

**Third Sunday in Lent – February 28, 2016**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Exodus 3:1-8,10-15 (NIV)**

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2) There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3) So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up." 4) When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5) "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6) Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. 7) The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8) So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ... 10) So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." 11) But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12) And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." 13) Moses said to 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?" 14) **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.'** " 15) **God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, '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, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.'"**

**Theme: I AM Is Watching Over You**

1. He knows what's happening in your life
2. He promises rescue and relief

Beloved by the Lord;

It began as any other day began for Moses. He was tending the flocks of his father-in-law as he had been doing for years. Today he would lead them to the far side of the wilderness to the hillsides of Mount Horeb. Under his watchful eye, the lambs and the sheep would be safe. He would not allow any of them to wander. If one of them would get caught in a thicket he'd offer his assistance and aid – that's what a shepherd does. He watches over the sheep with his loving care. He knows what's going on in their lives and provides them with rescue and relief. It may have seemed as if Moses was all alone with his sheep but that was not the case. Moses was being watched – as Moses would discover the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was with him.

Out of the corner of his eye, Moses saw something unusual – flames of fire were glowing from within a thorn bush. He focused a bit more closely and realized that although the bush was on fire it was not consumed by the flames. It didn't burn up. Although Moses didn't know it when he first saw the flames of fire it was the Angel of the Lord who was revealing himself to Moses as our text explains. **The angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.** It will become clear to us as we continue to explore this text that the angel of the Lord is really God himself – in fact this is a common Old Testament expression used in speaking about the second person of the Trinity (God the Son) before he took on human form. We often speak of the work of the Son as the work of redeeming and rescuing – and that is what the angle of the Lord came to do in this text.

As Moses focused on the flames in the bush he saw a special miracle. He saw a special manifestation of God's glory and presence. He would hear God call him by name. All of this is a powerful reminder that God is intimately involved in the lives of his people.

Curious as to why the bush did not burn up, Moses carefully approached the bush. It was then that Moses discovered that he was being watched. **When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."** Before Moses even had a moment to wonder who it was that was calling to him the voice spoke again. **5) "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."**

Bewildered and trembling in fear Moses did as he was told – he stooped to remove his sandals. As he did so he heard the voice proclaim: **"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."** At this, **Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.** Moses was gripped with fear, his past and present sins haunted his conscience. How could he possibly stand before the living, holy, eternal and mighty God?

The Lord continued to speak: **"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8) So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ...**

The Lord's people, Egypt – that was a distant memory for Moses and not necessarily a pleasant one. It had been 40 plus years since Moses had fled Egypt as an exile after killing an Egyptian who had been beating one of the Lord's people – one of Moses people. Back in Egypt it had been a strange life for Moses. He had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter but raised by his own mother at a time when all the other baby boys born among the people of Israel were being put to death. The oppression was more than Moses could tolerate – someone had to do something and so Moses killed the Egyptian to defend his own people. But that's not how they saw things – they resented Moses and when Moses discovered that his act was common knowledge he felt compelled to flee for his life. He had a new life now with a wife and family.

A rescue for the Lord's people – that was what Moses had wanted 40 years earlier when he heard his people crying out because of their slave drivers and when he tried to show his concern for them. The Lord's words must have filled Moses with mixed emotions. How could he not have felt some joy that the Lord was coming to aid of his people? How could he not have felt ashamed for his actions? But before Moses had too much time to think the Lord dropped a bombshell into his lap. **"So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."**

Not me, Moses thought. Who am I that the Lord should send me back to Pharaoh to bring his people out of Egypt and to lead them to land promised to Abraham and his descendants centuries ago. Leading sheep through the wilderness that he could do --- but leading people that hadn't worked out so well in the past. Humbly, **Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12) And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."**

The Lord made a promise to Moses to instill faith in his heart. You will not be doing this by yourself. I will go with ... and you will return to this mountain range to worship me! Moses was willing to trust the Lord but what about his people. Could he trust them? Would they accept his leadership now after all these years? **"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?" 14) 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.' " 15) God also said to Moses, "Say**

to the Israelites, '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, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

**I AM** -- that's who has been talking to you, that's who has been watching over you, that's who will be with you – **I AM**. The Lord could say to Abraham, I am. He could say the same to Abraham's offspring, to Moses and to us. **I AM** – those words express the fact that the Lord is -he is the one who always exists, the eternal living and unchanging one! He is the Lord, "**The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7) maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished ...** (Exodus 34:6-7 NIV) That is how he would describe himself to Moses on another occasion.

**I AM**, that's who is sending you. That was God's way of telling Moses and the Israelites that he was the one who in his grace and mercy had called them to be his people. He would surely keep all the promises he had made to their ancestors and to them. It's been 430 years since my people have been slaves in Egypt – the Lord was still faithful to them – they were still his people, he had not forgotten them. His promises to them were still in effect – and that would include his promise to set them free from sin and guilt as well.

Forgiven and empowered with the promises of the Lord, Moses could confidently return to Egypt and his people to bring the **I AM**'s rescue and relief.

**Theme: I AM Is Watching Over You**

1. He knows what's happening in your life
2. He promises rescue and relief

God has not chosen to reveal himself to us today by allowing us to see his glory on display with flames of fire in a bush that doesn't burn up. Today the Lord has chosen to reveal his glory to us through his Word. Through that word we've witnessed the Lord's glorious revelation to Moses. Through that word, we've heard the Lord explain to Moses who he is. We've come to know him as the great **I AM** – the living and existing one who is watching over us and who knows what's happening in our lives and who promises us rescue and relief. "**This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation,**" the Lord told Moses to remind us that he is with us as he was with Moses.

**I AM** knew Moses by name. And the Lord knows each of us personally as well. He made us his own by calling us to faith in him and he promises us, "**Never will I leave you or forsake you.**" (Cf. Hebrews 13:5)

**I AM** told Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. As we come before the Lord in our worship services we are filled with awe and respect – we humbly acknowledge our sins even though he knows what's happening in our life. I AM assures us of his forgiveness: "**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**" (Isaiah 1:18 NIV)

**I AM** heard the cries of his people in Egypt as they cried out under the burden of their slavery. He saw their misery and grief. **I AM** has invited us to call upon him in the day of trouble and promised to deliver us. (Cf. Psalm 50:15) What is that is troubling you in life? No matter what it is I AM knows. As the living powerful Lord who is involved in the lives of his people he is watching over you and promises that you will not be tempted beyond what we can bear but will provide a way out so that we can endure it. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13)

**I AM** has established peace for us. **I AM** satisfies the thirsty and gives fills the hungry with good things (Cf. 107:9) **I AM** satisfies our desires with good things. (Cf. Psalm 103:5)

**I AM** called and sent Moses to rescue his people from the adversity and trouble that they were experiencing in Egypt and to lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey. **I AM** himself became one of us to rescue us from the adversity and trouble that is ours because of sin. **I AM** set us free from our slavery to sin, death and the devil. **I AM** has promised to come again and take us to our eternal home where there will be no more hunger or thirst, no more death and no more mourning. (Cf. Revelation 7:16, 21:4)

Together with Moses, we have had the privilege of coming into the presence of the great **I AM**. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Cf. John 1:14) We have been reminded that he watches over us for our blessing and protection. We have been assured that he knows everything that is going on in our lives. We have been promised his eternal relief and rescue.

Forgiven and empowered by **I AM** Moses set forth to serve the Lord by following his call. Forgiven and empowered by **I AM** you and I also have been called to serve the Lord. Such service means struggling at times with our sinful flesh. Such service may call for sacrifice. Such service may bring trouble and difficulties into our lives. (All of those things happened to Moses.) But we are never alone in our service to the Lord.

**Theme: I AM Is Watching Over You**

That was a comfort and an encouragement to Moses – may it also be a comfort and an encouragement to you. Amen.