

Third Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2016

Exodus 3:1-15

God Furnished Moses the Name that would Rescue His People

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Dear Friends in Christ,

One thing leads to another. Have you ever had that happen? You begin a project at home. After you are a ways into it, something happens that leads into another project. Pretty soon you forget how it all started. The simplest task can suddenly become a major undertaking. That is pretty much what happened to a shepherd simply tending his father-in-law's sheep in the desert of Sinai. That shepherd was Moses.

Moses was minding his own business on the side of Mt. Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai. He noticed a burning bush which the fire did not consume. Who wouldn't be curious? "So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight-why the bush does not burn up.'"

Moses did not realize he was taking his first steps on a journey that would cover forty years and many miles. One thing would lead to another-Mt. Sinai to Egypt, back to Mt. Sinai, to the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moses began with the simple task of investigating "this strange sight." His steps led to the major ministry effort of leading two generations of God's entire nation, 600,000 men plus women and children, from Egypt to the land God had promised their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The LORD called Moses to deliver Israel. So that his servant would succeed, **God Furnished Moses the Name that would Rescue His People.** God heard his people's cry under suffering. "I AM" is the name by which God is remembered for generations.

At first all had been well for Jacob's family after they moved to this foreign land. Joseph and a friendly pharaoh had settled them in the fertile delta region. God blessed the nation. It grew so numerous the next king enslaved Israel out of fear. That slavery had continued for a little over 400 years. For all those years Israel groaned in their slavery and cried out to God for help.

There is a perspective for us when God does not immediately seem to hear our cries under suffering in a day or week or two. We are strangers in this land away from our home in heaven. We daily cry out for the LORD God to hear us. He does hear us as he heard Israel. He does not act, however, according our time table, but according to his perfect love and will. The angel of the LORD, the Son of God in a pre-incarnation appearance, spoke to Moses from the burning bush. "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." Now was the time he chose to act. "So I have come down to rescue them."

God heard his people's cry under suffering. Their suffering had reached his eyes. Their cries reached his ears. God had allowed them to endure these burdens for the reason St. Paul mentions to the Romans in chapter 5, "suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character hope." [3,4] 40 years earlier a younger and brasher Moses had tried to take things into his own hands by killing an Egyptian. It was not God's time. As tempted as we are to take things into our own hands when God doesn't seem to be listening, it is wrong and doomed to failure. That doesn't mean the Lord will not still use us in the future when he is ready.

God likely will not speak to us at that time in a literal burning bush where the Son of God spoke to Moses. Our burning bush is the Bible. From the Holy Scripture the Son speaks to us in these last days. In the Bible, God tells us that he hears our cries under suffering and has come to rescue us. The Spirit assures us the Son knows our sins. He hears our cries for mercy on the basis of his cross. He delivers us by his love from the suffering of a guilty conscience and a heart that condemns us. We suffer miserably under our sins and the consequences they can bring into our lives. God has delivered us from our suffering by Jesus' life and death.

We do not want to miss this future completion of God's plan of salvation behind what happened here. The LORD God's deliverance of Israel from their suffering is an historical and visible great portrait of the coming Savior who speaks to Moses. The good and gracious land flowing with milk and honey the Son of God mentions he was going to give his people is a picture of heaven.

Moses had learned over the past four decades that his name did not carry much weight. He wisely admitted as much, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" The LORD promised to be with Moses and shared the power of his name, the name that would rescue his people. "I AM" is the name by which God is remembered for generations.

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ That is God’s name the LORD told Moses to use when he went to Israel. “I AM has sent me to you...this is my name forever the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” God’s name had never changed. He was the God of generations before, the God of Abraham, the God Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Everything about the name “I AM” means unchanging existence with changeless qualities and consistent action.

God’s name in Hebrew is just what it says in English. I AM is the first person singular form of the verb to be. The LORD God who spoke to Moses and called him to deliver Israel is the same LORD God who speaks to us in the Bible and delivers us from the guilt and punishment of our sins. I AM means he alone exists. He is the only God. It is incorrect to say that non-Christian religions worship different gods than our God. Better to say Christians worship God, other religions worship idols, or do not worship God.

Moses knew the One going with him is the LORD God, the one and only God. Generation after generation remembers his Name as the Name that made all the promises of deliverance and kept them. Think of taking the power of someone else’s name in order to acquire something you own name would not get. If for example you made a restaurant reservation in your name, I could not get the table with my name.

In God’s sight, my name means sin and death. Your name means failure to love your neighbor and failure to love your God perfectly. Our names will appear one day on tombstones.

Your name also appears on a baptismal certificate. Our names are written in the Book of life. Your name is over the entrance to one of the many rooms Jesus Christ went first into heaven to prepare for you. By whose name, Moses asked, will I go to Israel and save them? I AM. By whose name do you and I stand before the throne of God blameless? I AM. In whose name do we trust even when disasters like we heard about in our gospel occur secure that God is not punishing us for sin? I AM.

We have hope for deliverance in the name of the great “I AM. That hope keeps us going no matter how many metaphorical bricks we must make with mud but no straw. Amen. <SDG>