

THE GREAT I AM
Advent Sermon Series: Power in the Name
December 14, 2014 –Exodus 3: 4-14 & John 14: 6
The Church of the Covenant

In our scripture from Exodus when Moses cleverly asks God to reveal His name to him, when the people of Israel ask me, *“What is his name?”*, (Exodus 3: 13) Moses is cleverly asking God to reveal not only his name but also the source of God’s power. It is believed that to invoke the name of a deity also invokes its presence; to invoke the presence of a deity also then invokes its power. It is believed there is power in the name of God to invoke His presence and power; God draws near as we name the name of the Lord. God then responds to Moses’ inquiry by responding: *“I AM WHO I AM”*. Say this to the people of Israel: *“I AM has sent me to you.”* (v. 14) So Moses can now invoke the name, the presence and the power of The Great I Am. The name *“I AM WHO I AM”* can also be translated, *“I will be who I will be”*, and it can also be translated, *“I was who I was”*. A mere slight change in the vowel pointing of the four letters referred to as the TETRAGRAMMATON, meaning the four letters, constituting the name of God, renders these three different translations –I am who I am; I was who I was; I will be who I will be. I am life, says God. It is connected to the Hebrew word, *hayah*, translated being, existence or presence. I am life PRESENT; I am life PAST; I am life FUTURE. I am your past and your present and your future. All that was I AM; all that is I AM; all the ever will be I AM. I AM pre-existent to creation itself; I AM in the eternal present and everything within it; all the future is contained in the GREAT I AM.

But the name of God was considered so holy that it was never uttered aloud. It was so powerful that one dare not name the name of God out loud. When scribes would be reading the word of God in Old Testament times and they would come to the TETRAGRAMMATON they would say *“Adonai”* (meaning *“Lord”*) instead of what we say as YAHWEH. The four letters of the TETRAGRAMMATON are Y, H, W, and H. We pronounce them Yahweh. But the sacred and holy name of God was never written down. It was never uttered aloud. They never added the vowel pointings to the four consonants. When the Old Testament scriptures were transferred from person to person orally, before writing had been invented, the speaker of the WORD would memorize every word precisely and speak it exactly. Indeed, if one added or subtracted one thing to the WORD of God the person speaking would be killed. Nothing like killing someone if they got something wrong to make sure that everything was always perfect. Same way, once the word of God was transcribed into writing. The scribes would have to get every letter, every consonant, every tiny vowel pointing correct and precise, or they would be killed. It is why you can look at the Dead Sea scrolls, transcribed around the time of Christ, and discover that the Book of Isaiah found there is word for word what is in our Book of Isaiah today. Scripture is inherently reliable for just this reason. But here is the problem –the name of God was never spoken out loud and the name of God was never written down. So the precise name of God was lost over time. When we glibly and naively speak *“Yahweh”* today for the name of God we probably have it completely wrong. We really do not know exactly what the TETRAGRAMMATON is or how it is pronounced. The name of God has retreated into history and today is a mystery. The name was lost. The presence was lost over time. The power in the name was lost. How to find it? How to find the power in the name once again?????

Skip now to the New Testament and to the Gospel of John. There unfolds Jesus endeavoring to present a clever riddle to His disciples. Right after the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus says to His disciples: *“I am the bread of life.”* (John 6: 35). He says: *“I am the bread which came down from heaven.”* (v. 41) *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven.”* (v. 51) I am the sustenance of your life; I am the source of your life. I AM THE GREAT I AM. Jesus is dropping a major hint here but the disciples do not yet understand. Later Jesus says: *“I am the light of the world.”* (John 8: 12) I am the creative, life-giving light which entered the world at creation. I am the light which is the life of men and the darkness has not nor ever will overcome it. I AM THE GREAT I AM, hints Jesus. Jesus later says, *“Before Abraham was, I am.”* (John 8: 58) Before the ancient patriarchs existed, I existed. Before

creation itself was wrought I lived and had being. I was who I was; I am who I am. I AM THE GREAT I AM, suggests Jesus. Jesus says: *"I am the door of the sheep."* (John 10: 7) I am the One who opens the doorway to God. I am come that they may have life and have it abundantly! (v. 10) Again, Jesus hints to them who He is. I AM THE GREAT I AM. He says to them: *"I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know me..."* (John 10: 11) The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. I am the One spoken about in the 23rd Psalm. I am the One who gathers His lambs within His everlasting arms. I AM THE GREAT I AM. Again, Jesus states to His disciples: *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."* (John 11: 25-26) I WAS life at creation; I AM life today and in the present; I WILL BE life in the end of days when I shall come and judge the quick and the dead and bring to eternal life those who have loved my appearing at the day of resurrection. I am who I am. I was who I was. I will be who I will be. I AM the resurrection. I AM the life. I AM THE GREAT I AM. Jesus says: *"I am the true vine..."* (John 15:1) I am the One who connects you to the Father. I am the One through whom you receive new life and sustaining power for daily living. I AM. Jesus says: *"I AM the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."* (John 14: 6) I am the only way to God, says Jesus. I am the truth above every truth in this life, says Jesus. I am the life; I am the source of life. I am being itself. I am life and new life and abundant life and eternal life, says Jesus. I AM WHO I AM. I WAS WHO I WAS. I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE. I AM THE GREAT I AM. Clearly, the Lord Jesus Christ is dropping some rather broad hints on His disciples. These succession of "I AM" statements, more than their content, are really referring to who He is. Jesus IS the GREAT I AM...

Many times in ministry I really don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I am at a loss for words and am frozen into place by my own feelings of inadequacy. I may go into a difficult pastoral situation. As I am walking up the front walk to enter the person's home I have a simple prayer: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." I pray over and over and over again the name of Jesus. As I pray the name I am invoking the name; as I invoke the name I am invoking the presence; as I invoke the presence I have the strongest feeling that I am not walking up that sidewalk alone, but that the Lord Jesus is walking with me, every step along the way. And then I enter into the house and invariably discover that the Lord Jesus is already present and already at work. I need only come alongside what Jesus is already doing, what He is already speaking into this hurting person's heart. "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." You are THE GREAT I AM. Recently, I walked into a home where a dear saint was dying of cancer, a person I have known and loved for 25 years. It was hard. I did not want to see her suffering so. The family needed a Word. Mostly, I stood over her bedside and just silently prayed, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." And as I was there I had the strongest impression that indeed by praying the name of Jesus that indeed Jesus had come. That Jesus had come to take this precious saint's hand and lead her into eternity. A couple of hours later that is exactly what happened. Jesus came and took her hand and led her into the light. "I am the light of the world." "I am the door into heaven of the sheep." "I am the way and the truth and the life, and you are coming to the Father by me." "I am the resurrection and the life...whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." THE GREAT I AM HAD COME. Jesus had come to bring life. I AM WHO I AM had come to bring being, creation and eternal life itself.

That first Christmas when an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told Joseph to name the Holy Child, Jesus, *"you shall call His name Jesus"* (Matthew 1: 21) the name which was given to Moses and was lost to mystery and to the ages became again revealed. It is the name above every name, it is the name of Savior and Lord, it is the name at which one day everything in heaven and on earth will bow. THE GREAT I AM HAD COME TO EARTH. The name above every name holds the power of life. I AM THAT I AM had come in radiant glory. Moses asked: "What is your name?" And in Bethlehem, in a manger, God has finally revealed His most holy name –YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME **JESUS**. Beloved, there is POWER in the name of Jesus. And Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*