

BUT I REPEAT MYSELF

Sermon, September 3, 2017
Texts: Exodus 3:1-15; Matthew 7:13-29

THE NAME OF GOD

Sermon Supplement, September 3, 2017

Some of you may have noticed our pew Bibles, at times, prints the word "LORD" (*all upper-case, capital letters*), and at other times prints "Lord." Psalm 8:1 is a prime example: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Two different Hebrew words are being translated; one rendered "LORD," and the other "Lord."

Wherever "LORD" appears (*all upper-case letters*), the actual word being translated from the original Hebrew text is יהוה (*or "YHWH"*), the name of God given to Moses by God via the burning bush. The original Hebrew text contained consonants only; no vowels or vowel markings were in the



original. This name is sometimes referred to as the "Tetragrammaton" (*from Greek τετραγράμματον, meaning "having four letters"*). "YHWH" almost defies definition. As one scholar wrote, this verse "is one of the most puzzled over verses in the entire Hebrew Bible." Most understand it to be a form of the Hebrew verb *hayah*, "to be". As explained in Exodus 3:14, it can be translated "I AM WHO I AM." It can also mean "I am what I am," or "I will be what I will be;" see footnotes "b" and "c" in the pew Bible, page 57. Another possibility: "I will be what I now am."

Whenever the word "Lord" appears (*upper-case "L" and lower-case "o-r-d"*), the actual word being translated is the Hebrew *Adonai*, which means "Lord, Master, sovereign one." "*Adonai*" (Lord) is a title, YHWH (LORD) is a name; just as "Pastor" is a title and "Clark" is a name. Psalm 8:1 actually reads, "O YHWH (LORD), our *Adonai* (Lord), how majestic is thy name in all the earth!"

Vowel markings were added to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament many years after the original text was written. The scribes who performed this task ran into great difficulty trying to add vowel markings to YHWH; nobody was certain how to pronounce it. In their zealous ambition to honor Commandment 3, God-fearing Jews would not utter this name of God *at all!* As the years passed, the vowel sounds for this Name apparently faded from the collective memory of the Jewish faithful.

The solution? Scholars tell us the vowel sounds from "*Adonai*" (Lord) were taken and applied to YHWH (LORD), which resulted in *YaHoWaH*. Anglicized, that comes out "Jehovah" (*see below*).

Y H W H + A d o n a i = Y a H o W a H

Jehovah, therefore, is sort of a "hybrid" name, and not believed to be an accurate phonetic rendering of God's proper name. Most scholars agree the original pronunciation of this Name was "Yah-WEH" or "Yah-VEH."

(*This adjacent supplement was included in the bulletin as an insert; I began the sermon by reviewing it, then proceeded to refer to the Scriptural context in which this Name of God was given to Moses.*) As we read in Exodus 3, after Moses sees this bush that is burning, but not burning up (*perhaps our current president might refer to it as a "low energy bush"*), he approaches and a voice calls out to him from this bush, and the voice calls Moses by name! That's all certainly pretty unusual, but there's something else unusual here easily missed by the Western reader. It's not the burning bush, although that's certainly unusual, nor is it the voice of God coming out of that bush, which is also unusual. It is the way in which God addresses Moses. He repeats Himself! He repeats the name. Maybe you're thinking, "So what? Maybe God had to repeat Himself to get Moses' attention." (FYI, the sermon title is borrowed from an old Mark Twain quote: "Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.")

No, there is something of a "double meaning" here (*pun intended*). In Semitic forms of communication, when a name is used twice in succession, when a name is repeated, it is usually an expression of personal intimacy. It's something you say to someone you know well, someone you care deeply about. I like the story about a small college town, where a tavern frequented by students ran the following ad in the campus paper the week before Parent's Weekend: "*Bring Your Parents For Lunch Saturday. We'll Pretend We Don't Know You.*" Not to be outdone, the college chaplain posted the next day: "*Bring Your Parents To Chapel Sunday. We'll Pretend We Know You Well.*" This intimate form of address used between people who know each other well, this repetition of names, is something we find in the Bible, but we do find it sparingly. Let's look at a few.

Remember Abraham, the father of the faithful. God promised him that he would be the father of a great nation; that in his advanced years he would have a son, an heir, and from that heir all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Well, Abraham does have a son, Isaac, and then God puts Abraham to the test (*Genesis 22*). God tells Abraham, "*Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering to me.*" We can only imagine the personal agony of that experience for Abraham, as he obeys God and takes his son on what has to be a tortuous three-day journey to Mt. Moriah. When they arrive at the summit, he wraps his son in ropes, lays him on the altar, and being scrupulously obedient to the voice of God he raises the knife and is about to plunge it into his boy, when suddenly the voice comes from heaven, "*Abraham, Abraham! Do not harm the boy. Now I know you fear God. You have not withheld from Me your son, your only son.*" God *intimately* addresses His loyal servant in this time of testing.

Later on (*Genesis 46:2*), it's Abraham's grandson Jacob who is struggling in his old age. There's a famine in Palestine, and there's plenty of food in Egypt; through a long chain of events one of Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph, had become prime minister of Egypt and has now invited his family to come to Egypt. However, Jacob wasn't sure. He wrestles with this decision with all the heartache and anxiety of any elderly person who is contemplating a move that may be permanent, so he laments in so many words, *"Should I stay or should I go? Should I stay here, or should I go with my sons and relocate to Egypt? There's food there, Joseph will take care of us, but ... maybe I'm just too old to go. This is my home; this is the land of my fathers. This is where I belong, if I move now, I'll probably never see this home again."* As he is wrestling with that decision, God comes to Jacob and says, *"Jacob, Jacob."* *"Don't be afraid, it will be all right. For there I will be with you and I will make of you a great nation."* So Jacob and all his family go, and the Israelites prosper in Egypt for many years.

However, after Jacob and his sons pass away, and the Israelites have greatly increased in number, a new Pharaoh comes to power. The Israelites are not treated kindly under this Pharaoh; they are enslaved for many, many years, until one day a Jewish man exiled to life in the Sinai desert notices a bush is burning, but it's not burning up! He turns to pay attention to it, and a voice comes out of the bush, and says *"Moses, Moses.."* Out of this intimate encounter comes the exodus from Egypt and the foundation of the Jewish nation.

Again, years pass. There is uncertainty as to how this nation will develop, the political structure is chaotic at best and Israel was fighting for her very survival. God comes this time and disturbs the sleep of the young son of Hannah, calling to him in the night, *"Samuel, Samuel!"* (*This is where we get that chorus from that popular hymn, "Here I am, Lord, It is I Lord, I have heard you calling in the night."*) Samuel is chosen by God for a particularly important task, and he grows to become one of the greatest leaders Israel had ever known. He is the last and the greatest of the Israelite judges, and the first of the great prophets.

Just a few more, as time permits ... the great king David mourning for his slain, rebellious, insurrectionist son: *"Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son."* Jesus speaking to the preoccupied and harried hostess of the home in which He was a guest, *"Martha, Martha."* Jesus later seeing the great city just before He enters, and he breaks down weeping, *"O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem: you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."* Jesus speaking to His dear friend and disciple the night this same friend and disciple would deny Him three times, *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat."* While enduring His agony on the cross, bearing the weight of our sin, Jesus cries out, *"My God, My God."*

And as the early church begins to grow, the most dramatic conversion experience we find in the entire New Testament is when the Pharisee Saul is transformed from one of the most dangerous antagonists of the early church to the apostle Paul, one of the most powerful promoters and advocates of the early church. In a blinding light that literally knocks Saul off his high horse, Jesus calls out from heaven, *"Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."* As if to say, *"Saul, I know you. And I have prepared and selected and chosen you for a momentarily important task."*

In our second reading this morning, Jesus issues a warning. Knowing now this intimate form of address should add to the weightiness of this warning for us, for it is a most disturbing warning. Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not speak in your name? Did we not fight evil and corruption, did we not do all kinds of things for you?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!'"* Jesus intimates that one Day people will come forward claiming to know Him, and not just superficially ... these are people who will be claiming to know him intimately, personally. You get the idea here that it *matters* what we do, it *matters* that we try to follow God's will, what God wants us to do, and it matters immensely. As Jesus says elsewhere John 14, *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."*

There is another side to this warning, though, a hope-filled side. And that is one day, our Lord will recognize His faithful servants, and probably a smile will form on His face, and He will look, and say... *"Joe, Joe ... Dave, Dave ... well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your eternal joy."* It's almost a cliché question in some church circles to ask: "Do you know Jesus?" Now, that is an important question, but according to this text the most important question is not "Do you know Jesus" but rather, it is "Does Jesus know you?" Does He know you intimately, well, because you have been spending time with Him, because you have been paying attention to His words, because you have been living to please and honor Him? Jesus won't be like that college chaplain who promises to pretend to know the students who, in reality, spent very little time with him.

May **all** of us grow to know and be known by Jesus Christ more and more as we do the Father's will, right up to that day when we meet Him face to face, and He calls us by name ... twice ... welcoming us into our eternal home.