

Sunday 18th April God's Name

Exodus 3 (2:23–3:15) Second reading John 4:25-26, 8:23-24 and 8:57-58

We first look in our Bibles at Exodus 3:14, where we see the words 'I AM WHO I AM' printed in small capitals. The word in the Hebrew text here is the name of God, Yahweh. This is his covenant name; it is not Jehovah, because that is the result of a later misunderstanding. The name 'LORD' is not a translation of Yahweh, but it was chosen to prevent that people would pronounce the holy name Yahweh. In this name of God no maleness is implied.

We skip the stories about the birth and early life of Moses. Exodus 2:23-25 really belongs to Exodus 3; it tells us about the situation of the Israelites and why God intervenes. They are in trouble and they pray – and God hears them and sees them (2:24, 3:7, 9). He remembers his covenant with their fathers (2:24, 3:6) and he is faithful to the past – but there is also a new beginning because he is going to intervene on behalf of Israel.

Moses is reluctant to do what God asks of him, so God tells Moses his Name, his personal name; this name is our focus for today. God's name Yahweh means something like 'I am' – 'I will be' – 'I am with you'.

Names are important in the Bible; they often characterise a person. What can we positively learn about God from understanding his Name? We learn that he is not just any God, like all the nations had their gods. We see the following things in Exodus 1-3:

- The LORD is a God of covenant, specifically with Israel. It is his covenant people who get to know his Name and so who he is. We are now also in his covenant.
- The LORD is faithful. We may think he has gone, Israel may think that he does not see them, but he is there and he hears.
- The LORD is accessible: like Israel, we can always pray to him and we know that he hears our prayers. Unlike Baal, God never sleeps.
- The LORD is the saviour of the oppressed. He doesn't give us what we need; he is whom we need.
- The LORD exists absolutely: he is not dependent on our approval. When people find their keys or their phone again, they easily say 'There is a god', but that is nonsense. God exists anyway, whether or not we accept him. Yet he is also there 'for' his people. God is more than the feelings we have. When we feel bad, he still exists.
- But he is tough with the pharaoh. He is not someone who tolerates sin and disobedience. At the end of time he will likewise judge the world and the people in it.

This God we know not only from history, but also in Jesus. Seven times in John's Gospel Jesus refers to himself as 'I am'. We read three of these passages. By saying this 'I am', Jesus claims that he is the God of Israel; God become human. God is not far away, we know him in and through Jesus. We know him as Jesus.