

We jump from the story of the binding of Isaac (last week in Genesis 21-22) and Abraham's confession of God as the Lord who provides, to the foundational story in the First Testament about the identity, purpose and passion of God. It's easy to overlook the myriad connections between our two texts and the larger story in which they are directly related. God has promised Abram [and Sarai] "to make of them a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Genesis 12:2 Through the story of Abram's son Isaac and his sons Jacob and Esau their family is in fact growing, becoming a great nation. The promise of God's constant presence is affirmed by Jacob in his dream at Beth-el, "Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!'" Genesis 28:16 The of that founding family continues with Jacob's children, among whom Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt, is able to deliver his family from the famine threatened all the land. And so the family of Abram, becoming a great nation, arrives in Egypt as refugees and are eventually enslaved out of the fear and jealousy of Pharaoh. God's promise to Abraham is coming to pass, but in a foreign land. As our text today opens, Moses has been born to a people now enslaved. Two women, midwives, are actively saving lives, doing God's will, yet God seems to be largely absent, not blessing the children of Abraham according to that original promise.

groaned : Notice the multiple words used to describe the cries for help and suffering of the Israelites in their slavery, and God's apparent absence and turned back.

God heard : What does this mean in the text...was God not listening before? Is God now listening because God is acting?

When the Lord saw : how long was the bush burning before Moses saw it? How long was God waiting to be found?

HERE I AM : Moses who responds with the classic response to God's invitation (as we saw last week in Genesis 21:7 Hineni (הִנֵּנִי), which means "Here I am" – I'm ready to do your will.

God invites Moses to draw closer, to remove his shoes. There is something different to see, to hear, to recognize that requires a change in rhythm, an openness. Notice the heavy repetition of the word see throughout the text.

I am who I am : the name of God is YHWH, an untranslatable word for "to be" conjugated in multiple persons/tenses. It's often called the Tetragrammaton meaning "[consisting of] four letters") יהוה in Hebrew and YHWH in Latin script. It's so sacred that religiously observant and over conservative Jews neither pronounce nor read aloud the name יהוה;; instead substituting a different term to refer to God such as Adonai ["The Lord"], or HaShem ["The Name"].

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 10.1.2017

Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

2 ²³ After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites *groaned* under their slavery, and *cried out*. Out of the slavery their *cry for help* rose up to God. ²⁴ *God heard* their *groaning*, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

3 ¹ 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. ² 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. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ **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.**" ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ 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.

⁷ 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, ⁸ 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, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The *cry* of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ **But** Moses said to God,

The name is a mixture of the word for “to be” conjugated simultaneously in more than one way, giving the impossible to grasp definition of “I will be who I will be” or “I am who I was” or “I was who I will be.” It conveys that message that God cannot be put in a box, controlled, or limited. And that is the message, the name that Moses is called to go and tell others about. Most Jewish believers do not say the name aloud, replacing it with the Hebrew word “Adonai” which means “Lord”, hence the choice in most Biblical translations to use Lord out of respect.

The name is developed further in : Exodus 6:2-3 “God also spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name ‘The Lord’ I did not make myself known to them.”

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus uses this name to self-identify. In John 8:58, he responds to the questions of Jewish religious leaders “ Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” The word “I Am” is the Greek version of the Hebrew name of God YHWH, which is why the leaders respond with the desire to kill Jesus for blasphemy.

But : Moses makes up several excuses, 4 **but**s in our textual selection, ranging from not being a good public speaker because of a stutter, not knowing God’s name, and of being afraid.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in this passage?
- What image most speaks to you today?
- How does the story of the call of Moses intersect your own story?
- What buts keep you from entering into God’s call for you?
- How are you called to tell of God’s name in the world?
- What does it mean for us to go and say “I am has sent me to you”? What might that look like?

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

¹³ **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 his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “*I am who I am.*” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘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 forever, and this my title for all generations.

4 ¹⁰ **But** Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” ¹¹ Then the Lord said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” ¹² Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” ¹³ **But** he said, “O my Lord, please send someone else.” ¹⁴ Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶ He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. ¹⁷ Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”