

## **Exodus 3:1-15**

*Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

*Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."*

*But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':*

*This is my name forever,  
and this my title for all generations."*

Good morning, again. I hope everyone had a good week.

You know, I find language very interesting. I wish I was better at it. One thing, regarding language, that I am always fascinated by is how we change the meaning of words over time. I

mean, how does one generation ever talk coherently to a future generation and how can a future generation ever understand their ancestors? For example:

1. Does anyone here have HGTV on their cable or satellite service? There is a show on most of them that is about looking for homes to buy. I think that it's called House Hunters, or something like that. From the ones that I have seen, the buyers tour potential houses to buy and, as they enter each room, they typically say one word. I wish I had a dime for every time they did. They look around and say "nice". Nice window, nice size, nice countertops, nice view...or just plain nice. Did you know that nice used to mean silly, foolish, or simple? Neither did they.
2. Let's go the other way. The word silly used to mean worthy or blessed. It was only later it came to describe something negative. If you asked most people today, they would tell you that it means foolish.
3. Awful meant something worthy of awe. Today we took the "e" out and in common usage it refers to things terrible and unpleasant.
4. A clue (claw) was a ball of yarn, to flirt was to flick something away or making a brisk or jerky motion, and a hussy was a housewife...sorry ladies.
5. Egregious referred to something distinguished, a girl meant any child, male or female, a wench meant a female child, and a guy referred to something frightful. Maybe that one hasn't changed, depending on your view point,

I think that it is interesting how we redefine things to fit the times. To those who were born in "modern times" nice is a good thing, silly probably means something undesirable, and a clue will never be a ball of yarn.

Along with changing definitions of words we also diminish whole concepts. Take love for example. Love is now strictly an emotion. Peace is just the absence of war. And joy has become a substitutional word for individual happiness which is typically found when we are doing something that we find personally enjoyable. Right now most of us are thinking, "Of course that is what they mean." Well, they didn't always. Humans seem to constantly strive to compress concepts into packages that we can hold on to, that we can fit into our understanding, and then we mold them, over time, to our liking.

This morning in our Old Testament passage we take a little trip with Moses. He is living in Midian, having fled Pharaoh, and he is married to Jethro's daughter, Zipporah. On the day that we read about, Moses had made his way to Horeb and was tending his sheep, the sheep that Jethro had put him in charge of. He is there, minding his own business, and an angel of God shows up in the form of fire within a bush, but a fire that didn't burn up the bush.

Well, as you would expect, Moses finds this sight unusual and interesting and so he decided to take a closer look. As he started towards the bush and the fire, however, God stopped him.

Did you hear what God told him? He told him that he was on holy ground. God told Moses that he was entering new territory here. The area that he was about to enter was special. Actually he was already there. He was on holy ground, not because, in itself, that spot was a particularly special place. It was holy ground because God was there. God's presence made that place holy. That is what holy is...being close to God... and, being on that ground, being close to God in that way, required a reaction. It required recognition. It required the shedding of worldly things. For Israel and for Moses this would have been symbolized by removing their sandals, covered in the grime of the world.

In Horeb, in that place, Moses encountered God and, by definition, he was on holy ground. He encountered the holy. And there is one of those words. It is one of those words that we have played with over time. It is one of those concepts that we have diminished in our world today.

So, what is holiness? What is holy? You know, that is an important question. As one theologian put it, "Holiness is one of the most important ideas that anyone can grapple with. It is basic to our whole understanding of God." It is basic to our whole understanding of God. It is basic to our understanding of life.

You see, God and holy are not two different things. And holy is not just an adjective used to describe a supreme being. God and holiness are one in the same thing. Let's take love again. So often we say or hear that God is Love. We are not saying that God is loving, which he is, as a consequence of who he is. What we are saying is that God and love are one and the same. God cannot *not* be love and because of that, he cannot *not* be truly loving. If he were to be, if God acted in any way outside of love, then he would not be God. They are one and the same thing.

Now, do you see the potential problem? While seeking the definition of the holy is important, and understanding God is critical, the problem is that so often we are doing it backwards. We are seeking the definition of the holy so that we can apply that definition in order to find our understanding of God. Do you see the problem yet? It seems to be in our nature, our fallen nature, to manipulating the meaning of words. Now, that may not be an issue with things like silliness or niceness or what we call a ball of yarn. But when we redefine what holy means in the world, we, for us and for future humanity, alter the perception and understanding we have of God. We bring it, Him, down to our level.

When we make love simply an emotion and apply that definition to God, for us God is limited and becomes a god of personal feelings. You see where this is going, right. When we remake obedience to be all about enslavement, then God become a task master instead of an

uplifter. When we define peace as simply being the surrender of arms, we miss the deep peace, the shalom, that God created us for in order to transform the world. When power is known only as it pertains to how it uses and controls others, then a God of humility and sacrifice confuses us. And when we understand joy as a good time, or a personal happiness, or the accumulation of wealth, or however we measure happiness in order to serve ourselves, then the God of true joy will never satisfy us.

We can't know God through words and concepts that we devise, and revise, and compromise. We must first know God. It is through knowing God that love has any real and lasting meaning. It is only through embracing God that peace touches our souls. By truly knowing God, what some experience as wrath becomes an embrace of love; humility becomes empowerment; and sacrifice become the gaining of everything. And it is only in the presence of God that the gift and excitement of Holiness can be found. Holiness is not a legalized burden in order to restrict us. It is amazing freedom for the fullness of life.

I think that C.C. Lewis had great insight and a great grasp of holiness and humanities relationship to it. He likened humanity to "half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

And I might add that when we don't get it, or maybe when we are even a bit afraid at the prospect of a transformational God, we redefine the terms and the concepts in order to remain comfortable in the slum of our own creation. The good news, the great news, is that holiness awaits us. It is what we were created for. All we have to do is take off our sandals and come into the presence of God.

Lewis understood one thing down to his very core. He said, "How little people know, who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible."

Let our hope be that we might embrace the One who is irresistible and then bring Him to everyone we meet.

Amen