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Pentecost XXII & Proper 27
November 9, 2025
Text: Exodus 3:1 – 15
Title: What's In A Name?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today's sermon text is the Old Testament lesson from Exodus 3. Here the name of God is revealed to a person for the first time. This account might be familiar to you. Moses was out in the fields tending the flocks of his father-in-law, and he saw something strange. A bush was on fire nearby, but Moses noticed something unusual. The bush wasn't turning into ash like anything else that burns in a fire. Instead, it kept burning with no effect on the bush itself.

Of course, that struck Moses as odd, and his curiosity got the better of him so he went to investigate. When God saw him coming to take a look, He spoke to Moses from the flames, and what was the first thing that God said? He said the name of the man that He had come to speak too, "Moses." The Lord then told Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on Holy Ground, a special place set aside for God.

After this, the Lord identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses immediately hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord then told him that He was there to deliver His people out of slavery in Egypt, and He had chosen Moses to go and confront Pharaoh for Him. Moses would be an ambassador for the Lord God, and he would lead the people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land first shown to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses' first response to these words was to say that he was a nobody, and that he shouldn't be given the job to speak to Pharaoh or be a leader of God's people. But the Lord was ready for that objection, and said that He would be with him through it all. Then He gave Moses

a sign to prove that this was for real. He said that the people would worship Him on this same Holy Ground that Moses was standing on now.

It was here that Moses finally decided to ask the question, “What is your name?” In other words, “Who are you?” The answer is immediate and mystifying, “I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you...Say this to the people of Israel, 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, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

There it is, the very name of Almighty God, I AM, Yahweh. That is the name that we pray will be hallowed every time we pray The Lord’s Prayer. It is the name that He has revealed to us. The name that is to be held in reverence and not taken in vain according to the second commandment that Yahweh would give to His people in just a few short months after this first meeting with Moses. It is the name that the Lord wants us to remember and keep for special use throughout all generations, even this one.

We find that and the other commandments given to us in Exodus 20:7, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” After they returned from exile about 400 years before the birth of Jesus, the Jews were so afraid of violating the 2nd Commandment that by the time of Jesus, they had even made a secondary law that just to mention God’s proper name, Yahweh, carried a severe penalty.

In fact, today many Jews still do not speak the name of Yahweh in their temples or synagogues because they are afraid of violating those secondary, man-made laws. So, when they read the Scriptures, they speak a substitute name, Adonai, where the proper name of God appears in the text. To mention the name of Yahweh is offensive to them. That’s how seriously some in the Jewish religion take this commandment about the name of God.

Today the name of Yahweh isn't used very much. English translations of the Bible simply translate the divine name into "Lord," and spell it with all capital letters to set it apart. And in other settings, such as the divine service, we more typically refer to God by each person of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's the way that the Christian church commonly refers to Yahweh because that's how He has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ. That is the name that we have been baptized into and have been called to live by, and when we do, we glorify the Lord and especially His name.

But regrettably our sinful self rarely cares about giving glory and reverence to the name of God. It seems like such a simple thing to do, especially when you listen to those who seem to say that Christianity is all about following the Ten Commandments. At least, it would be simple if the Commandments could be kept just by their surface meanings. "You shall not murder," seems like an easy Law to keep, but Jesus tells us that there is more to God's Law than what is simply stated on the surface. He reminds us that simply calling someone a fool violates this commandment. And there is much more to the other Commandments as well. Take the time to reread what Martin Luther writes about each Commandment in his Small Catechism to remind you of what else each one demands of us.

Through the Law that Yahweh placed upon the hearts of each and every one of us, you and I know that we fall far short of keeping any of His Commandments as He intended them to be. It's obvious when we look at the entire scope of each one that our sinful selves fail miserably. There is nothing within any of us that is capable of keeping His Law, and that means there is nothing within any of us that is worthy of the honor and glory of His name. We are lowly slaves to sin just like the people of Israel were lowly slaves to the Egyptians.

As slaves we have no hope, and our future is bleak. Our slave master – which is sin – will never release us from our condition, and we can't escape. We must be liberated just like the people of Israel were, and it is Yahweh who acts on behalf of His people once again.

Yahweh came down from heaven to free His people from their slavery to the Egyptians so many years ago, and He came down from heaven again to free His people from sin 2000 years ago. Jesus came into this world to free us from our slavery to sin. He came here to be a sacrifice on the cross to pay the price that the Law demands, death. By the death and resurrection of Jesus, the second person of the Triune God, Yahweh, freed us for all time so that "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth..."

It is a name that has been placed on you as well. To whom do you belong? Jesus Christ. When did He claim you as His own? It happened at your baptism. You became His when you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. On that day, He claimed you as His own child, and made your name a part of His family. Before the pastor poured water over your head, your parents were asked how you were to be named, and then your name was presented to the Lord. After the water was poured, there was another name given to you to add to your identity, the name of Christian.

That name tells you that you have no need to worry about eternal punishment for your sins. Your sins are forgiven because the name of Jesus has been added to yours, and when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see the sins that you've committed. He sees Jesus and you are forgiven for His sake.

Because of that forgiveness, there is now nothing that you *must* do for salvation because you are no longer a slave to sin. You are completely free in the forgiveness that He has bought for you. There is however, many things that you are given the *privilege* of doing, all of which

can be summed up by saying that you *get* to live in a humble way that will glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

You are given the joy of humbling yourself at the name of Jesus. That is why some bow when the Trinity is mentioned in the service. It's why Christians who are able to have followed the custom of kneeling at the rail when coming to the Lord's Table, or why many Christians make the sign of the cross to remind them of their baptism as Luther encouraged Christians to continue to do. It's not that a person *must* do these things to please God, but you *get* to do them as a sign of your devotion and a remembrance of the great things that Yahweh has done for you.

In addition to these simple things, we show our love for our Lord by serving others out of love for them. The Lord doesn't need the things that you can give and do, but when you do them in His name out of love for others, you do them for Him. But we don't serve others to be *like* Him, we do these things to serve Him. The Father doesn't need you to be a "little Jesus" running around here in the world. One Jesus is enough. The Father made you and called you to be you, and to live the life of good works that He has prepared in advance for you to do, not anyone else.

There will be times that because of your sinful nature you will fail, but even those sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ shed on the cross. There is nothing that we can do, not do or say that He will not forgive while we still draw breath in this world because He has promised that Jesus' sacrifice was enough for all. And He always keeps His promises. His good name depends on it. Amen. In the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.