

***"I Am Has Sent Me to You"***

Most of the time when you come on a Sunday, you will find me preaching from the Gospel; we will reference to the Gospel, but when you have an Old Testament lesson from Exodus – that has what it has in it today – you just cannot pass it by. Today's Old Testament lesson from the Book of Exodus is quite extraordinary and also very powerful. Imagine, if you will, a man walking alone on a mountain while he is caring for his sheep and he literally stumbles upon the most remarkable find – God Himself – in a form right before him that would take your breath away. Let's go directly to this Scripture in our Pew Bibles – Exodus, chapter 3 on page 89. We will begin with verse 2. The Bible says *"there the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up."* (Exodus 3:2) There were no tricks, no special effects, and no mirrors but more importantly no one else was around. Please remember that in the Old Testament when we encounter the words *"the angel of the Lord"* most Biblical scholars agree we are reading about the pre-incarnate Jesus – who has come to visit, share a word of knowledge or direction. The same Angel of the Lord who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 22 on Mount Moriah – telling Abraham not to harm Isaac – saying, *"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."* (Genesis 22:12) Only God Himself could say *"from me."* This is God who is speaking. What Moses witnessed on that mountain that day was God Himself speaking to His chosen leader of His chosen people. They just didn't know it yet.

The Lord begins to reveal Himself to Moses – first by calling him by name twice. He then tells Moses that he is standing on holy ground and needs to act accordingly; he needs to remove his sandals and approach. When Moses has come closer, God reveals that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and that He was well aware of the suffering of the sons of Israel at the hands of the Egyptians. In doing so – God is revealing His concern, His compassion and His character to Moses.

What happens next literally stuns Moses – as God tells him that He has been chosen to go to Pharaoh in order to bring His people out of Egypt. In Exodus 4, Moses tries to question God's choice by telling Him that he is *"slow of speech and tongue"* – in other words, Moses had a speech impediment. We cannot say what it was - maybe he stuttered or stammered, and that is OK - but God would not accept that excuse. Like many of us, Moses questioned whether he was good enough, whether he had what it takes, whether he was up to the task that God wanted him to do. Numbers 12:3 tells us that *"Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."*

- Can you just imagine him first witnessing a talking burning bush,
- next being told that it is God who is talking to him,
- And then he was told that he was going to have to go and tell Pharaoh to let the nation of Israel be released?

This humble man must have been baffled - if not in total shock! (Exodus 3:11) God responds

Third Sunday in Lent – February 28, 2016, Year C

that He will be with Moses every step of the way. So Moses tries one more way out – by asking God to tell him His Name; Moses says that the people of Israel will want to know! Let's face it Moses is fearful – he is seeing this incredible image and then he is told to go back to Egypt – from where he ran as a fugitive after killing an Egyptian guard who was beating a fellow Hebrew. God surprises Moses– and reveals His name by telling Moses. Look at verse 14 on page 90 –“*God also said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."*” “*This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'*” (Exodus 3:14) In essence God told Moses “tell them I AM sent you!”

God is always “I AM,” He is the Ever living One. None of us could say “I am” a hundred years ago, nor will we be able to say “I am” a hundred years from now. The verb doesn't work that way. Only God is always “I Am.” It is a state of being – and God always was, always will be and always is! The one and only God Almighty - who then gave Moses the strength and the courage – and everything else that he would need to follow the call that He Himself had put upon Moses' life – by the Name and the power of I AM WHO I AM.

Not too long ago as I was preparing a sermon on John 6, in which Jesus proclaims that “*I Am the Bread of Life.*” I got to thinking about the words that Jesus used in declaring “I Am.” I found that throughout the Gospels – Jesus Christ clearly reveals that He was the One (the Second Person of the Trinity) who called Moses to deliver Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He was the One who told Moses “Tell them I Am sent you!” I compared the Greek words for “I Am” ἐγώ εἰμι (ego eimi) that recorded Jesus' words in the Gospel of John 6:35 and the words from Exodus 3 in which God says “*I Am Who I Am.*” The ancient Hebrew texts of the Old Testament had been translated into Greek in Alexandria around the second century BC, before Jesus walk the earth - called the Septuagint. The Exodus 3 in the Septuagint contained the very same words ἐγώ εἰμι (ego eimi). There are many more examples which point to the same truth – especially in the Gospel of John.

Each time Jesus revealed to the world a bit more about Himself and His personality using “I AM” it was recorded with the same Greek words - ἐγώ εἰμι (ego eimi).

- In John 8:12 Jesus proclaimed “*I am the Light of the world*”
- In John 10:7-9 “Jesus said “*I am the door of the sheep.*”
- In John 10:11 Jesus reveals that “*I am the good shepherd.*”
- Jesus told Martha upon the death of her brother Lazarus in John 11:25-26 “*I am the resurrection and the life.*”
- On the night before He died for us, Jesus told His disciples this undeniable truth - “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*” (John 14:6)
- Jesus told His disciples “*I am the vine, you are the branches.*” (John 15:5) Branches don't live without a vine – He is the source of our lives.
- Jesus said in John 8:18 “*I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.*”

I find it incredibly remarkable that **in each of these words of Jesus – He outwardly showed His identity to the world – ἐγώ εἰμι (ego eimi) as “I AM.”** But sadly many in the world were not ready to hear that truth. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke - Jesus warns "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matthew 11:15). The entire Bible points to Jesus – and now He is personally making Himself known. Jesus (Yeshua) was given the name that means “the Lord saves, or Savior.” He was also given the name Emmanuel – “God with us.” It is SO VERY clear.

Another fascinating testimony to Jesus’ divinity is as He answered questions from the Pharisees in John 8: “*I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.*” (John 8:24) Some translations quote Jesus as saying “*I am He*” and some others say “*I am who I claim to be*” while another goes so far as to say “*I AM WHO I AM.*” Going back to the original written language of the Gospel – the Greek simply says this: “*γὰρ μὴ πιστεύσητε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι*” which translated means “*for if you don’t believe that I AM*” or as the Septuagint translated “*ego eimi*” - could read “*for if you don’t believe that I AM WHO I AM.*” In the Gospels we have the truth that Jesus is God, that He is indeed I AM! He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a matter of fact Jesus even told the Pharisees as He said to them, “*I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am.*” (John 8:56-59) WOW!

Jesus prepared and equipped His disciples – giving them everything they would need – especially the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost – courage, strength, and knowledge to complete the call that He Himself had put upon their lives. He is the One who charges His followers – and that is YOU and ME, to tell the world to “tell them I Am has me to you!”

How awesome it is when we consider this – that the creator of the Universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who always was and always will be - didn’t just come down to meet with Moses, but He came down and actually took on flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. His mission was similar to the one He gave to Moses – to free His people from bondage. Just as He was aware of the suffering of the people of Israel in Egypt He was aware of the suffering of the world at the hands of sin and death – and they also needed to be freed. This mission could not be handed to someone else who was called to carry it out - but had to be done by the only One who could satisfy the righteous judgment of God – and that had to be God Himself. Like the Passover - freedom and life would come through the Blood of the Lamb.

Jesus continues to call people to be His hands and feet, to share His love with others, and to be commissioned to grow His Kingdom. I am marveled at the list of volunteers that have come forward – and some as an answer to a phone call – to meet with the children, of all ages, and to share with them Christ’s love. It might be in coloring a picture, but it might be seeing God’s Word in action through the love and the witness of the person who has volunteered to be at children’s church, or to teach a class to the Pre-K or Nursery, or the Junior High, or the

Third Sunday in Lent – February 28, 2016, Year C

Elementary kids. Being Jesus' hands and feet - He calls His church – you and me to do the work He has given us to do. Like He told Moses – He will be with us every step of the way. In essence this mission involves making disciples – getting the Word out! Please take a moment and think – is God speaking to you today? Will you hear His special words: *“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”* (John 15:16) Great Words! You know getting the Word out is not all that easy!

- 97% of the world has heard of Coca Cola;
- 72% of the world has seen a can of Coca Cola;
- 51% of the world has tasted a can of Coca Cola;
- Coke has only been around since 1886.

If God had given the task of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Coca Cola company it would probably be done by now. But instead Jesus gave the task to each one of us: *“And Jesus came to them, and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus has given us His instructions – we need to bear fruit in our lives - evidence of our work on His behalf. Like with the fig tree in today's Holy Gospel – Jesus cares for the vineyard – and He waits patiently for us to grow and bear fruit. He will nourish us and strengthen us through His Word – providing us with everything we need. He will not give up on us – He will fertilize it. The Gospel says *“let me dig a trench around it and I will fertilize it... give me one more year!”* The Lord wants each fig tree – each person - to flourish through believing in Him. Believing in Jesus, inviting Him into your heart opens the door of a real relationship with God, and then repentance and forgiveness follow.

The same Jesus who spoke to Abraham, to Moses, and to His disciples is now speaking to you! Please turn to your pew bibles one more time – to Hebrews 13:8 on page 1877. Like I shared with you John 14:6 *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me”* this truth is undeniable as well: *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* (Hebrews 13:8) Don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise! God's Word is the same yesterday, today and forever! *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* Believing and belonging to Jesus is transforming – and your fruitfulness will be evident to others and believe me it will tell them one thing: “I AM” has sent me to you.