

Proper 17 A  
Exodus 3:1-15  
September 3, 2023

“I Am and We Are”  
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*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 . . . 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?’ God said, ‘I will be with you.’*

*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 God’s name?” what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you . . . 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 for ever,  
and this my title for all generations.*

Convinced that he'd heard every Moses joke conceived by the human mind, Charlton Heston listened patiently as a journalist pressed him with one more. He said:

God told Moses, "Take off your shoes, Moses, and approach the burning bush."

And Moses did, and burnt his feet.

And God said, "Ha! Third one today!"<sup>1</sup>

C'mon, it's a little bit funny! It's also a little bit funny just how much of the Moses story our lectionary decides to leave out. Last week, Moses was a baby in a basket, adopted by the princess and named at 3 years of age. This week, he's a grown man!

Back in Egypt, prior to the episode at the burning bush, Prince Moses had observed the cruelty of an Egyptian taskmaster firsthand as he beat a Hebrew. Incensed, Moses killed him. When Pharaoh learned of it, Moses became a wanted man. Fleeing to the land of Midian, Moses came to the aid of a group of young women who weren't being allowed to water their flocks at a well. Their father, Jethro, invited Moses to supper. Shortly thereafter Moses married one of the young women, Zipporah, and they had a son. Then, we learn that the king of Egypt died and God took notice of the suffering of the Hebrew people in Egypt. That's where today's reading picks up: a burning bush, a conversation between Moses and the god of his ancestors, a plan to liberate the Hebrew people with Moses at the helm, the revelation of the divine name, and Moses trying desperately to come up with a way out of it all.

If we're honest, it's kind of a relatable story. Admittedly, few of us grew up in palaces, or killed taskmasters, or tended sheep, but we all likely

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Ebert. "Charlton Heston: 'I've heard every Moses joke conceived by the mind of man.'" Rogerebert.com, May 26, 1968: <https://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/charlton-heston-ive-heard-every-moses-joke-conceived-by-the-mind-of-man>.

know something about feeling compelled, charged, called to do something or to be someone and trying to get out of it because, frankly, it sounded terrible. Is this an appropriate time to tell you just how much I did not want to become a minister?

Well, Moses may have been a reluctant liberator, but I fought the whole ministry thing tooth and nail for years! It took 4 years of campus peer ministry, an odd revelation from my Roman Catholic neighbor, a year of prodding from my campus chaplain, a year of seminary education, and a strange cathartic moment before I finally relented and gave into my own sense of calling. And that was all after my mother found me dressed in an old coat and tie of my grandfather's, preaching to my stuffed animals at age 5! The writing was on the wall and visible to everyone BUT me!

Sometimes, the thing we're meant to do or the person we're meant to be just doesn't feel like the thing we *want* to do or the person we *want* to be. And yet, guilt, or magnetism, or a sense of call, or an unshakeable sense of identity keeps drawing us back, not letting us go, unrelenting until we admit to ourselves who we are and what we're "supposed" to do – even if we don't want to. Why does it always seem to take kicking and screaming, though, to get ourselves there?

There is an easier way and the key to it is, I think, in God's revelation of the divine name to Moses. I AM WHO I AM. No kicking, screaming, wailing, weeping, or gnashing of teeth. Just the resolute and honest admission of an irrefutable fact. I am who I am, I will be what I will be, and I will do what I do because I will be who I am. Period.

There's a lot we could glean from this text, a lot we could walk away with. In fact, this story could reignite a latent need to be or to do something we'd long since thought had passed. Or, it could invite us into deeper reflection about the places in our world in need of liberation. Or, it could challenge us to play a part in overturning systemic injustice. Or, it could

simply remind us to admit who we are – to be who we are and do what we do because we will be who we are. No kicking and screaming needed.

Accepting the truth about ourselves is, I think, the first step toward the sense of fulfillment we all crave – regardless of who we are. Be you. Do you. Only then can we be truly at content. As Oscar Wilde once said, “Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” May it be so with us. Amen.