

August 30th 2026

11th Sunday after Trinity

8.00am Holy Communion All Saints Oakham

Exodus 3.1-15, Romans 12.9-e, Matthew 16.21-e

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Over the last few months, we have been reading through the stories of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, which ended with the people of Israel becoming residents in Egypt. Last week the story jumped 400 years, to a very different time, when the Israelites were enslaved, and there was a concerted attempt, through the killing of male children, to eliminate them completely. And in that context we heard of the birth of Moses, and how, through his family's subterfuge he was kept safe, and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Our reading today has moved on a further few decades. When Moses grew up he realised the nature of the condition under which his people were held, and in one incident he killed one of the Egyptian task masters. For this he was forced to flee from Egypt, and he took refuge in the land of Midian, probably in northern Arabia, where he found favour with the priest Jethro, married his daughter and had a son by her. At the start of today's passage we find him looking after his father-in-law's flocks in the region of Mount Horeb. Nobody really knows where that is – the biblical texts are ambiguous – but it was clearly regarded as a holy place. But there Moses saw the phenomenon of the bush that was burning but not consumed. He heard the voice of God speaking to him out of the bush, sending him on a mission to free his people from the Egyptians. This is probably the last thing that Moses wanted to hear – he had fled from Egypt to save his life, and was now settled quite comfortably in Midian, with a wife and a son, and a steady job. So he began to make his excuses, that he was not worthy of the job.

Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

To which the voice replied

'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.'

With perhaps a sense of desperation, Moses tried another tack.

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?

To which the reply came that was to change everything.

'I am who I am.' 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you.'" "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".

The story of Moses continues and will continue to be read over the next few weeks. But I want to pause here and to dwell this morning on God's reply where he reveals his name. The name can be translated from the Hebrew in a number of ways – *I am* or *I am what I am* or *I will be what I will be*. Before this revelation of his name, the Patriarchs and the Israelites used other names for their God.

- *Elohim* - Creator, Mighty and Strong.
- *El Shaddai* - God Almighty or All-Sufficient One.
- *El Elyon* - God Most High.
- *El Roi*, used by the slave girl Hagar as she was exiled into the wilderness - The God Who Sees Me.
- *El Olam* - The Everlasting God or The Eternal God.
- *Adonai* - Lord or Master

All of these are found in the Book of Genesis, and they all seem in some way to be human perceptions and descriptions of God, although the phrases are lofty and carry much meaning. *I am who I am* or *I will be what I will be* is different. This is God's name for himself, a name that describes his essential nature of his existence – the God who was, and is and is to come, unconstrained by time, unconstrained by space. The God who exists whether humanity recognises him and names him or not. As a perhaps rather inappropriate and irreverent comparison, T S Elliot wrote that cats have three names – the family name, the dignified name, and the secret name, never revealed to anyone.

His ineffable effable

Effanineffable

Deep and inscrutable singular name

Here we have God's secret name, his deep and inscrutable singular name that describes his very being. But nonetheless it was a name revealed to Moses and his people.

The name itself as written consisted, in the normal Hebrew way, of four consonants – Y, H, W, H – with the reader being required to supply the vowels. This was probably pronounced as Yahweh. Over the course of time this became a holy word, that was not spoken, and different vowels were used when reading the four letters, so that it became Jehovah when spoken, a word we know very well of course. The nature of that name, based on the use of the verb "to be" is I think very significant. This verb is at the very root of language – the first verb form that you come across when learning a new language - used to describe God as the root, the source of being for language, for all that is.

So why then did this make all the difference. For Moses, the revelation of the deepest nature of God, as perceived by God himself, meant that God was sharing his deepest

confidences with him. This seems to have served to convince him that now was the time that he would free his people, to set out on a new stage of life. For us, the importance of that name remains, that our God is the source of all being and that he shares that self knowledge with us. But we have been given a greater name, a deeper revelation in Jesus, which takes things further and means *Yawheh saves*. A further revelation of God's nature – that the source of all being is the one who has come to save his people. To this divinely given name, other names and meanings are added in scripture – Immanuel, Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Alpha and Omega, Lion of Judah, , Prince of Peace, Morning Star and we could add more. All describe aspects of Jesus as he has been perceived by the prophet and the church. Jesus himself takes on the ancient name and adds new meanings to it in his *I am* sayings - the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the way the truth and the life, the true vine. But the basic name, the divine name is *Yawheh saves*.

And just as the realisation of the depth of meaning of that name changed everything for Moses, it still has the power to change everything for us. Some of you might remember the lines from a Paul Simon song of the 1960s.

*A man gets tied up to the ground
He gives the world its saddest sound.*

Whilst I wouldn't raise the words of Paul Simon to the level of Holy Scripture, there is some truth in that. And there is much at the moment, both in our individual lives and in the life of the church, to tie us down to the ground. The revelation to Moses and to his people of God's name of *Yahweh, I am what I am*, the source of all being and his further revelation that in Jesus *Yahweh saves* from all that might assail and trouble us, should be enough to lift our eyes from the ground, to give us hope and fortitude for the future, to walk with God the three in one into the future he has planned for us, whatever that may be.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen