

Sermon June 9, 2024

3rd Sunday after Pentecost “Proper 5”

Exodus 3:14-15; Mark 15:1-5; John 14:17-17, 25-27

(Kids’ book of questions)

For some folks, God is an old man with a long beard sitting on a throne. For others, there is more mystery, less anthropomorphizing.

Over the next couple of months, we’re going to be exploring our theologies as a community of faith, as well as our relationship with the UCC, and the implications of our theologies and affiliation for how we “do” church. The UCC welcomes believers and agnostics, but does have a statement of faith that is grounded in Christianity. Here’s an excerpt from that statement, which is also GCC’s statement of faith:

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, who is made known to us in Jesus our brother, and to whose deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, and set before each of us the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to help people find a purpose in life and to save people from sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, and binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

So our statement of faith says we believe in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And today I'd like us to explore a little bit about what we mean about our faith, and the different ways we express it.

The passage from Exodus today follows God speaking to Moses through the burning bush, telling God to go to Pharaoh and to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt. Moses is skeptical about this mission – “who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” he asks. God assures Moses, saying, “I will be with you.” Then Moses notes that if he does this, he’s going to be asked, what’s your god’s name? Our NRSV translation reads “I am who I am;” other translations read “I will be who I will be.”

That phrase, “I am” or “I will be” is existential! There is a creative power in the universe that EXISTS. God previously had identified as “The god

of your fathers, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Given that the writers of scripture were men of privilege, and that the Abrahamic religions are historically patriarchal, the reference to Moses’ ancestors by patrilineage is a way of reminding Moses of God’s continuity through history. So in our passage today, God is reminding Moses of God’s eternal presence in history, and by saying, “I will be who I will be,” God tells us that that presence will continue to exist.

When we say we believe in God, what do we mean? How, if at all, do we envision God? What do we call God? What attributes do we ascribe to God? Is it helpful for our personal relationship with God to anthropomorphize – God as Father or Mother (or in some cultures, Grandfather)? What do we see when we close our eyes and say “creator?” Is our idea of God more fluid, like a collective consciousness? An energetic representation of the powers of the universe?

I can’t summarize all the theologies since the beginning of time, or even since the beginning of the Bible. But what I can offer is an exploration of the primary ways God is perceived.

In the Bible, there are about two dozen different terms for God – all descriptors, except the one in our passage today. That one is abbreviated YHWH, pronounced “yahweh,” which was only spoken aloud by the priests, as it was considered too sacred for the common ordinary folks to say. Here are the others:

1. YAHWEH/YHWH - only spoken aloud by priests – I am who I am or I will be who I will be (Ex 3:14-15)
2. (Jesus – “Abba” - father) (Romans 8:15)
3. El Shaddai - God Almighty (Gen 17:1-2)
4. Adonai - Lord/Master (Gen 15:1-2)
5. Jehovah Tivah - God who provides (Gen 22:13-14)
6. Elohim - Creator/Banner (Gen 1:1; Rom 1:20; 2 Peter 1:4)
7. Jehovah Shalom - peace (Judges 6:24)
8. El roi - the God who sees (Gen 16:13-14)
9. El Elyon - the Lord most high Gen 14:18-20
10. Yahweh Rohi - God the shepherd (Gen 48:15; Ez 34:31; Ps 100:3; Ps 23)
11. Father of Mercies (Heb 12:9; 2 Cor 1:3)
12. Father of Lights - (James 1:17)
13. El Chay- the Living God (Jer 10:5)
14. Jehovah Nissi - God is my refuge (Ex 17:15-16; Ps 20:5)
15. Yahweh Tsur - The Lord is my Rock (Ps 18:1-2; I Sam 2:2)
16. Jehovah Sabaoth/Yahweh Sebaoth - Lord of Hosts - sovereign over all the powers of the universe; God as head of heavenly armies (I Sam 1:3; I Sam 17:45)
17. Jehovah Rapha - God heals
18. Jehovah Tsidkenu - God of righteousness
19. God as mother:

God as comforting mother Is 66:13; Hos 11:3-4; Deut 32:18; Hos 13:8 (mother bear)

-Mother Eagle - Deut 32:11-12

Nursing Mother: Is 49:15

-God as mother hen: Mt 23:37; Luke 13:34

20. -God as a woman in Labor: Is 42:14

So those are the names and titles of God for Christians and Jews as found in scripture. For Muslims, there are 99 names for God, all descriptive of some aspect of God. But that's more than we can take on for today!

The 13th century Sufi mystic poet Rumi offered these words:

“I tried to find God on the Christian cross, but God was not there;

I went to the temple of Hindus and the old pagodas,

But I could not find a trace of God anywhere...

I searched the mountains and the valleys,

But neither in the heights nor in the depths was I able to find God.

I went to ka 'bah in Mecca, but God was not there either....

I questioned the scholars and philosophers,

But God was beyond their understanding.....

then I looked into my heart, and it was there,
 where God dwelled, that I saw God.”

Our experience of the Divine =is deeply personal and unique to each of us.

As Christians, we also affirm faith in Jesus as Christ/Messiah/Savior. Jesus described himself with these phrases, as recorded in the Gospel of John:

- I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35)
- I am the Light of the World (John 8:12)
- I am the Door (John 10:9)
- I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14)
- I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)
- I am the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6)
- I am the Vine (John 15:1,5)

Other terms for Jesus include categories for savior, for royalty, for his nature as a human, and for the nature of his ministry:

- For royal language, we have King of Kings, Savior, Lord, King of Israel, Prince of Peace, Alpha & Omega
- For savior language, we have Christ, Messiah, Emmanuel, Lamb of God,
 Word/Logos, Deliverer, Redeemer

- For his nature as a human: Son of Man/son of humanity, Only begotten son
- For the nature of his ministry: The Light, Light of the World, Teacher, Wonderful Counselor, Comforter

Worship leader, author, writer, songwriter and recording artist Mari Fitz-Wynn offers these words:

Jesus.

His name is a complete sentence.

His name is an entire prayer.

His name alone brings healing.

His name guarantees salvation.

His name quenches the thirsty soul and fills the soul's hunger.

Jesus

His name is the perfect solution to every problem.

His name can resolve conflict.

He brings peace and calm into every situation.

His name is protection.

His name brings light when darkness is all around.

Jesus

His name is music, it is the sweetest melody.

His name is joy unspeakable.

His name is perfect

His name is altogether lovely, magnificent, glorious.

His name is Emmanuel, He is God with us.

Finally today, we consider our faith in the Holy Spirit

In the Hebrew scriptures, *Ruach* meaning breath or wind, describes God's spirit. In the New Testament, the word *Pneuma* is used, which also means spirit or breath. In stoic thought, pneuma also represents a vital creative force. Also in the New Testament we have paraclete, which means Advocate/Counselor; and also, we have Holy Ghost, which is used interchangeably with Holy Spirit.

There are different descriptions for "the holy spirit," and these different descriptions emphasize different aspects of it. It is most often called "the spirit of Yahweh" (or similar designations such as the "spirit of God," or "spirit of the Lord God," or "spirit of the Living God") because it is God's very nature and it comes from God. That is also the reason God calls it "my spirit" (i.e., [Isa. 42:1](#); [Acts 2:17-18](#)). In addition, it is referred to as:

- "the spirit of wisdom" ([Exod. 28:3](#); [Deut. 34:9](#)), because through it God communicates wisdom to believers.
- "the spirit of your Father" ([Matt. 10:20](#)), because it comes from God and is God's nature.
- "the spirit of truth" ([John 14:17](#); [16:13](#)), because through it, God and Jesus give truth to the world.

- “the spirit of the Son” ([Gal. 4:6](#)), because God gives it to Jesus, who gives it to people ([Acts 2:33](#)).
- “the spirit of Jesus” ([Acts 16:7](#)), and “the spirit of Jesus Christ” ([Phil. 1:19](#)), because it comes to us from Jesus Christ and brings attributes of Christ into our lives.
- “the helper, the holy spirit” ([John 14:26](#)), because it helps us in our life and in our service to God. (excerpted from [BiblicalUnitarian.com](#))

The point of this exercise is to share with each other as Christians working to manifest God’s beloved community == to affirm the theological foundations of our gathering, worship, and action in the world.

So now that we’ve explored the nature of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, I’d like to find out what’s most meaningful for you. Each of you has three post-it notes in your bulletin. Please write on each little note the word or words that best describe how you think about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and when worship concludes, please stick them up on the chart! And you don’t need to use the “menu” from your bulletin - whatever word(s) work for you are welcome.

Also, if there is a word for God/Jesus/Spirit that you would NEVER use, please write that on the chart when you’re putting up your sticky notes! During fellowship time, you can see the words to convey concepts of God, Jesus, and the Spirit that are meaningful to the GCC church community. May we continue to explore our faith, by God’s grace. AMEN.