

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 10, 2017
Exodus 6:2-8
What in A Name, God's Name?
Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

I was amazed on our road trip to Colorado a few weeks ago, how conditioned we, and I'll venture "we," are to the icons we see along the road. By icons I mean logos. Certain shapes and colors identify restaurants, hotels, service stations, and so forth. When we see the logo, the name pops into our heads. The name leads us to stop and use the place, or keep driving on past.

Name means reputation. Reputation evokes emotion and moves to action. We eat at certain restaurants, and stay in particular hotels. We know we will find clean restrooms at this service plaza. Or, think of Hurricane Irma. What emotion has that name evoked in you these past days, especially if you have loved ones in Florida? Think what Irma's reputation as the largest hurricane ever in the Atlantic Ocean has made thousands of Floridians do in order to prepare.

What's in a name? A lot is in a name. This is no less true in the names our God uses in his promise to Moses to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. God's names are iconic as they reveal his nature and his reputation for acting on that nature in power and in love. **What's in A Name, God's Name?** Almighty power, and, faithful grace.

God just had told Moses that because of my mighty hand Pharaoh will drive Israel out of his country following the plagues. There begins our lesson, "God also said to Moses, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty.'" The Hebrew name "Yahweh" is written in all capital letters, LORD, the Tetragrammaton. This is God's name that means his covenant of grace in the coming Savior. We'll look more at that shortly.

First, we see that in God's name is almighty power. He is God Almighty, El Shaddai in Hebrew. God is the only one who can compel nature to do what is contrary to itself. He first revealed this reputation to 99 year old Abraham in the renewed promise of a son to him and 88 year old Sarah. The Apostle Paul summed it up nicely in his letter to the Roman Christians, "God calls things that are not as though they were."

God Almighty would make one of the earth's greatest powers throw off its yoke and free all its slaves. El Shaddai would stretch forth his arm to divide the Red Sea so his people could cross on dry ground. He would cover the Egyptian army with the waves when they followed. God Almighty would conquer the heathen Canaanite nations, make walls fall down at the trumpet sound and give the land to his people as he had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

What's in a name, God's name? Do you contemplate the almighty power that is in God's name? Are you mindful that he has prospered your work and defended you from evil? What need or grief ever has failed of relief? I encourage you in the words of the hymn writer, "Ponder anew What the Almighty can do As with his love he befriends you."

God Almighty hears our groaning under the burden of sin and remembers his covenant to deliver us. God Almighty displays his power to heal our sicknesses. He calms our storms. He protects us from demons. He even will raise us up from death and the grave. God calls things that are not as though they were. He called Abraham and Sarah parents even though they were too old to have children. He calls us the children of God even though we are still sinners.

The Almighty God speaking to Moses and commanding him to do the seemingly impossible is our God as well. God deals with us not only in awesome might and majesty but also in independent and faithful love we call grace. There is another name here, LORD. **What's in a name, God's name?** Faithful grace.

"God also said to Moses, 'I am the LORD.'" Yahweh is a form of the Hebrew verb, "to be." God was telling Moses and us that he is the only God. Jesus identified himself as this God when he said, "Before Abraham was born, I am." [John 8:58] Yahweh was the Old Testament word that meant Savior. I have promised the Savior who will redeem you as I promised the patriarchs. When God told Moses he had not made himself fully known to them by that name, he meant that as time went on and the nation grew their knowledge of that name's meaning would grow as well.

Yahweh, or Jehovah in later translations, spells out God's total independence from anything else. We exist because God created us through our parents. God exists because he is God. He is free to do who he is. We love because we are loved. God loves because God is love. "I am" also means absolute faithfulness to his Word. Gabriel told Mary about the promise of her Virgin Birth, "For no Word of God will ever fail."[Luke 1:37], Or, "Nothing is impossible with God."

God would do everything for Moses and Israel because he was free to carry out his faithful love for them. This is why Yahweh has done everything for us. Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for us because he was obligated to us in some way. He suffered and died freely and willingly as our Substitute. Jesus is God Almighty and God my Savior. He is faithful to his Word. That Word agrees with the Father's Word and the Spirit's Word.

The people of Israel would know God, another name and the only plural name for God in all religions, was the LORD because he saved them from slavery. We know the One true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit because he has saved us. "Christ died for all, that all those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." [2 Corinthians 5:15]

God's promise, "I will take you as my own people and I will be your God," is the new covenant of faithful grace. We are the recipients of that new covenant; in baptism, in hearing the Word of Christ, in receiving our Lord's true body and blood in the Lord's Supper. What's in a name, God's name? Faithful grace; the forgiveness of all my sins, the removal of all my guilt, new life instead of death.

In his excellent study on the Old Testament, Connecting Sinai to Calvary, sainted Prof. John Jeske wrote, "If God were small enough for us to understand, he would not be big enough to be worshipped." Moses and we face the tasks God gives us not because we understand him. We face them and conquer our tasks because we know God's name means for us Almighty power and faithful grace in Christ Jesus. Amen. <SDG>