



# A SERMON

by Rev. Victor H. Floyd: September 28, 2025



"Moses and the Burning Bush" 1985, Keith Haring

## Say My Name, Say My Name

EMBRACE YOUR DESTINY, CHILD!

### Exodus 2:23-25

*After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Their cry for help rose up to God from their slavery. 24 God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.*

### Exodus 3:1-15

*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 Mount Horeb, the mountain of Elohim. 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 spacious land, to 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 Now go, I am sending 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 serve God on this mountain." 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." 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, 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 forever, and this my title for all generations..."*

### Exodus 4:10-17

*But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." 13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." 14 Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do. 16 He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. 17 Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."*

### UP, UP AND OY VEY

Before Superman was Clark Kent, his name is Jal-El, from the planet Kryton. Jal-El's parents place him in a escape pod, launch him into space. He is taken in by a human couple in Kansas. They raise him as their own. He rises from Smallville to serve humanity, and to save. The -el of Jal-El means that he was "of God." I know this because the creators of *Superman* were Jews. They patterned<sup>1</sup> the story of *Superman* after the

<sup>1</sup> Brian Kinniard, "Moses and the Man of Steel" *Psychology Today*, September 28, 2014, accessed online at <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-hero-in-you/201409/moses-and-the-man-of-steel>>

story of Moses, the baby who was rescued from the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter. She names him Moshe, Moses, which means to draw out—out of the Nile. He fulfills his destiny, drawing the people of God out of slavery in Egypt. Our Jewish neighbors refer to ancient Egypt as "the narrow place"—you know, like Smallville.<sup>2</sup>

Moses was raised in the narrow place. There, he witnesses the murder of a slave, a fellow Hebrew, and in a fit of rage, Moses murders the Egyptian slave driver and buries him in the sand. Now a wanted man, his face plastered on every pyramid, Moses flees to Midian, where he is taken in by a family with awesome first names. He marries a woman named Zipporah whose father is called Reuel and Jethro. Now, we discover the fugitive Moses hoping to fade into the Midianite countryside and grow old in denial, but this time, Moses cannot escape denial.<sup>3</sup> An oppressed nation needs him.

How will Moses overcome his reluctance and answer God's call? If anyone here is reluctant to put your faith into action, today is your day. Following worship, Calvary will make it easy for you to put your faith into action. More on that later. But first, you must choose to leave behind whatever is stopping you from saying yes to God's call. We come this morning with many feelings. Our nation is constricting. People feel trapped and fearful. What is your Narrow Place? Where is your Smallville?

### THEN AND NOW

Many parts of the Bible that are just not relatable. A talking snake? An ark that was a floating zoo? What on earth could a 3000-year-old story about a burning bush have to say to a 21st-century congregation of good-looking, well-educated people? These stories are removed from our experience. But when these stories begin to break open into something that grabs us, watch out. They become relevant and require our immediate attention.

**Exodus 2:23b-25** *The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Their cry for help rose up to God from their slavery. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.*

Four verbs teach us a lot. 1) God *hears* us pleading. 2) God *remembers* the promises of the covenant, 3) God *sees* this world, and 4) God *takes notice*. We are held in a Divine Mind that hears, remembers, sees and notices. God hears/remembers/sees/notices what the pharaoh had rather keep hidden. God doesn't explain away our pain but gets involved in it.

Enter Moses, not quite at home anywhere, not exactly who he once was, not yet who he's going to be. Moses is haunted by his past, unsure of his place in the world. Something so human about him—vulnerable, insecure.

Out there in the desert trying to keep some sheep alive, actively not looking for God. Then, the mystery kicks in. It matters that the story of freedom<sup>4</sup> begins here—not with strength, but with groaning. Not with action, but with the simple act of turning aside and paying attention. This is how change begins.

### BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

Even as we read this ancient story, there are people crying out under the weight of empire and modern day pharaohs. The groaning has not stopped. We are living in a time when whole communities—children, seniors, families—are bombed in Gaza, with nowhere to run. And their cries rise up. We are watching as freedom of speech, of the press, freedom of religion, of peaceful protest is under attack—here, at home. Books banned. Teachers are silenced. Leaders stoke violence not to serve the people, but to enrich themselves. Democracy is under attack.

But there are flashes of hope. Jimmy Kimmel was cancelled by the leader of the free world. The people cried out, cancelled their subscriptions, and the Disney gods took notice and corrected their error. How Kimmel rose to the moment is a lesson in fortitude and grace.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> < <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smallville>>

<sup>3</sup> Terrible pun. Groan.

<sup>4</sup> The history of liberation is integral to our theology.

<sup>5</sup> John Koblin and Michael M. Grynbaum, "Jimmy Kimmel, Somber but Defiant, Defends Free Speech in Return to ABC" *New York Times*, September 23, 2025, accessed online at < <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/23/business/media/jimmy-kimmel-return-monologue.html>> (September 23, 2025)

Here is the hope I hold: The God of Exodus is alive and well. The same God who heard the Hebrew slaves still listens. The same God who saw their oppression still sees. And the same God who called Moses—uncertain, stammering, murderous Moses—is still calling people to put their faith into action. And that includes you.

### **SAY MY NAME: THE CALL AND THE QUESTION**

Had I experienced a burning bush talking to me, I probably would've made a video, posted it online and went on my way. But Moses turns aside—and that's when God says his name. Pause with me here—in the silence between name and response. This is not a throwaway moment. It's the beginning of everything. There's power in being called by name—intimacy and dignity. When someone says your name—not your title, not your case number, but your name—you come alive. Watch this. Dave Hurlburt! Margaret Nalbach! Kei Fujimura! See there. It matters. God calls Moses by name twice.

The freedom of a nation begins with the recognition of an individual. It starts with being heard, remembered, seen, and noticed.

### **GOD WILL BE**

But Moses is incredulous. "And just who shall I tell them sent me? What is your name anyway? Voice From Bush? Hey You Up There?" And God answers, "I AM WHO I AM." The most important verb in scripture. Exodus 3:14: *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. Ehyeh means "I am" but also "I was. I will be. I have been" and so on.<sup>6</sup> Asher can mean "that, who, which" and so on. The name of God is too big for human language, but here ehyeh asher ehyeh means:

*I am who I am...I was who I was...I will be who I will be... have been who I have been... (to infinity)*  
A Jewish mediation on Exodus 3:14 as taught by Rabbi Michael Lerner. Mix and match.

*I am who I was...I will be who I am becoming...I am that I will be... (to infinity)*

Moses wants to know God, but God will not be apprehended, not by human thinking anyway. The medieval anonymous guide to contemplation known as *The Cloud of Unknowing* teaches we cannot think God, we can only love God.<sup>7</sup> God can well be loved, but God cannot be thought.<sup>8</sup> These words should hang in flashing neon over the door of every seminary.

Because God is not an ideology. God just IS, and that should be enough for us right now. The One who *becomes*. The One who *will be with you*—in Egypt, in exile, in the wilderness, in the streets, in the sickroom, in the courtroom, in the boardroom, in the rubble, in the voting booth, in the church. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God.<sup>9</sup>*

God is mystery, but God is not confusion. God is presence. God is movement. God is here right now and already on the way.

### **NO MORE EXCUSES**

But Moses doesn't feel ready. He says, "I'm not a good speaker." "Please send someone else." God says Aaron will go with you. Your brother talks real good. You need him. And he needs you. I am calling you. Your sister Miriam is standing by, too. Because nobody can do this work alone. God gives us traveling partners, companions. No one is exempt from the simple invitation to turn aside, to listen for God. No one is too young, too old, too unsure, too scared, too tired, too soft-spoken, too privileged, too overwhelmed to be called.

### **HOLY GROUND**

The world is burning. There is real pain, real fear, real injustice, and yet even now, the bush burns and is not consumed. The voice calls not in anger but in love. It's saying your name, calling you to do more than think you can, calling you to love God, and let that agape love lead you to new choices. This moment, this life,

---

<sup>6</sup> O. Wesley Allen, editor. *The Preacher's Bible Handbook* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019) 15. ("Exodus" Lisa Wilson Davison)

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rohr, Center for Contemplation and Action Daily Devotional, January 29, 2020, "The Cloud of Unknowing" <<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-cloud-of-unknowing-2020-01-29/>> (September 23, 2025)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Aurora Leigh 86 by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, The Literature Network Forum, accessed online at <<https://www.online-literature.com/forums/showthread.php?77123-Please-help-with-poem-analyzation-Aurora-Leigh-86-by-Elizabeth-Barrett-Browning>> (September 20, 2025)

this ordinary, weary ground is holy—not because we're ready or pure of heart—God knows!—but because the Great I AM...is.

So take off the shoes of cynicism, and turn aside. Remove whatever armor you put on just to make it through the week, and turn aside. Turn aside and hear what God has to say. "I have seen. I have heard. I will be with you." *Amen.*