

Pentecost 13
Year A

Ego Eimi

Scripture:
Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Invocation:

Holy Spirit,

Help us to find patience, and peace, in the midst of our culture of frustration and agitation and restlessness. Help us to speak with kindness, to those who speak to us with power and wrong intentions.

--Amen

Sermon:

These days, the issue of Gender regularly hits the headlines.

When old controversies and ideas,
are recycled and wear new clothing.

We invent novel words to make sense of it all.

We all know that words influence how we think, and how we live.

Words have power. Every politician knows that!

English translations of The Bible regularly refer to God in

Masculine terms: “My *Father*”, and “*He* said”.

In response, well-meaning folks may try to balance the scales,

By referring to God as “Mother” and “She”.ⁱ

We read the Bible each Sunday.

We claim that the Bible is God’s revelation.

We ought to know how the Bible treats God and Gender.

The tension between God's way and the World's way,
Goes back to the beginning.
Think of Adam and Eve. And the Garden they lost!

Today, we heard the familiar story of God talking to Moses,
through a Burning Bush.
Moses asks God, "*What's your name*"?

Asking for someone's name wasn't uncommon,
3,000 years ago and it isn't uncommon now.
Every relationship begins with a name.
Everyone has a name. *Even God.*

It's only human to want to know who we are talking with!

When God started talking and giving Moses orders,
Using a weird burning bush as a prop, Moses politely said,
"People will ask me,
'What is that Burning Bush's name?'"ⁱⁱ

So, the Burning Bush boldly responded:
Tell them: "I AM has sent me". ⁱⁱⁱ "I AM WHO I AM."^{iv}

"I AM WHO I AM" is God's name.

1400 years later, in John's unique Gospel,
Jesus emphatically claims *that same name*. "*I Am*". ^v

I AM is an interesting name.
Jesus claimed it at least twenty-four times, in John's Gospel.

Jesus was a man. But, when he used the same name
as the Burning Bush,
He transcended gender and the limits of biology. ^{vi}

Everyone knows that names are important.
And, living in the flesh, Gender matters.
It's the subject of lots of chatter these days.

Yet, in both of the original Bible languages^{vii},
God's name^{viii} has *no* Gender preference.

Because, for us, gender distinctions matter,
our children's names reflect gender:
we choose "Stephanie" or "Stephen", "Robert" or "Roberta".

But, God is God, and we are not!
God doesn't have to choose.

Even though God created us as gendered beings,
God's name chooses neither one gender nor the other.
And yet, God's name is not gender free.
Like a "Chair" or a "table"

*In both Greek and Hebrew, God's name both includes gender ...
and is beyond gender.*

*This is amazing. God is fantastic.
The more we know about God, the more we will be surprised.*

If you are skeptical, that's OK.
God wants us to use our minds!

Translation of an ancient language, from an ancient culture,
Into today's English, is tricky stuff.

It's never simple. Reasonable minds can differ.
That is why there are so many Bible translations.

Every translator knows that the fragment she is looking at
isn't the whole story.^{ix}

She must consider the vagaries of language and culture.

The assumptions and the norms of both the ancient culture,
And our culture must be considered.

In Greek, God's name is "ego eimi"^x. In Hebrew YHWH.

Neither are explicitly masculine.

Yet, Bible translations are loaded with the masculine Gender.

When Jesus says "**I am**"^{xi} (*ego eimi*),

some Bibles translate that as "**I am He**".^{xii}

When Jesus and the Samaritan Woman are talking by the well,

In some translations Jesus says, "I who speak to you am **He**".

A more literal translation would probably have Jesus say:

"**I Am**, [is] speaking with you."

Jesus was born, biologically, a man.

We don't know why God made that call.

God loves Women.

God never intended the Bible to reveal a bias towards Men.

When God chose to come to us as a man,

God did not reveal a preference for one gender or the other.

We are all God's children.

Sometimes Jesus spoke as himself. He used a masculine pronoun.

Like anybody else.

Sometimes Jesus spoke as God's Son. The great "I Am",

Then, he spoke without reference to gender.^{xiii}

We've been reading from St. John's Gospel.
Bible students know that John
sets a remarkably high image of Christ.^{xiv}

John speaks of Jesus as uniquely God incarnate.^{xv}
John points us to a God, who is beyond gender.^{xvi}

God chose to come into Creation as a man.
It's easy to think of God as a masculine force.
In fact, Jesus often referred to God as His "Father".

And yet, the Bible is full of feminine analogies, for God:

- "How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children ... take refuge in the shadow of your wings."
- "Be merciful to me, O God, ... in the shadow of your
wings I will take refuge, till the storms ... pass by ... in
the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy."

Even Jesus said:

- "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... How often would I have
gathered your children as a hen gathers her brood under
her wings....!"^{xvii}

I am a man.

Yet, I know that God embraces us as we are created,
by Him and with Him and through Him?^{xviii}

The world used to be simpler.

It may yet return to a better, simpler place.
It may not!

Right now, the World is a messy place.

Still, I am sure that,

however it works out, in the real world,
gender is God's sacred gift to Creation.

Even though the limits of human language and culture push us
to define God as a "He" or "She",

God is not limited by gender.^{xix}

Whoever we are, and wherever God has placed us,

We are called to serve The Kingdom. ^{xx}

We must never be so caught up in our own story,

that we don't see the Truth in other people's stories.^{xxi}

We "... are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus." ^{xxii}

God calls us to clothe ourselves

in Christ's humility, and Christ's loving acceptance.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free;
nor is there male and female,

for you are all one in Christ Jesus." ^{xxiii}

AMEN.

ⁱ That seems "fair".

ⁱⁱ Moses reacted like anybody else: He asked "who" is giving him orders. When we ask for someone's name, she might think we're too nosy. She might say, "Why do you ask?" Moses avoided being rudely direct; he did not say "I want to know your name".

ⁱⁱⁱ See, <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/general-apologetics/purpose-and-meaning-of-ego-eimi-in-the-gospel-of-john/>

^{iv} The Burning Bush is God's way of getting Moses' attention. God still uses nature to get our attention.

^v In Greek, ego eimi ἐγώ εἰμι. See, *ibid*, John 4:26; 6:20; 6:35; 6:41; 6:48; 6:51; 7:28; 7:29; 7:33; 7:34; 7:36; 8:12; 8:16; 8:18; 8:23 (twice); 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 9:5; 10:7; 10:9; 10:11; 10:14; 10:36; 11:25; 12:26; 13:13; 13:19; 13:33; 14:3; 14:6; 14:9; 15:1; 15:5; 16:32; 17:11; 17:14; 17:16; 17:24; 18:5; 18:6; 18:8; 18:37; 19:21.

^{vi} 1st, in the Greek you don't need the pronoun "I". It's implied. But Jesus wanted to make a major point, So he said: "The Father and I are One". In other words: "I and only I can claim God as my Father". In the OT Hebrew, God's name "YHWH" is closely related to "I am" (see Exod 3:14; 6:2; Deut 32:39; Isa 43:25; 48:12; 51:12; etc.). Thus in the Septuagint, such passages are translated into the Greek expression "ego eimi" ἐγώ εἰμι. See, Rudolf Koch: The Tetragrammaton.

^{vii} Greek and Hebrew.

^{viii} "I Am".

^{ix} What was the writer trying to say? What will the reader, today, understand was being said?

^x ἐγώ εἰμι

^{xi} In the Greek, the word eimi ("Am") connotes the ongoing, present result of a past action. We might say, "I was, and I still Am being God." A translation into a variation of "progressive perfect", e.g., "have been", reflects the limitations of English, rather than the nature of God. See, Moulton, ProL, p. 119.

^{xii} See, John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8 and, e.g., the RSV.

^{xiii} Jesus often spoke of himself through non-gender metaphors, e.g., "I am the light, I am the bread of life", etc. See, e.g., John 6:35, 6:41, 8:12, et seq.

^{xiv} <http://catholic-resources.org/John/Themes-IAM.htm>

^{xv} See, e.g., John 1:1, 14 and 18 (monogenes theos).

^{xvi} Julian of Norwich - an English recluse - in her 14th-Century Revelations of Divine Love says: "Just as God is our Father, so God is also our Mother". She talks about "our precious mother, Jesus". She speaks of the Trinity, usually described as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in these terms: "Our Father desires, our Mother operates, and our good Lord the Holy Ghost confirms". St Anselm, the 11th-century Archbishop of Canterbury, prayed to "Christ, my mother" and called God "the great mother". St John Chrysostom called Christ our "friend, and member, and head, and brother, and sister, and mother". <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32960507>

^{xvii} See, Psalm 36:7; Psalm 57:1; Psalm 63:7; Psalm 91:4; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; Ruth 2:12

^{xviii} Translation of ancient languages isn't easy. I am no scholar. I am a parish priest. But I am sure that God fully encompasses gender.

^{xix} God is utterly beyond our human limits and our hang-ups on gender and physical traits.

^{xx} God chooses both women and men to do God's Kingdom work. "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; ... Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; ... Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" Romans 12:9-21

^{xxi} See, <https://www.fuller.edu/posts/she-teaches-resisting-the-danger-of-a-single-narrative/>

^{xxii} Galatians 3:26.

^{xxiii} Ibid., 3:28 et seq.