

“I AM WHO I AM”

Exodus 3:13-20; Romans 5:1-5; John 8:48-59;

Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2016

We have probably all heard at least one story at some time, somewhere, along this journey called life about a person who was found guilty of a crime they never committed! And sometimes, not always, but sometimes—a person who is found guilty of a crime they never committed is due to a “mistaken identity”!

Sometimes, today also, people may have the great misfortune of having their identities stolen. Dishonest people are able to hack into their computers to access their bank account, who end up withdrawing money from those accounts for themselves. Sometimes they are able to charge a lot of merchandise to someone else’s credit card.

Today is Trinity Sunday—and once again we are reminded by our God that he never wants to become the subject of a Mistaken Identity, or to have identity stolen away from him. Today is the Festival of the Holy Trinity—a day when we in the Church profess loudly and clearly, our belief that this really is only One, True, and Triune God; One Divine Being in three distinct Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1. The discussion that takes place between Moses and the LORD God Almighty in our Old Testament lesson today is one that is chiefly centered on our LORD’s truest identity (Exodus 3:1-12). This discussion takes place right after God has spoken to Moses out of a burning bush, when God said to him: “Moses, take off your sandals for you are standing on HOLY GROUND!”

Yes, God informs Moses that he is fully aware of the plight of his adopted people, the Hebrew people, the people of Israel, who have now been living as slaves in Egypt for some 400 years. Moreover, in Exodus 3:10 we hear God tell Moses: *“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt!”*

We know of Moses’ initial objections to God’s call, but when he acquiesces then Moses asked the LORD God what might seem to us actually as a very practical question: *“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?”*

God said to Moses. “Tell them – ‘I AM WHO I AM!’”

“Say this to the people of Israel, the LORD, 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” (Exodus 3:14-15)!

Friends, in the Bible, a person’s name usually tells us something very significant about that person’s character. In the third chapter of Genesis, (1) Adam names his wife “Eve” because that’s the Hebrew word for “life” or “life-giving,” because she will now become the “mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20). (2) God changes the name “Abram” to “Abraham,” because Abraham means the father of many nations! One day, through Abraham’s descendants all the nations of the world would become blessed—because through Abraham’s seed would eventually come the birth of our Savior (Genesis 12:1-3). (3) God changes Jacob’s name, remembering that Jacob means “one who struggles,” to “Israel,” which means “son of God” because Abraham’s descendants will now continue down to the Promised Messiah through Jacob and not Esau.

Of course, there is a big difference between us and God. When we name a child, we don’t have either the power or the authority to make the person we are naming “fit” the title, but God has the right and the power to cause anyone he names to become what their very name implies. The names God gives are sure indicators of the destiny of those whom he names.

And so when God gives names to himself, for the sake of the people he reveals himself to, we may be sure that name is a powerful description of WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE INTENDS TO DO. God does not choose names for himself at random. God chooses names for himself that will deepen our love for him and enlarge our admiration and strengthen our faith. Brothers and sisters, THE MOST IMPORTANT NAME FOR GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT is a name that is usually translated in English Bibles with that four letter word "Lord," but with each of those four letters appearing as a capital letter: "LORD." The importance of this name for God, which is actually the HEBREW PARTICIPLE FOR THE VERB "TO BE," that could also be translated as "BEING" or the One who "causes all things to be."

This word "LORD" which can also be translated as: "I AM WHO I AM," occurs 6,822 times in the Old Testament. That's more than three times as often as the simple word for "God," which is "Elohim," that appears 2,600 times, and "El," that appears 238 times.

Friends, this Old Testament name by which God reveals himself to us, sometimes translated as "Yahweh," or "Jehovah," or the "LORD;" or even "I AM WHO I AM," is full of some very important implications for us. Here we are reminded that God's name teaches us first of all that HE EXISTS.

And yet many people who live out their lives in this world may do so --- as if he does not exist! And even if they believe that he exists, they live as if this truth makes no difference to us in our lives at all.

Let's suppose that your very favorite President of the United States, who lived during the course of your own lifetime, had invited you and some of your family and friends to the White House for a reception. As you enter that cozy green room, the President of the United States would be sitting there by the fireplace and you walk right by him without even looking at him at all, never even shooting a glance in his direction. You offer him no personal greeting. Furthermore, throughout that whole evening---you never looked at him, or spoke to him. You didn't even thank him for having invited you and your family and friends to the White House. You never even asked him why he invited you there.

Nevertheless, every time a newspaper reporter in the green room where you were, he would come up to you during the course of that evening and ask you—if you believed in the existence of the president? You would reply, "Of course! Yes, I believe in the existence of the president!"

You would even agree with that reporter that the house you were sitting it was indeed the president's house, and the food you were eating had come from the White House kitchen, which is the President's kitchen. . NEVERTHELESS YOU PURPOSEFULLY CHOSE TO NEVER SHOW YOUR FAVORITE AMERICAN PRESIDENT—ANY RESPECT THAT NIGHT AT ALL!

Practically, speaking you were acting as if you did not believe that he existed! You pay him no regard! He has no place in the affections of your heart.

His gifts that you were receiving that night, but NOT HIM, become the center of your affection! Isn't possible that certainly a great many people who profess that they believe in God, end up also treating him in a very similar fashion him this way? To many people God is not any more important to them than hydrogen, that though hydrogen is included in the air we breathe, it's component part of the air we breathe is very minuscule at best—only 1 out 2,000,000 molecules of the air we breathe is hydrogen, which is actually a good thing, because it highly flammable and would be detrimental if you were exposed to it in much too big of a quantity!

If asked: "Do you believe hydrogen exist?" You might say, "Of course, hydrogen exists," then you return to all those other things that really matter to you!

Contained in God's answer to Moses, when Moses inquires of God about his name, God replies: "I AM WHO I AM." God is teaching us that not only does he exist, but for those who will stop for long enough from simply pursuing their own glory and their own private pleasure long enough to consider that he is

right here next to us, as close as our very breath, that recognition, and that belief, can make all the difference for you in the world!

But this is precisely the reason we want God the Holy Spirit – to sanctify us to such a degree – that there are indeed those times when we proclaim from the top of our lungs: “MAKE A JOYFUL NOISES TO THE LORD, ALL THE EARTH! SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS! COME INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH SINGING! KNOW THAT THE LORD, HE IS GOD! IT IS, HE WHO HAS MADE US, AND WE ARE HIS; WE ARE HIS PEOPLE AND THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE! ENTER HIS GATES WITH THANKSGIVING, AND HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE! GIVE THANKS TO HIM; BLESS HIS NAME! FOR THE LORD IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER AND HIS FAITHFULNESS TO ALL GENERATIONS” (Psalm 100)!

Moreover, our God is a God who does not change! In Malachi 3:6, God says: “I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” Within the name LORD, or JEHOVAH, OR YAHWEH,” is the affirmation: “I AM WHO I AM.” In James 1:7, “With him there is no variation or shadow due to change.” And in Hebrews 13:8, we read: “He is the same yesterday, today and forever!”

Our God is also the God with an inexhaustible source of energy. In Isaiah 40:28 we read: “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary!”

2. But if we who were by nature Gentiles and not Jews were ever to come to know him, we could only come to know, we profess again this day on this Trinity Sunday, because this God WHO REVEALS HIMSELF TO US AS “I AM WHO I AM,” HAS NOW DRAWN ABSOLUTELY NEAR TO US IN THE GIFT OF HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST!

You know the complete scoop behind this mysterious revelation: “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem all of us who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as children, whereby we also call out to him – “Abba, Father!” (Galatians 4:4-7)

Because he has conquered sin, death and the power of the evil one, he who also exists and always existed as the Eternally Begotten Son of God before the time of his incarnation, when he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, he can reveal himself to us by the same name today.

In John 8:56-58, Jesus is answering the criticism of the Jewish leaders, who were mocking him because he dared to say: “If anyone keeps my words he will never see death!” When these critics ask our Lord, “Are you greater than Abraham,” even without batting an eye, Jesus says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it and was glad!” And when they next remind our Savior that he was still about 17 years shy of being 50 years old, Jesus said to them: “Before Abraham was I am,” the title Jesus as the Holy Son of God is also claiming for himself is that of his also being the GREAT I AM. Because of our Savior’s perfect life, death and resurrection, because he has come into this world to pay the price for our rebellion and sins, and was raised again on the third day, pouring out the HOLY SPIRIT upon us that we might fully become with him now partakers in his divine nature: Then we can say with St. Paul despite all our sins of past, present and future: “By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain” (I Cor. 15:9-10)! But does this close relationship I now enjoy with God actually change the way I live out my life in this world, not only in my coming faithfully to the LORD’s House every time God grants me that opportunity, especially when I have the health and the wherewithal to actually be here? Does this close relationship I now enjoy with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ reflect itself in my faithful stewardship and prayer life?

Does this close relationship we now enjoy with our Heavenly Father through his Son Jesus Christ, make us more devout in our prayer life?

You may have heard about that retired country preacher who decided to skip church services one morning, since he no longer absolutely had to be there in the pulpit to deliver God’s Word to his people every Sunday, and to spend the day hiking in the wilderness instead. Rounding a sharp bend in the trail,

he collided with a bear and was sent tumbling down a steep grade. He landed on a rock and broke both legs.

With the ferocious bear charging at him from a distance, the preacher prayed, “O Lord, I’m so sorry for skipping the worship service this morning! Please forgive me and grant me just one prayer request—make a Christian out of that bear that’s coming toward me!” At that very instant, the bear skidded immediately and unbelievably to a halt. That’s when the bear fell to his knees, clasped his paws together, and began to pray aloud at the retired preacher’s feet, “Dear God, for this thy bounty that I am about to receive, I give thee thanks!” Amen