

World Communion (10Oct17)
Exodus 2:23-3:15, 4:10-17

(NICK) There's so much that could be said about these Narrative Lectionary stories, and today you have the benefit of having two preachers unloading on you, so you should get to hear plenty over the next 45 minutes or so. Just to be clear: that's a joke. Some of you were already squirming, so I'd better get on with it.

My initial point is that it's good you have two pastors. Sonja and I wanted to give you a chance to hear different perspectives amid this passage. Moses asked "who is God?" and the answer was "I AM!" revealing God's identity as "I AM WHO I AM" or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE," something of both personal integrity and also all being. We're going to explore this weird name for a few minutes, pondering who this I AM is, what it means to have I AM as your God.

I AM who responds

The first theme about this God is that it is I AM who responds. We may think of this as a call story, of God calling and commissioning Moses, even as Moses argued knowing he was unqualified, still he repeated that phrase of acceptance we hear a lot in these weeks, "Here I am." Sonja is going to say more, but with calling we should notice it's first responding. The reading starts thick with this: God heard their groaning, God remembered, God took notice. Before God is I AM who calls, I AM responds. Our work is always preceded by God's initiative and compassion.

That is critical because these people who were groaning and crying out apparently weren't even expecting God to be listening. They likely felt very left out, living in the wrong place at the wrong time, without help, without hope, without God. Their entire existence of

slavery in Egypt, of a vile, oppressive leader taking and killing their children, of deadly workloads and frustrations, that must all have seemed like desperate separation from God. And yet God heard. I AM responded.

God listens. God hears. God cares. Suffering and sorrow may feel so isolating, but they cannot cut you off from this I AM God who is striving to respond to you always. Your existence can't be apart from I AM. Let's keep listening for what it means to have a responsive God, the I AM who is centered on you and your needs.

I AM Who Calls and Equips

(SONJA) Our story of Moses reminds us that we are called by the I AM. I am who I am. I have been who I have been. I will be who I will be. I am becoming who I am becoming. Our God is a dynamic verb; not a static noun.

Our story of Moses also reminds us that I AM calls the "Yes, but ..." people. We notice a burning bush and say "Here I am!" We feel awed and honored. until we hear the ask. Then, like Moses, we're prone to argue that God reached the wrong number. "Yes, but how am I possibly worthy?" we might say, or "Yes, but why should anyone listen to *me*? Yes, but I don't talk so pretty good. Yes, but ... really God, can't you send somebody else?"

The "yes, buts" are not necessarily as sign of unfaithfulness. We need to get our hearts and minds ready because a true calling often feels beyond our our ability, beyond our worth, beyond what we prefer to risk. We're in good company. An old woman, Sarah laughed at the promise of a conceiving a child. Samuel, a young boy, felt too young to speak words of judgement to the leaders. Mary, the mother of Jesus, argued that it was biologically impossible for her to bear the Messiah. Thomas the apostle couldn't believe the resurrection until he

touched the wounds of Jesus. They were all "Yes, but" people who finally said, "Here I am," and meant it.

A true calling involves our doubts, and finally getting *off* our "buts" and coming around to trust our "yes" to the I AM, who will be who God has always been. For I AM tells us: "those whom I call, I will equip."

Whatever our calls to the work of shalom—in our families, our schools, our workplaces, or the wider world—we, too can trust I AM to provide.

I AM who accompanies

(NICK) From Sonja's focus on calling and equipping, I want to add a word about location. That the God I AM didn't go to be directly amid the hurting people seems disappointing, but I can't really give a reason for why that would be. Instead God shows up with a burning bush. Maybe it's just storytelling flourish to have God show up in the vegetation.

From that place, consider this place. You may say there's nothing so phenomenal here as shrubbery bursting into flame. To counter that, I'm going to remove my shoes to offer you a sensual cue. See, really the thing in the story wasn't the bush itself. That was a sensual cue, also, to highlight God speaking, this I AM who responds and calls. That's why we gather here, why we come to this place together, because we expect a word from God. We expect these messages and listen for words that tell us we are cared for and loved, that suffering is not what God intends for our lives or our world, listen for where we're invited to contribute, where we're called and sent to offer God's care to our relatives and neighbors and people in need. That doesn't mean God is only here. Rather, we come for the reminder that God is with us always everywhere.

It may seem less miraculous, but I'm amused that instead of a burning bush, God shows up today with a frozen loaf of gluten free bread, another sensual cue, directing us to the vital matter of God speaking to us. With bread at this table, God says "Here I Am, for you." This is the word of presence, of joining with your life, of hearing your longing, of uniting you into the task, filling you with what (or who) you need to bear that presence for others.

This God is I AM who accompanies. In Exodus, God went with Moses, eventually leading the people as a pillar of cloud and fire. More for this name of God, I AM, is that Jesus claims this terminology in the Gospel of John, where we're headed later in this Narrative Lectionary year. In his walking-, talking-, caring-, serving-, eating-, dying-, rising-self is the embodiment of the God I AM for you.

"I AM the bread of life," is one of these ways Jesus identifies himself. He is the God who accompanies, literally breaks bread with you, abides with you for the journey, who knows and nourishes your life and will never leave you, through death and beyond.

We gather here to hear again that word of promise, here on ground made holy by the realization that your God is I AM who accompanies you.

I AM Who Abides

(SONJA) Moses learned that he had what he needed to heed his calling. He had unique access to Pharaoh and his eloquent brother Aaron. He wasn't asked to take on his calling on his own—and neither are we. And he learned that he was provided with the I AM godself. "Now go," says God, "I will be with your mouth and teach you."

Sister Helen Prejean, the Roman Catholic nun who wrote the book *Dead Man Walking* and ministers with people on death row, once

said, "I'm always asking God for a searchlight. But instead, God gives me a penlight."

We usually have to map out the journey of a call one step at a time. This requires trust in the I AM, who says, "Here I am," right in this place, right now, I am being who I have been, who I will continue to be. I will abide with you. I will show you the way.

God made a sacred covenant to our biblical ancestors and to us: I will be your God, and you will be my people. God keeps the covenant even when we forgot. In fact, the prophet Isaiah tells us that God says over and over again to God's people, "Here I am; here I am," waiting for them to pay attention.

On this World Communion Sunday, we have an invitation to listen for the "Here I AM" god. Here I am in the wine and the bread. Here is where my people have found me for over two thousand years and many more than two thousand places. Here I AM with MCC and with the church down the street and across the world. Here I AM, giving you my body as I have always done and always will do. Here I am calling you into One Body through me. "Here I AM." Come. Be refreshed. Then go, *with* me, where I will send you. Let your "Here I am" be "yes."