

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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August 21, 2005
14th Sunday after Pentecost
Exodus 24:3-11
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 6:2-8
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 34
Second Lesson: Romans 11:33-36
Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

I Am the LORD

As a child, did you ever get one of those plaques or one of those bookmarks that has your name and under your name it tells what it means and you get a passage from the Bible or something like that with it? I remember seeing them and getting some of them, and I remember a couple of different definitions for the name “Randy”. But there is one that sticks out that I remember in my mind. Any idea what the name “Randy” might mean?

Wolf. There are other ones like “Benjamin”—son of my right hand, son of my strength. I thought that one was cool. I got “wolf”. Who wants to be named “Wolf”? When I was born did my parents look at me and say, “He looks like a wolf. I think we will call him ‘Randy’”. I don’t think so, although, if my children have ever shown you my high school senior picture, it kind of does look like a wolf with a full beard and real long hair. You’d get a big kick out of it. But I don’t think my parents knew that was what my senior picture was going to look like and that is why they gave me the name “Randy”.

In the Bible there are times when the names that are given are more like that, where God uses the name that is meant to communicate something and to teach something so that even today, sitting out here in a breeze, we learn something about God. Think about the ones we read about—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Remember Jacob, when he was born as the second of the twins to be born and he came out holding on to his brother, Esau’s heel. That is why he was called “Jacob”, which means “heel grabber”. Why in the world do you think the Lord had him grabbing his heel when he was born so that he would be called “heel grabber”? The Lord had a purpose because “heel grabber” was another phrase that meant “deceiver”. The guy who “pulls your leg” is probably how we would put it today--deceiver. Remember, Jacob is the guy that deceived his father to steal the birth rite from Esau. And then Jacob, when his brother Esau found out that he had done all that, remember Esau was going to kill him. So Jacob had to flee and go to Uncle Laban’s land. He was trying to do things on his own and where it got him was being chased out of town by his own brother who wanted to run him through with a spear.

Remember later though, Jacob wrestled with God, and his name was changed from “Jacob” to “Israel”—him who struggles with God. And that name then reminded Jacob really that with God on your side you can do a lot more than if you are trying to do it with your own wits and your own deception and things like that. There is an example in the Bible of a name that really means something, that communicates something, that teaches you and me yet today.

In what I read to you earlier from Exodus, do you remember there was a phrase that kept getting used over and over, a name? “I am the LORD. I am the LORD. I am the LORD. I am the LORD.” Four times that phrase is used in those few verses. If you look at the way the name the LORD is printed in your service folder, you notice that it is different than all of the other ones, right? It has got all capital letters. I am the LORD—the LORD is the name that reminds us that God is the God of the covenant, the God who is faithful, the God who keeps his promises, and the God who acts in grace. When God talks to Moses in Exodus 6 that’s what Moses needed to hear. And as God talks to you and me today through what he said to Moses, it is what we need to hear. We need to hear that God looks us in the eye and puts his hands on our shoulders and says, “I am the LORD.” Do you understand what this means? He says it means, “I am faithful to my promises and I will take you to be my own people.” That is important for us to know.

When God said these words to Moses in our text, he had called Moses to go back down to Egypt. Remember Moses spent the first 40 years of his life in Egypt. He had tried to take over on his own and lead the Israelites and he killed that Egyptian and he ended up having to leave. Then he spent the next 40 years of his life in Midian taking care of the flock and various things like that. And God came to him in that burning bush and said, “Moses, it’s time for you to go back and lead my people out of Egypt, to bring them out of that slavery so that they can go back and take that land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Do you remember Moses’ response? “You bet you Lord, let me at them.” Well, if that’s the one you remember, you are remembering wrong. He came up with eight different excuses why God should send somebody else. You know, kind of like we do. He sounds a little bit like a kid when you tell the kid to go clean his or her room and they give you all kinds of reasons why right now isn’t the best time to do it, but tomorrow will be a better time and maybe never is the best time. That’s kind of what Moses sounded like.

But God let him go down to Egypt. He made all these promises to him. He gave him all this strength that would not come from Moses but that would come from God. Then he gets down there and Moses summons up the courage—I can imagine he was just as nervous as could be—and Moses walks in and says to Pharaoh, “Let God’s people go out so that they can worship three days in the wilderness and then we will come back.” Can you imagine that kind of exhale to get rid of all those nerves after he had said that? What was Pharaoh’s response? “You know what? All those bricks you guys have been making, I’ll tell you what. You go gather the straw and keep making the same amount of bricks.”

The people weren’t real thrilled with Moses. Moses no doubt was wondering, “What am I doing here? I am making things worse. Things aren’t getting better.” So God comes and talks to him. God said to Moses, “*I am the LORD.*” He kept repeating that phrase. “I am the LORD.”

A little bit later in the book of Exodus, God is going to have a sermon on the name of the LORD. “*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving*

wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6,7) The name of the LORD—abounding in love, slow to anger, rich in mercy, and yet he is also the faithful God. He reminds Moses when he says, “*I am the LORD*”, that he is the God who is going to keep his promises. And then he points him to those promises. He had made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he would give them the land that they were living in as strangers. He even said to Moses, “I revealed myself to them as God Almighty but never as the LORD”. Well he had used the name of the LORD because we are told that Abraham called on the name of the LORD, but he didn’t reveal it in his actions what he was about to do. He says, “*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.*” He was going to show just what the name of the LORD means and how he is going to have mercy on his people and the mighty acts of judgments—those plagues and those things that happened in Egypt—so that the Egyptians would let the people go. God was going to SHOW them what the name of the LORD looked like in action as he kept his promise that he gave Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—that the land of Israel would be theirs, not as a stranger living in a foreign land, but that he would give it to them as their possession. In order to do that, he was going to bring them out of Egypt and Moses would lead them.

So God had to remind him four times in our verses—“I am the LORD. I am the LORD. I keep my promises. I am the LORD. I keep my promises.”—because Moses was forgetting it.

Be honest with yourself. Do you ever forget God’s promises to you? Have you ever faced things in life, you get your stomach in all those knots because you have to do something that you don’t really want to do? You have to confront someone with their sin. You have to remind someone of what is truly important in life, that all the things in life aren’t that big when it comes down to the greatest thing we have—which is knowing God and who he is and what he has done for us. I’ve done it and it is not always fun. It is nerve wracking. And then you share the Gospel with someone and they go, “Huh. Yeah. Whatever.” And then you wonder, “God, where is your promise? You said the Word was not going to be returned empty. Lord, I struggled to get my courage up so that I could go out and talk to someone about what sin is and how sin condemns us to hell and your love is the only thing that can take it away and that Jesus is the only answer for sin. Not our efforts. Not our desires. Not our trying hard. And they are not listening.” And you wonder, “God, where are your promises?”

Or you face a difficulty in life—financial difficulty. You face health problems and you think to yourself, “God, where are your promises now? There is that guy over there who doesn’t give a hoot about you and he doesn’t have any problems and I have loved you and served you all of my life since before I could remember anything. I believed you were my Savior and I am going through this and they are not. Where are your promises, God?” Then God comes to us and looks us square in the eye and says, “I am the LORD—the God of full and faithful grace. My promises are there.”

Think of those promises that he has made to us. Think of the promises he made to us at our baptism—the promises he has made now that point to Zander and to Christina.

They've been baptized into Christ's death. The perfection that God demands of you, God has given to you. It has washed away your sins. And the God who loves you enough to do that for you, he has said to you, "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." If he loved us enough to give us his own son, will he not also gladly give us all good things as scripture says. God says to us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus—neither heights or depths, angels or demons, past or future or anything else in all creation—that is his promise to us. His promises to us that say that all things will work for the good of those who love him—we have to remember our good is our eternal good that keeps us close to God and loving God and connected to him and connected to what our Savior washed away in our baptism. Our being does not mean that everything in this world is going to go the way we want it and things are going to line up right in a row for us. God has never promised that. In fact, he has said through much suffering we will walk on the paths in this world.

But God's promises to us are certain. He loved us enough to die for us. He isn't going to abandon us now. That is the incredible confidence that we have as Christians.

How many people tune into Dr. Phil or to Oprah to find some kind of source of strength or some kind of confidence in daily living? You and I have it—right there in the Word of God, in our baptism, in the Lord's Supper—God said, "I love you. I have forgiven you and I never will abandon you." That is what "I am the LORD" means when he looks us in the eye.

He also reminded Moses that "I am the LORD" means that he was going to be the one that would do the hard lifting in making the people of Israel his own people. It wasn't going to be up to Moses, to Moses' eloquence, to anything Moses would do of his own power or strength, so he said, *"I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD."*

Moses was worried and troubled because he thought, "The people aren't listening to me. They are mad at me. Pharaoh isn't listening to me. He is mad at me. No one is listening to me. What in the world can I possibly do?" So God has to remind us, "Quit looking at yourself and start looking at me. I am the LORD. Look at me and put your trust in me because I am the one who will take these people as my own." God chose the children of Israel out of all the nations on earth to be his treasured possession and dealt with them in a way that he did with no other. Why? Because he is the LORD. Because he is the God of full and faithful grace. Not because they had done anything. But God was going to be the one who was going to do all the heavy lifting. He would take them. He would bring them to the land flowing with milk and honey. It would take 40 years because they would turn away from God and look in other directions, but God would keep his promise in spite of the people being unfaithful to him. God remained faithful and made them his people.

Think about what that means for you and I. As we go through life, there are going to be times that we are unfaithful to God. We are going to do things that go against his will.

We are going to go off in different directions and think there are things that are more important than God, but God says, "I am the LORD". The LORD means "I AM". That word translated means "I AM". That means God is not a God of the past. God is not a God of the future. But he is the God of the present. And in his presence, he is always with us, wherever we have wandered, he stays at our side. And he is longing and looking forward to receiving us back as his own whenever we say, "Lord, I have sinned. In Christ's name, forgive me." He's never going to hold up his hand and say, "Wait a minute. Prove it first"—like you or I might to someone else that slighted us. He is going to say "I AM. I live in the present, right now, and I am with you, and I love you, right now. And I will love you forever."

He takes us and makes us his people. He washes away our sin. He gives us eternal life. And he tells us, "You are living as aliens or strangers in this world now. Your true home is in heaven. And I AM is going to be with you the whole time until I take you to be with me in heaven."

When we have that kind of knowledge, that kind of trust, that kind of confidence, God becomes important in our life and we want to worship him. We want to know him better. We want to serve him faithfully because he has done so much for us. Then we live life with this confidence that we have the eternal present God right at our side, loving us, strengthening us and sustaining us.

I am the LORD gives us that confidence.