

Sunday, September 3, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Who Am I?”
Exodus 3:1-15 and Matthew 16:21-28

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “What is your response when someone asks, ‘Who are you?’” (name, parent, child, job title, nationality, etc.)

Exodus 3:1-15. Context. Raised at the court of Pharaoh, Moses finds himself at odds with the powers that be after killing an Egyptian who had been beating one of the Hebrew slaves. He fled to Midian, the northern part of the Arabian peninsula (east of the Jordan river and south of the Dead Sea) where he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro. According to rabbinic tradition, Moses remained in Midian for 40 years before he was called by God to lead the Israelites to freedom, the focus of this week’s reading. The mountain of God, where Moses received his call is named ‘Horeb’ in this passage, and ‘Sinai’ elsewhere. Moses is not eager to take up the task God has called him to do and makes excuses. But God will have none of it. As part of the conversation, God reveals the sacred name to Moses: I AM WHO I AM, as it is explained; YHWH (or JHVH) as it is abbreviated and transliterated. The name itself reveals little about God, but it becomes the great I AM that from then on is a sign of God’s self-revelation. Although the four-letter name of God was pronounced ‘Yahweh’ (or ‘Jahveh’), it was considered so sacred that a circumlocution came to be used by the Jewish community: Adonai, which translates ‘my Lord.’ In some English-language Bibles today, the sacred name is represented by ‘LORD’ all in capital letters. In Hebrew Bibles the four consonants of the sacred name are pointed (i.e. given an indication of vocalization underneath the consonants) with the vowels of ‘adonai’ to remind the reader of which name to pronounce. The translators of the King James Bible, following precedents going back several hundred years, combined the Hebrew consonants of the sacred name with the vocalization of ‘adonai,’ resulting in a unique name for God: ‘JeHoVaH’.

Matthew 16:21-28. Context. After Peter confessed Jesus as Messiah (king) and “son of the living God” in the shadow of tetrarch (king) Philip’s palace at Caesarea Philippi and near the temple dedicated to Julius Caesar who was proclaimed a god upon his death, Jesus began to spell out the implications of Peter’s confession.

Peter objects and Jesus rebukes him, calling him “satan,” a Hebrew word here meaning 'tempter.' The true disciples of Jesus will be those who not only make the proper confession, but give their lives in pursuit of the kingdom of God. Jesus, along with Matthew’s community, truly believed that the kingdom was very close at hand. We can interpret this opinion two ways: either Jesus and the early Christians were wrong; or the kingdom is even closer now than it was then!

Read Exodus 3:1-15 and Matthew 16:21-28

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Exodus 3:1-15 and Matthew 16:21-28 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

What was God’s response when Moses asked for God’s name? (Exodus 3:14) Who do you say God is? [Creator, Father, Rock, Alpha and Omega, Lord, Ancient of Days, etc.] What do those names mean to you?

“Our experience of unworthiness is often a starting point in our discipleship. But it must be the final experience of unworthiness. As we grow closer to God, we begin to see ourselves as worthy because we are made worthy by God’s love and transforming grace. We see the delight God takes in us as a part of God’s creation, blessed in so many ways. Our prayers begin with confession but then can move on to commitment, from acceptance of grace and forgiveness into intercession and calls for justice and for peace. We don’t stay in a state of shame but move into grace because of God’s call on our lives.”

- God called Moses to rescue the Israelites from Egypt. Moses did not think he could do it, but God assured him that God would be with him. Are there things in your life that God may be calling you to do but you are unsure if you can?
- Can you think of someone who is stuck in a place of unworthiness and struggles with who they are? What could you do for this person?

In today’s Matthew passage, what did Jesus say he needed to do? (Matthew 16:21).

Before today’s scripture, Jesus had commended Peter for recognizing Jesus as Messiah. Yet Matthew 16:23 says, “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.’” Why do you think Jesus said that to Peter? How do you determine whether something is divine or human? Have you ever felt you were the stumbling block of ministry?

Read Matthew 16:24: “Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’” What does Jesus mean by "denying oneself" and "taking up the cross"? How might the passage apply to your life?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, Moses encountered the Divine through the burning bush, may we also encounter your divine call in our daily routines. Teach us to listen attentively to your voice and to respond with obedience, knowing that you are the great "I AM."

Grant us the strength to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus’ path of selflessness. Guide us to embrace the transformative journey of faith, finding life by losing it for Christ's sake. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.