

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – August 30, 2020 – With You
Romans 12:9-21 and Exodus 3:1-15**

Pieces of our identity are formed from a very early age. Growing up, we learn that we are someone's child and, perhaps, someone's brother or sister, as well. As young people, we begin to view ourselves, at least in part, by the friendships that we keep. And, as the years pass, many of us assume new identities as someone's boyfriend, fiancé, husband, parent, or grandparent.

In conversation with others, we often seek to describe who we are in relation to our upbringing, our experience, or our training. We speak about generational characteristics, specific years of birth, and graduating class. And we seek to define ourselves by our profession or accomplishments, our education, our neighborhood, or our hobbies.

Throughout, we use powerful "I am" statements as a means of defining how we perceive ourselves and, even, how we perceive reality itself. I might say, for example, that I am the husband of Kara, and the father of Liam and Nathan. I might also say that I am a Christian minister serving Westminster Presbyterian Church of Akron, Ohio. This is how I have chosen to define myself. This is my reality. It is also the reality through which others view me.

Other parts of our identity are not so straightforward. Subjectively, some are known as kind, generous, and helpful, while others are described as arrogant, boastful, or rude. These judgments are the cumulative effect of our words and actions in the public sphere, for all of this defines our shared reality.

By the third chapter of the Exodus narrative, Moses' life has been defined by a series of disparate events and experiences. As an infant, he had survived a tenuous beginning, hidden in a basket on the Nile River. When the pharaoh's daughter discovered him there, she had mercy on him, drew him out, and ensured his care at the hands of the palace attendants. Each of these experiences shaped Moses' reality and defined who he was as a person.

Yet, despite his incredible origin story, Moses never forgot that he was a Hebrew by birth. And it was this which became the identifying characteristic of Moses' life that would lead him to reject the trappings of the Egyptian empire in favor of his biological and spiritual kin. Exodus tells us that, "One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk." After carefully surveying the area, and seeing no potential witnesses, Moses "killed the Egyptian and hid him in the

sand.” He knew that if this dark secret was ever revealed, it would put him on a collision course with the pharaoh.

The next day, Moses “saw two Hebrews fighting,” and stepped into resolve the dispute. He “said to the one who was wrong, ‘Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?’” But the man’s response left him speechless, for the man answered, “‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’”

Moses, now harboring an open secret and fearing retribution from the pharaoh, fled to a new land and made a life for himself there. He married the daughter of a priest, and assumed the existence of a lowly, unskilled shepherd. And there, far from the glamorous life of the palace, he found belonging.

Then, one night, something mysterious happened. While Moses was tending his flock of sheep in the wilderness of Mount Horeb, he experienced the divine presence in the form of a bush that was burning and yet was not consumed. And he soon learned that the same God who had delivered him from certain death on the Nile River was now articulating a plan for him to deliver the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage.

Friends, we have often heard that God works in mysterious ways. And here, we find God's intention to use even a fugitive murderer to accomplish the work of divine deliverance. The plan that God describes involves sending Moses into the belly of the beast. Back to the place where he was raised, and where certain death awaits him for the crime that he attempted to commit in secret.

And God will send him, not with a mighty army to overthrow the most powerful nation in the region, but with a simple promise that God will go with him. That's it. That's the full extent of what God is promising here. There is no strategy, no research, and no Plan B. Moses is simply called to trust.

Moses' immediate reaction is more than understandable. "Who am I," he asks, "that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Tellingly, God never tells Moses why he is the right person for the job. There is no mention of Moses' skill, or cunning, or charisma. There is no effort whatsoever to build Moses up. Instead, God simply says, "I will be with you." For God's presence and guidance will make all of the difference between succeeding or dying in the midst of this extremely risky venture.

Surely, Moses recognizes the gravity of this situation. He knows that the stakes could not be higher. And he knows that he will look like a damned fool if he presents himself before the pharaoh and demands the release of all of the king's free labor. In fact, the plan sounds so naïve that we can almost hear the laughter in the palace halls as Moses delivers his presumptuous speech before promptly being shackled and led away to execution.

These are the scenes that Moses envisions as he asks a follow up question of 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?” And God said, “I am who I am... I am has sent me to you.”

Friends, just as we identify ourselves in relationship to others, so too does God. God says, I am the “God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” I am the God of the covenant, the God of deliverance, and the God of new life. I am the One who goes before you, and beside you, and who makes the claim on your future. I am your God.

As Christians, the story of our salvation does not reach its ultimate conclusion in the event of the Exodus, but with the self-revelation of God in the person of Jesus

Christ. So it is no coincidence, in John's Gospel, when Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd," "I am the bread of life." "I am the true vine." "I am the light of the world." "I am the way, and the truth and the life." For Jesus is the culmination and fulfillment of this great I Am.

And it is in him that this ancient yet ever-present God promises to be with us. No matter the circumstances. No matter the odds. No matter how weary or doubtful we may be. For while I am certainly a minister, and a spouse, and a father, I am also a child of God, heir to the covenant, and daily reminded that the One who sends me is faithful. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.