

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Midweek Advent III
15 December 2010
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Exodus 3:1-15

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Egypt is the place of death.

It's the place of slavery—
remember, Joseph was sold as a slave into Egypt.

Egypt isn't the promised land;

it's not the land sworn to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob;
it's not the land flowing with milk or honey.

And yet, Egypt is where the Lord's people and the Lord's promise live.

We've now left the Book of Genesis and are making our way to the Exodus!

But you can't have an Exodus, a leaving, a departure, a "way out,"
without a *prophet* to lead and guide.

"For the Lord Yahweh does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants *the prophets*" (Amos 3:7).

Therefore today's prophet is Moses.

Now, it's not difficult to set Moses and Jesus side by side.

Both were born under tyrant rulers (Herod and Pharaoh)—
rulers who ordered the death of all male children, 2 years and younger.
Both went *into* Egypt;
and both came out.

But Moses is unlike any other prophet of old.

As Scripture records his death, when he was 120 years old,
and **"His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated"** (Deut 34:7),

It's said of him:

"There hasn't arisen a prophet since like Moses, whom Yahweh knew *face to face*, none like him for all the signs and wonders that Yahweh sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land, and for all the mighty power and great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut 34:10-12).

Moses is the prophet who knows Yahweh *face-to-face*.

He was a shepherd, like many of the prophets before their calling (cf. Amos 1:1).

As a shepherd, today's text says that Moses led the flock to the mountain of God (Ex 3:1).

Now, because you're already familiar with Moses,

you hear in this an echo of Moses' leading the people of Israel to Mount Sinai,
shepherding them like a flock as well.

Sinai's the second greatest mountain in all of Holy Scripture
(second only to Mount Zion, that is, Mount Calvary).
Mount Sinai is where the Law was given,
where Moses received two tablets of stone with 10 words carved into them.
Moses is probably best known for his receiving and giving of the Law.

But the Law comes later in the story—
and it comes as a gift to those already delivered from the hands of Pharaoh—
to those who've had their exodus and come to worship Yahweh in the wilderness.

Moses is the prophet who brings the Lord's people *out of Egypt*.
And as each prophet has his own unique calling,
Moses does too!

Our reading today says,
“The Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses in a flame in the midst of a bush” (3:2).

Undoubtedly a strange sight, Moses turned to get a better look—
the bush was on fire, and yet did not burn (3:3).

And from the bush God called,
“Moses, Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am” (3:4).

(That's the way the Lord does it—
Twice to really get your attention!)

But before “Moses, Moses,” Yahweh called His,
“Abraham, Abraham!” (Gen 22:11)
and His “Jacob, Jacob!” (Gen 46:2).

Then after Moses we hear:
“Samuel, Samuel!” (1 Sam 3:10).
and “Saul, Saul!” (Acts 9:4).

Moses stands in the middle.
He's the prophet unlike any other,
the prophet who knew Yahweh face to face,
who led His people like a flock to the mountain of God.

But before Moses led them out of Egypt, he was called to be Yahweh's man, the prophet.
And that meant Moses must have access to the *Name*.

Listen to what Moses says when Yahweh asks him to go to Pharaoh:

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israel out of Egypt?” (3:11).

And again,

“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His *name*?’ what shall I say to them?” (3:13).

The *Name* is very important here:

“God said to Moses,

‘I AM WHO I AM.’

And He said,

‘Say to the people of Israel,

‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

God also said to Moses,

‘Say this to the people of Israel,

‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’

This is My *name* forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” (3:14-15)

Why such a big deal about a name?

Well, if you know the name, then you can call upon it.

The name gives you access;

and in a certain sense, knowing the *name* gives you control over that person.

That God gives *His name* to Moses speaks of our Lord’s humility and willingness to suffer.

It declares that this God wants to be known and called upon and accessed freely.

This Lord wants His prophet to have some control over Him.

All of this is in the *Name*.

But on the other hand, look at what His name is!

“I AM WHO I AM” –

another translation might just as well read:

“I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.”

And the shortened version of all of this is simply: *Yahweh*.

Yahweh’s the one who *is*.

He’s the one who *will be*.

He’s the one who’s always *been*.

All of that’s in His *Name*.

And this *Name*, given to Moses, is the name that the people cry out to—
the name given to them in their prayer and in their sorrow.

Yahweh called Moses to be His prophet because,

as He says,

“I have surely *seen the affliction* of my people who are in Egypt and have *heard their cry* because of their taskmasters. *I know their sufferings*, and *I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land*” (3:7-8).

Yahweh has seen and heard and knows the suffering and affliction of His people.

And so now He acts.

He acts by giving His name to Moses,
by sending a prophet.
and by letting Himself be called upon, summoned, cried to, and controlled.

The Lord gives Himself over to His people so as to free them from their affliction and bondage.

The Lord gives them His *Name: Yahweh*.

And in giving His name,
in calling and sending a prophet,
He does the whole Christmas bit—
“I have come down to deliver them” (3:8).

Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth,
Comes down—.

Wherever He comes down,
He comes with His *Name—*
and with His name, His own self.

He comes down as the one who’s always been, is now, and ever shall be.

He comes as the God we’ve learned to know:

“The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (3.6).
This Yahweh is the God of the *living!* (Mk 12:27)
And Moses is His prophet.

Now we all know how the story goes—
we’ve seen Charlton Heston act it out in the film, “The Ten Commandments.”

Moses eventually goes timidly to Pharaoh;
after 10 signs and wonders including rivers of blood, swarming gnats, and the death of
the firstborn,
Pharaoh lets the Israelites go.

And so, with the Passover,
they go—and quickly!

But Pharaoh changes his mind, pursues them into the Red Sea,
 and, as Yahweh commanded Moses to strike his rod into the sea,
 Yahweh led His people Israel like a flock,
 with Moses as their shepherd,
 onto dry ground.

All the while, hard-hearted Pharaoh, and his host were drowned by the crashing waves of the sea.

And then it's 40 years in the wilderness;
 40 years of constant idolatry, complaining, dying, and mourning.
 40 years of Moses' patience being tried.
 40 years of Moses calling upon the *name* of Yahweh,
 praying for this people and their sin.

And the Lord heard his prayer.

He heard his prayer in a way Moses didn't understand at the time,
 and yet trusted nevertheless.

Yahweh answered Moses' prayer on behalf of this sinful people,
 by "**coming down to deliver them,**"
 in the person of Jesus His Son.

Jesus is the prophet like, but greater than Moses!
 Jesus is the ultimate prophet,
 who not only knows the *name*,
 but bears it Himself!

Jesus means *Yahweh Saves*.

So it is that "**at the name of *Jesus* every knee shall bow, in heaven or on earth, or under the earth**" (Php 2:10).

Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh.
 He's the promised deliverer.
 He's the one who sees your affliction,
 and hears your cry,
 and knows your suffering.

And so He's come to deliver you out of the hand of Satan.

He's done the whole Christmas bit already—
 bringing you into a good and broad land, flowing with milk and honey.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit