

## **March 5 – Communion**

Knowing the Great I AM

Exodus 3:1-14

During Lent we are going to be examining a book by Rob Fuquay, pastor at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis titled, "The God We Can Know, Exploring the 'I Am' sayings of Jesus." I hope you are planning to attend one of the small groups that will be discussing this book. There is so much more in each chapter than I can put into a sermon. If not, I hope you have purchased a copy of the book and are reading it in preparation for our time together and as a spiritual discipline during this season of Lent.

This series is about knowing God through Jesus. In many ways the Bible is a story of humanity's attempt to know God. The Bible also tells a story of God's desire to be known. The highest expression of that desire is the gift of God's self in the person of Jesus.

God wants to be recognized. God wanted to be known by Adam and Eve. Even when they tried to hide, God came looking for them. God came to Abraham. Abraham was called a friend of God. God came to the prophets so they could speak God's message to the people. Eventually God came directly to us in Jesus because God wants to be known. On several occasions, in the Gospel of John, Jesus begins self-revealing statements with the words, "I Am." These statements provide powerful insights into the heart of God and God's desire to be known.

Before we get to those statements we need to go back to Moses. We remember his story. He was born to a Hebrew slave at a time Hebrew male children were supposed to be killed. His mother places him in a reed basket at the edge of the Nile where he is found and raised by a daughter of Pharaoh. As a prince of Egypt he had everything. One day he sees an overseer abusing a Hebrew slave and in a fit of rage kills the man. Later, when he realizes that the deed is known throughout the Hebrew community he flees Egypt in fear of his life. In the Sinai dessert he helps the daughters of Jethro and marries one. He may not have all of the luxuries he had been use to but

he had a good life, safe and secure. Then he sees a bush on fire that is not consumed. Going closer he hears the voice of God who wants him to risk everything and return to Egypt to free the Hebrew people. Moses does not want the assignment. He tries various ways to get out of this task giving excuses like he stutters. God continues to reassure him so Moses asks God's name. He is told, "I AM WHO I AM" which could just as easily be translated, "I will be there as I will be there." Moses is afraid. He seeks assurance that he will have what it takes to face this challenge and God says, "I will be there." Moses might want more but God is saying trust me, my being there is enough. I will be there with you and help you deal with all of your fears and, when the people want to know me, let them understand that I will be with them as well.

We have sometimes been just like Moses. Have you ever waited to act faithfully because you are feeling inadequate? Have you ever delayed saying yes to a challenge because you were confident any number of people could do it better? Have you ever declined an opportunity because you were certain your skills weren't sufficient? Have you ever dodged an assignment because accepting would require you to grow? Then you behaved just like Moses. Just remember, God's name is not "I Already Have." It is not "I will be." God's name is "I Am." It means God works in real time, God gives us what we need when our feet are where God wants them to be. God's promise is "I will be there as I will be there."

Moving on to the New Testament what do the I AM statements tell us about Jesus? Jesus identifies with the God of Moses. The God called "I Am" can be fully known in Jesus. Also, Jesus relates himself to very earthly things: bread, light, vine, shepherd, way. At the same time Jesus talks about these images in contrast to their opposites. In other words, Jesus is an answer for hunger, darkness, fear, emptiness, and so forth. Just as the Great I AM would be with Moses in his challenges, so Jesus vows to be with us in ours. Over these weeks we will look at specifics as to what that means when we face particular challenges in life. But for today we need to hear again, God wants to be known, Jesus wants us to know God, and we find this as we journey with God, the great "I AM."

I want you to do something now, I want you to think of six attributes of God. Usually we come up with terms like: mighty, awesome, Holy, creative, compassionate, and loving. Now I want you to fill in the following: I am.....and come up with six terms. What words do you use? Most of us are tempted to think first of our less desirable traits, I am forgetful, I am out of shape, or I am shy. Some might think of relational attributes like I am a grandparent or I am a husband/wife.

Phillip Newell, former Warden of the Iona Abbey says, "We are not just made by God, we are made out of God." Think about that in the first person. I am not just made by God; I am made out of God. Think about that first list of Godly attributes like mighty, powerful, compassionate and all those you included. Now start placing those in your "I am" statements. I am mighty. I am creative. I am compassionate. Part of this sermon series is understanding that getting to know God means getting to know ourselves.

When God said to Moses, "You are the one to set my people free." Moses saw all the reasons that this was not practical. He let his own image of himself define him. God said, "I your God will be there." Moses finally, even with all of his doubts, decides to go forward and in walking with the God of the burning bush, the God of the "I AM," he discovered much about God, but even more about himself. He had courage that he was unaware of. He could speak more eloquently than he thought possible. He had the tools to confront Pharaoh, take a group of slaves and lead them into the wilderness, and form them into a nation with an understanding of what it meant to worship the one true God.

Jesus came to share with us this same astonishing message about God but more about ourselves. Jesus will be with us on our journey. Jesus is the answer to our fears and needs. Jesus will feed us, enlighten us and guide us. In that journey we will find out more about God but even more about ourselves.

Today we are reminded that we are not just made by God we are made out of God. Doesn't that word give you hope, give you strength, and allow you to face the uncertainties of tomorrow? I know it does me. When I get to putting myself down for my shortcomings and fill in the I am blanks, like Moses, with all I cannot do, I see the burning bush, hear the voice of God saying I am here with you. When I realize God is

with me and I am made out of God then I realize those voices of doubt are wrong and God's possibilities are what my focus should be.

We are made from God but even more we are made out of God. This is what we need to know as we begin our Lenten journey.