

Sermon 30th August 10am

Readings:

Exodus 3: 1-15

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. **3** Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' **4** When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' **5** Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' **6** He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. **9** The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. **10** So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' **11** But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' **12** He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

The Divine Name Revealed

13 But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' **14** God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'^[a] He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."' **15** God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord,^[b] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you":

This is my name for ever,
and this my title for all generations.

Matthew 16: 21-28

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great

suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

The Cross and Self-Denial

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

²⁷ 'For the 'Son of Man' is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the 'Son of Man' coming in his kingdom.'

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

I am about to become a grandmother for the second time which is both very exciting and a time of anxiety and uncertainty too.

Some of you know Sarah my youngest daughter and the baby will be a brother to Arlo who is now 2 and a half. There are so many unknowns in the run up to the birth but the biggest question from all our family is, "What are you going to call him?" What is going to be his name? We remain in suspense and I suspect this will continue until this little fella makes his entrance to the world.

Names are naturally so important to us. They are a fundamental part of our identity. What is the right way for us to refer to one another without causing offence and what if we cannot remember everyone's name. My mother-in-law's funeral is this coming Thursday. You will see her named as Betty in the news sheet. This was very important to her. Betty is her given name, and she was Baptised as such. Anyone, usually a healthcare professional, found writing her name as Elizabeth on a form would catch the sharp end of her tongue.

In both our readings today names are important.

In the Gospel we hear Jesus referring to himself when he is speaking to his disciples as the "Son of Man" and in our earlier reading Moses asks God how Moses should refer to him. What is God's name?

At first, when God calls to Moses from the burning bush, God tells Moses,

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob".

Let's not forget that Moses had grown up in Egypt where over 1,500 gods were named and worshipped at that time.

God was being clear to Moses exactly who he is and we know, if we read ahead in Exodus, that in due course God will show his supremacy over all the Egyptian gods enabling Moses to lead the Israelites out from Egypt.

Moses goes on to ask what name he should he refer to God by when he speaks to the Israelites and God replies, ehyeh asher ehyer. **I AM WHO I AM.**

This can also be translated from the Hebrew as I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE. The Hebrew verb is very much describing God's presence as a presence that is a very active.

God goes on to say, "this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations".

God is promising that he will be present and with us for the future ahead. For eternity.

I AM WHO I AM or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE. Constant, sustained, ever present.

"This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations."

Moses is discovering that God is not some ancestral deity that he half-knew and who has seemed too distant to help Moses and the Israelites in their plight. God is about to act. God is promising a presence but does not guarantee an easy outcome.

Last week, I overheard someone questioning over coffee at St Christopher's why is Jesus was calling himself the 'Son of Man'? I don't know who I overheard but I want to thank them for posing such a great question and inspiration for this sermon.

Jesus refers to himself as the 'Son of Man' about 30 times in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus lets **others** confess that he is the "Son of God" but **he choses** to speak of himself only as the 'Son of Man'. I just want to clarify that this is the case in the three Synoptic Gospels, the Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke but John does record Jesus alluding to his divinity more explicitly.

One of the mysteries of our faith is that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. He is both fully the Son of God 100% and fully a human being the Son of Man 100%. The mathematicians amongst us will know that this does not add up and so this remains a mystery for us mere mortals.

Christ was careful not to declare himself as the Messiah or Son of God as this would have been a politically loaded title full of expectations by the Jews of the time who were looking for a conquering, reigning king who would defeat Israel's enemies and free them from Roman occupation. Jesus speaks of his humanity, his mortality, when he reminds people that he is the 'Son of Man' whilst at the same time he is slowly, gradually revealing his divinity from the point when he started healing and performing other miracles.

We heard in last week's Gospel that when Christ asked who people say that he is, Peter declared, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God". Previously Peter was also among the disciples declared that Christ was "Truly the son of God" after he had invited Peter to walk on the water with him.

In the earlier chapters of Matthew Christ has been gradually revealing **who** he is to his disciples and now, at this point, he is beginning to reveal **what this will mean** for them all.

Earlier in Matthew Jesus had explained the cost of following him when he said

"Foxes have dens and birds have nests but the 'Son of Man' has nowhere to lay his head".

He later declared to some of the teachers of the law that he, Jesus, has authority on earth to forgive sins, and later that the 'Son of Man' is the Lord of the Sabbath. When Jesus called his twelve disciples and sent them out to begin their ministry he was clear to them that this was not going to be an easy task. He had told them that

“You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the ‘Son of Man’ comes”.

Jesus is introducing the idea that he will come again.

A couple of chapters later he mentions that he will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale. He has introduced death and burial but had not yet mentioned glory. And then, in his explanation of the parable of the weeds he told us that the ‘Son of Man’ will send his angels to weed out from his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

Jesus is gradually revealing his divinity by his actions: in forgiving sins, redefining the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, claiming authority over the Sabbath and the Temple, and he is reminding us that he is also the ‘Son of Man’. He is human even though his actions suggest divinity. So we can see that Christ has been unfolding the full picture to the disciples in bite-sized chunks.

And then here in verse 27 he says, ‘For the ‘Son of Man’ is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.’

This is a new revelation to the disciples. Jesus will die, he will be buried, but he will come back and he will come back in the glory of his Father and people will be judged and treated accordingly.

And then there is the final somewhat curious verse which must have puzzled the disciples. **“Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the ‘Son of Man’ coming in his kingdom.”**

What could this mean to the disciples?

Six days later Peter, James and John see Jesus in his dazzling glory in the transfiguration on the mountain top.

After the resurrection the disciples see Jesus on many occasions.

So, in our reading from Exodus we see Moses discovering the God he thought he half-knew as a distant ancestral figure turning out to be the God who has been there from the beginning and will be there forever. God has been watching all along and is about to act. Moses is about to play a pretty significant role although not without huge trepidation and a series of cascading excuses that follow this meeting at the burning bush.

In our second reading we see Jesus turning out to be someone Peter didn’t quite fully expect. We see Christ getting Peter to wake up and widen his mind to the divinity he was standing alongside and the greatness and magnitude of the promise of eternal life. Peter was about to see how this would unfold and would play a very significant and costly part himself.

Perhaps, like Moses and like Peter, the God we've half-known is bigger, closer, and more active than we've allowed ourselves to believe. We too can be tempted to keep God at a comfortable distance — a memory, an idea, a Sunday habit — rather than the living presence who has been watching all along and is already at work in our lives right now. And when that presence draws near and asks something of us, our first instinct, like Moses' and like Peter's, will often be fear, or excuses, or the urge to protest that this cannot be the way. But the invitation this morning is the same one they received: not to have everything resolved or every fear settled before we respond,

but to take the next faithful step anyway — trusting the One who says "I will be with you," and the One who calls us, at whatever cost, to lose our life in order to find it. Amen