

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

1st October 2017

Exodus 3:1-15

Spirit... come and make us the people you dreamt us to be... in that first imagining of yours... and that you call us from our place here... into the world... and find you waiting there... for each one of us... to be the one you call us to be... Amen

Today... it has been good once more... to celebrate baptism... and once more with a name I can pronounce... The most anxious part of a baptism to me... is the worry of mispronouncing the name... because names are full of heritage and history of families... named after grandparents... or different sides of the family... and I'd hate to cause a fallout by getting the names round the wrong way or forget one of them altogether...

I have once repeatedly called the mother of a child the wrong name... She never said anything... just smiled... I called her Linda... her name was Fiona... and you get that sense you've said something wrong... and the congregation know you've got the name wrong... but no one is going to tell you at that moment... but going out the church shaking hands... half the congregation say... thanks for the service today... Bill... or Jimmy... or Linda...

Moses didn't get the chance to get God's name wrong... because he didn't know what it was... and asking God... wasn't a great help either...

"Who is it that I should say is the one who is going to cause all this trouble for Egypt?... What great an mighty name will put the fear of death into the Pharaoh?"... asks Moses...

And God pauses... and the bush shimmers... and with chest out God announces... "Tell them I AM has sent you"...

And Moses pauses... "I AM?... What kind of name is that?"...

I am who I am... I will be who I will be... I shall be who I shall be... I am becoming who I am becoming... All of these are possible translations of God's name... except it isn't a name... and God knows is... and Moses fears it...

The Invictus Games that have been taking place in Toronto... with their logo I AM... based on the poem Invictus by W E Henley... and finishes... I am... the master of my fate... I am the captain of my soul... In other words... don't name me as disabled... and therefore limit me... don't define me by what has happened to me... but what is yet to be...

And that's the point... of God's answer to Moses... I am the God whose name is the future tense... You won't tie me down in any definition of a name... My name is the future... "I will be what I will be"...

And in naming God like that... there are a couple of important things that can't be left unsaid...

God's name HAS to be 'I will be what I will be'... because our faith comes from... not what we believe about God... or love or grace or justice... but the relationship we have with love... and grace... and justice... and compassion... and that is constantly changing... God is not the distant... omniscient... being... that shifts the events of the world like a game of chess... God is endlessly modifying Gods actions in response to human beings... we're in relationship...

So when God says... "I will be who I will be"... God speaks a truth about what relationships are like... I will always be with you... God is saying... but how I am with you... how you see me and feel about me and understand me and talk of me... will constantly shift as the future unfolds... as you do one thing and I have to work out how to respond... because we are in relationship...

For example... you can imagine a young couple newly in love... Jimmy says Betty... your hair feels like the meadow grass that waves in a summers evening... Betty he says to her... your eyes are as blue as the Caribbean in spring time... But they aren't going to say that 70 years later he's bald and she can't see... How we relate to each other changes... the language... the feelings... evolve... As we come to know each other better... the mysteries change... the words change... the expectations change...

I will be what I will be... A relational name... that will change in a future that isn't yet known... A future promised... but we haven't got there yet...

It is what is yet to be that defines God... That's the second thing... with Moses on that hillside beside a bush that is burning but not consumed... Moses get's a hint as to what this God is really like... that things are going to happen in the future... Events are not all set out... even for God... Everything is in process... we aren't robots with fixed outcomes... Dreams... intent... and hope... are built into our relationship with God...

And as God's People... that is a hugely creative and hope-filled place to be... to realise God is not the one we've got captured in our doctrines and creeds that forever can't be changed... because God will be what God will be... We've still to yet fully meet this God we follow...

At the end of this month... we come to the 500th anniversary of the reformation... and the popular legend of Martin Luther nailing the 95 thesis... onto that door of Wittenburg Castle Church... a list of 95 criticisms of indulgencies... and practices of the medieval church...

It was clearly a defining moment in human history... It changed how we saw the world... how we thought about ourselves in the world... a burning bush moment... God wasn't tied up with the past... God was set free by the future...

And one of the strap-lines that came out of the reformation was... always being reformed... because God will be what God will be... Faith doesn't settle down...

And how significant it is that 500 years to the month that Luther drew the focus of the reformation... we... as a congregation here... we are still believing... God will be what God will be... We've heard not ten minutes ago... we believe God lies in the future... and how we understand ourselves... comes from our past... but exists in the future... because God will be what God will be...

Our God is named... for that which is becoming... that which is yet to be... that which is a future tense...

Moses got a hint of that... standing at the burning bush... which is the very logo of the Church of Scotland... Moses invitation... is our invitation... for Harry and each one of us... named by the future... and in relationship with God... and in God's name... we will be what we will be... together...