mysterious name *I Am Who I Am*, this is a reminder to them that God hasn't forgotten them, even if they had forgotten God for a moment. The covenant God made with them that continued to be lived out in that moment in Exodus continued in their time as a people in exile.

The story of Moses' escape, the encounter at the burning bush, and the revealing of God's mysterious name gives us hope. This hope is not out of naiveté, but an assurance that God is not finished with us. God has not, is not, and will not hang us out to dry. Sure, God's timing is not our timing. Sure, God may respond to us in strange sentences like "I Am Who I Am". It's in those timelines and

responses we can think about the burning bush in Exodus 3:14 and God remembering the covenant in 2:23-25.

God has never left us. God hasn't forgotten us. God is right there with us and God hears us.

Beloved in Christ, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.