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Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, December 6, 2009

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You ***Question and Encounter***

Exodus 3:1-22

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

Now Moses was tending his flock. And God appeared to him in flames of fire within a bush. So Moses went to the bush and asked, “Why does the bush not burn up.” And God called to him, “Moses! Moses!”

Question and encounter. Question: why does the bush not burn up? Encounter: God called out Moses’ name.

Advent serves as a dual reminder of the original expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the nativity of Jesus as well as the second coming of Christ. Advent is the arrival, coming and discovery of something extremely important. Question: What is Advent? Encounter: Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, lived obediently, suffered, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Jesus will return again and consummate the new heaven and new earth. Believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will change your life forever.

Question and encounter. Question: Moses asked God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”¹ Encounter: God 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.’”²

Question and encounter. Question: what difference should God’s name, “I Am Who I Am” make in your life? Encounter: movement from a preoccupation with self and personal salvation to the weight of the glory of God

Today, I’m speaking about a man that we normally do not associate with the precious weight of the glory of God. This man is Moses. Moses asked God a question and he was encountered with the precious weight of the glory of God.

When we think of Moses, we remember he had the best education that the world of that day could offer.

¹Exodus 3:13

We know this from Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7.

When we think of Moses, we remember Pharaoh's troops losing battles until Moses was put in charge.

Josephus tells us this.

When we think of Moses, we remember him seeing an Egyptian beating an Israelite and killing that Egyptian.

When we think of Moses, we remember him bringing the Israelites deliverance at the Nile River.

When we think of Moses, we remember him leading the people in the desert for forty years right up to the point of entering the Promised Land.

When we think of Moses, we remember the burning bush and the revealing of the name of God.

Focus your attention on God's self-identification with Moses in Exodus 3:14-15. In this text, God calls Moses and commissions him to go to Egypt and bring his people out of bondage. Moses was frightened at this prospect and raised the objection that he was not the person to do this. God responded, "I will be with you."³

Question and encounter. Question: Moses asked God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"⁴

Encounter: God 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.'"⁵

The great and central biblical name of Yahweh is explicitly rooted by God himself in the phrase, "I Am Who I Am." What God said to Moses is that the one who simply and absolutely is has sent you. This truth that God is the one who simply and absolutely is should radically change your life. This truth should fan the flame of your passion for the centrality and supremacy of God.

Does not your heart burn when you hear God say, "My name is, 'I Am Who I Am'"? The absoluteness of God's existence entralls the mind; God's never beginning, never ending, never becoming, never improving, simply and absolutely there to be dealt with on his terms or not at all.

I am who I am. God, the God who holds you in being this moment, never had a beginning. Question: why

²Exodus 3:14

³Exodus 3:12

⁴Exodus 3:13

me? Why you? Encounter: God loves you. God loves me. The weight of God's glory owns you, is for you, created you, redeemed you and sustains you. We have been known by God and loved by him from the foundation of the earth. "I Am Who I Am" holds you in being this moment. God who never had a beginning, but always was and is and will be, defines all things. Whether we want him to be there or not, he is there. God defines reality. When we come into existence, we stand before a God who made us and owns us. We have absolutely no choice in this matter. We do not choose to be. And when we are, we do not choose that God be. No ranting and raving, no sophisticated doubt or skepticism, has any effect on the existence of God. God simply and absolutely is.

If we don't like it, we can change, for our joy, or we can resist, to our destruction. But one thing remains absolutely unassailed. God is. God was there before we came. He will be there when we are gone. Life has to do with God because all the universe has to do with God and the universe has to do with God because every atom and every emotion and every soul of every angelic, demonic, and human being belongs to God, who absolutely is. God created all that is, he sustains everything in being, he directs the course of all events, because "from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory forever."⁶ God's name is "I Am Who I Am."

Advent forces us to deal with first things. Why? Advent makes explicit the awesome existence of God and this God is majestic and holy in his being. Never the same: when the Word changes you. Question: has the holiness of God disappeared from the evangelical world, the experience of individual followers of Jesus and the corporate expression known as the church? Encounter: self aggrandizement meeting the weight of the glory of God.

If each one of us individually and as a church collectively was dynamically living Eastminster's mission statement, "Being and Making Disciples", we would be known as a church where the dominant experience is the weight of the glory of God. If our dominant experience was the weight of the glory of God then we would know and live the truth that our primary identity is that of witness. Jesus Christ came into the world not to condemn it but to save it. We are driven by love for the lost and a desire to incarnate the good news of the kingdom of God in homes, neighborhoods, places of work and the community.

As followers of Jesus, we believe in the one whose name is I Am Who I Am. We believe in

⁵Exodus 3:14

someone who has arrived, someone who will come again and something extremely important. We exist to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ and him alone; to nurture and equip followers of Jesus for the work of ministry; to worship God with our whole mind, body and spirit; to preserve the truth; to promote justice while serving the marginalized in society; and to demonstrate the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. As followers of Jesus, we live his mission, the mission of loving the enemy and telling the good news of Jesus Christ to all in word and deed.

As followers of Jesus, we proclaim the larger story of God's love and purposes as the only hope for meaning in our world. Because we are so enthralled with the weight of the glory of God, we seek to demonstrate the gospel of the kingdom of God, thus fulfilling both the Great Commandment and Great Commission. We live the mission of Jesus until he returns again. John Calvin writes,

Let the pastors boldly dare all things by the word of God...Let them constrain all the power, glory and excellence of the world to give place to and to obey the divine majesty of his word. Let them enjoin everyone by it from the highest to the lowest. Let them edify the body of Christ. Let them devastate Satan's reign. Let them pasture the sheep, kill the wolves, instruct and exhort the rebellious. Let them bind and loose thunder and lightning, if necessary, but let them do all according to the word of God.⁷

Being the best Jesus someone will see and being church is about being a person and church that is experiencing the weight of the glory of God. We will experience the weight of the glory of God as we remain Word centered. The Word of God must be the central focus of the Church for it is the lamp. Preachers must not preach their own ideas, but expound the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God and is inspired, profitable and radiant with the light of the glory of God. God told Moses his name, which is I Am Who I Am. I Am Who I Am changed Moses forever. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You.

Advent is about Jesus' birth, mission and second coming. Question and encounter. Question: is your experience of God centered in you and your personal salvation? Encounter: "I Am Who I Am"

⁶Romans 11:36

⁷John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), xii.

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desires to be your dominant experience. Recover and embody the absolute reality, majesty and weight of the glory of God. Let us pray.

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