

Sermon on last Sunday of Epiphany Exodus 3, 1-15



Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." <sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses!

Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

<sup>5</sup> "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> Then he said, "I am the God of your father,<sup>[a]</sup> the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. <sup>7</sup> The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. <sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." <sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you<sup>[b]</sup> will worship God on this mountain." <sup>13</sup> Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I am who I am.<sup>[c]</sup> This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord,<sup>[d]</sup> the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

"Who am I?" - "Am I what others say about me, or am I what I know about myself?" This was the question posed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor who was arrested by Hitler during World War II, in a letter from prison. The question of one's own identity is of great importance, because those who do not know who they are suffer from a loss of identity. Such a person often does not know how to deal with themselves or with other people. They do not know their calling or how to fulfill it. This leads to an extremely unpleasant situation, because not recognizing the meaning of one's own life can be one of the greatest burdens of all.

As a 17-year-old boy, Moses did not know what a loss of identity was. His life was clear and pure. He was a strong student, sometimes even the best. As he grew older, he also gained the upper hand in sports. His future seemed predetermined: in the house of Pharaoh, he would be part of the elite. A brilliant future lay ahead of him. But a few years later, everything looked different. Moses was on the run. He had killed a man and was therefore wanted by the authorities. He found refuge in Jethro's house and obtained the right to stay there by marrying Jethro's daughter. During this time, Moses no longer wanted to think about his past - the memories were too painful. Instead, he occupied himself with small things, such as finding green grass for the flock. During this phase,

Moses was not looking for God. But God was looking for Moses - in the middle of his everyday life. God aroused Moses' curiosity through a burning bush that did not burn. This extraordinary phenomenon attracted Moses, and so an all-too-human feeling - curiosity - was used by God to call Moses.. God used Moses' natural curiosity to speak to him. Something similar happens today: a person may listen to the St. Matthew Passion out of pure artistic interest, and suddenly God speaks to his heart. Or someone goes to church because they want to meet someone they like - and then the word of God hits them right in the heart. "Moses!" God called to him directly and personally. Moses, who no longer knew his identity exactly, was personally addressed by the one who knows all hearts. Only God can do something like that. No human effort, be it through prayer or meditation, can force this encounter. Everything remains pointless and like a chase after the wind if God does not act himself. Although God is everywhere and knows all hearts, he alone chooses the moment when he speaks directly to the heart. The famous mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal expressed this in his own way: He sewed a hardly intelligible sentence into the hem of his robe which expressed an encounter with God. And even sketched the date and time of this encounter with God. He writes:

"Fire. God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God not of philosophers and scholars. Faith, certainty, peace. God, Jesus Christ. Joy." When God meets us, we often have no choice but to stammer. That's what happened to Moses on the mountain. He covered his face and said: "Here I am."

Until then, Moses was a pretty failed person. The fact that God now addressed him directly by name moved him deeply and gave him a new identity. But that was not the decisive factor. The important thing was that God revealed his own name to Moses. When God reveals his name, it means: "I am here" or, better translated, "I will be with you!" - "I will not leave you alone." And when God is there, he is there as the one who acts. He intervenes in our lives and saves us. He does this through his name. God, whom the heavens cannot contain, lives with us here on earth. In Moses' case, he did this through the revelation of his name. The revelation of God's name on Mount Horeb was actually just the beginning of a long history of God with us humans. Later, God would show his way to us ever more clearly and distinctly. Although God used many people and chose different paths, the message always remained the same: "I am here for you as an agent and savior!" This name accompanied the people of God throughout history - through the tabernacle in Israel, through the prophets of the Old Testament and ultimately through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, who was revealed in the manger and in the carpenter's house. This name is also spoken over your life when you are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And the same name comes to us in the flesh when we receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper. For Moses, being commissioned with God's name was the turning point of his life. He no longer returned to his homeland as a failed revolutionary, but as an envoy of the Most High. Moses took on his mission, even though it was anything but easy. He had the mighty Pharaoh as his opponent, and even the people of Israel were often stubborn and opposed to God's plan. But with God's name, Moses had direct access to God himself. It was as if God had given him his personal credit card with PIN number through his name - an account with infinite reserves that never runs out.

What happened at Mount Horeb was not only important for Moses, but for all of us. The task that God gave Moses was nothing new: It was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who had performed miracles in the past and would continue to perform them again. Through Jesus, God himself descended and revealed his life and nature here on earth among us humans. In addition, God poured out his spirit on all people, so that not only individuals can speak in God's name, but we can all pray and live together in God's name. That is why today we can address God directly and pray: "Our Father!" . That is

why we ask that God's name be hallowed among us. Because when God's name is hallowed, that means nothing other than that God is there.

When Moses returned to Egypt, he knew he was on a mission from God. This mission, which he carried in God's name, accompanied him from then on - even in difficult times. It may be that we are constantly faced with crises. It may be that we do not always understand the meaning of our work or our commitment to the church. But it is precisely in places like these that we can, like Moses did before the burning bush, hide our faces and come into God's presence. Week after week we can kneel before the altar and receive Jesus himself. In doing so we draw strength and hope for the future week. All of this cannot be expressed in human words - neither those of a philosopher nor in any other words. But that is not important either. The only important thing is that God himself calls and commissions us. And he says: "I called you by Name when you were still in the womb. Amen.