

Sermon – God is in this place: God has a name Exodus 3

Who here has ever owned a Billy bookcase or some Matilda curtains or a Lack table You've been shopping at Ikea. The company's practice of naming was created by Ingvar Kamprad, IKEA's founder. He had dyslexia and struggled to remember product codes, so gave things names instead. This developed into a coherent system, so some types of products have place names while others have human names...The Billy bookcase is named after an employee, Billy Likjedhal (don't trust my pronunciation!).

We've come to the 4th in our series of sermons about encounters with God – involving some of the big name characters in the Old Testament... Adam and Eve, ...Abraham and Sarah... Jacob and Esau... Names are important... Adam the first human, whose name becomes one of the words for human in the Hebrew Bible ... Eve... whose name means source of life ... Jacob (as Derek alluded to last week) is an example of nominative determinism... his name describes what he will be... whether you understand his name to mean heel grasper or supplanter, this tells you Jacob will become someone with drive and ambition not always perfectly directed... Now today, in a key episode in the story of *Moses*, we have another important focus on names... not the names of people, but the name for God...

Here's the backstory... Moses, after a miraculous escape from genocide, is brought up in the Egyptian royal household. As he grows up, he reconnects with his Israelite roots and then gets into some trouble. He murders an Egyptian who he sees oppressing his people, so he runs away and spends (to borrow Derek's resonant phrase) 40 years staring at sheep. And then this happens... this moment we he meets God... and asks for the name of the God he's talking with...

When we pray in church, we call God many different names... if you look through the liturgy printed in our orders of service or the words to hymns in the hymn book ... you'll find a range... with epithets... Almighty, loving, holy.... And designations...Father...Lord... Redeemer

I wonder: What name do you use when you talk with God... when you pray...?

I remember doing RE at secondary school. I was from a very devoutly Christian family and thought I knew quite enough about the Bible already

and was rather put out when the teacher told us about the “real” name for God. What was she on about... God is just God, surely?

Well, although God is called upon, referred to in the Bible loads, this is one of very few moments when God names Godself.

When God calls to Moses out of the bush that’s burning, and Moses responds, God explains to Moses who he is speaking to. They go round the houses several times as Moses processes what God is asking of him. And through this conversation God identifies Godself using a name that turns up loads in as my RE teacher noted) it doesn’t usually appear in our English translations... ...it’s the name God gives towards the end of our reading today: verse 15, where Moses is invited to say to anyone who asks about his mission

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

Where we have Lord often the Hebrew Bible has 4 Hebrew letters (yod) ה (he) ו (vav) ה (he) which we usually transliterate as YHWH and sometimes (if we were ever going to) pronounce Yahweh... But as you may know, often observant Jews don’t say the actual name...the tradition says it’s too holy to speak outside of the Temple and since the Temple has been destroyed, there is no place to speak it...

The holiness of God’s name reminds us that God is powerful (even perhaps dangerous). If you were with us last week, you may remember Jacob says at the end of the episode we looked at *I have seen the face of God and I’m still alive*... Moses is told to take off his shoes because he’s standing on holy ground.... this God is a force of nature... or, rather, supernature... of which the bush that burns and is not consumed by the flames is a sign...

And yet God has a name like each of us...

God’s name is rooted in relationship.... Twice in the text we’re looking at God refers to Godself as the God of Abraham Isaac, Jacob... God of people we know... God of the ancestors.... A name that locates God in the history of God’s people. And this is the God who has seen... has been watching all the bad things that are happening to God’s people... is going to rescue them and calls Moses to be part of that ...

This is a God who speaks... who communicates with humans using human language... who calls people (like Moses, like all of us) by name...

God's name is being... is life... As Howard read to us, you may have noticed that God gives God's name more than once... in different forms... there's the relational one we've just thought about... and then there's the mysterious one... *I am who I am*

The experts say that once again English bibles don't do justice to the expression... so for some it speaks about God's total freedom ... *I will be who I will be* or about God's enduring presence ... *I am the being that is eternal*...or about God's sheer actuality.... *I am there wherever it may be... I am really there....*

When we have an encounter with God, here in church on Sundays... when we are out in nature... when we are quietly praying at home... it's in some way like our encounters with each other... there may be words... or pictures ... visions like that bush that burns... there is conversation in some way...there is connection, understanding.... The Ignatian tradition of praying invites people imaginatively to talk with God as if they were talking with a friend... that's what Ignatius says ... speak to God as if you were talking with a friend... an approach that suggests – as we believe as Christians – that the one who spoke the world into existence – the source of all being and life – is someone whose name we know... and someone who knows and calls us by our names...

As we reflected, we listened to a setting of the Sanctus – *Holy holy holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are fully of your glory* – sung by the Hilliard ensemble, with Jan Garbarek weaving in some saxophone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prMSjig0GeQ>