

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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Sermon by Pastor Daniel Gensmer
It's God's name, not noise. (Exodus 34:5-9)

⁵The LORD came down in the cloud. He took his stand there with Moses and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶The LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and overflowing with mercy and truth, ⁷maintaining mercy for thousands, forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin. He will by no means clear the guilty. He calls their children and their children's children to account for the guilt of the fathers, even to the third and the fourth generation."

⁸Moses quickly bowed to the ground and worshipped. ⁹He said, "If I have now found favor in your sight, Lord, please let the Lord go along with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our guilt and our sin, and accept us as your possession."

"I've heard about you." There's something strange about that sentence, because a name can carry a reputation. "I've heard about you." Before someone ever meets you, they already have an idea of who you are, what you look like, or maybe parts of your reputation that have been shared when you weren't around. "I've heard about you." Well, what did you hear? Is it that I am a nice person, loving, caring, patient, trustworthy? Or did you hear about my flaws, my short temper, my mistakes, my attributes that I would rather not have spreading around person to person like a virus? A name is more than a noise we use to get someone's attention. A name tells us something about the person behind it. Not just who they are, but what they are like.

God has a name too. And it's not just a noisy name we use to summon God. As we dig into the Scripture here in Exodus God shares his name. But He doesn't merely tell Moses what to call him. He tells Moses what his name means for us. Because It's God's Name, Not Noise!

And this topic of God's name has been a tremendous theme throughout the entire book of Exodus. All the way back in chapter 3, God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt at the burning bush, and Moses asked a natural question: "When I go to the Israelites, and they ask me your name, what should I tell them?" And God answered, "**I AM WHO I AM.**"

The LORD revealed his name. He is the great "I AM" – The God who simply is, because he doesn't depend on anyone or anything for his existence. But God's name didn't stop there; in chapter 6 the LORD announced his name again and connected it directly to what he does, saying, "I am the LORD. I will bring you out. I will deliver you. I will redeem you. I will take you as my own people..."

In other words, "This is who I am," and "This is what you can expect from me."

And God kept his word. The entire Israelite nation witnessed the Power of the LORD on display as plague after plague struck Egypt. And by the end, the Israelites weren't merely released from slavery; they were sent away with riches. They didn't merely escape the armies of Pharaoh; they witnessed the LORD bury their enemies in the Red Sea. In the desert, the Israelites hungered, and the LORD provided them with Mana and Quail. In the desert, the Israelites thirsted, and the LORD provided them with water from a rock.

The Lord said who he was, "The great I AM". The LORD told the Israelites what to expect, and he backed up his word with action. So by the time we arrive at Chapter 32, right before our sermon text, the Israelites have every reason to know who God is. Which makes what happened next so shocking.

Moses goes up Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments from God. And when he returned, he discovered the entire nation of Israel bowing down before a golden calf. And they said, "This is your god, Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt."

Look at those ridiculous Israelites. They knew God's name, and they saw the LORD perform powerful wonders. They witnessed the LORD display his power over the entire nation of Egypt as the LORD sent plague after plague. The LORD

liberated them through the Red Sea. The LORD had clearly been with the Israelites, but now they are bowing down to a cow made of earrings, declaring, “This is the God who took us out of Egypt!” How silly! They were treating God’s name like noise, and applying God’s name and his reputation to a Calf they had to Carry rather than their Creator who Cares for them.

And I don’t think our struggle is mistaking a farm animal for our God. Like the Israelites, God has revealed himself to you, but do we have our own Golden Calves? Do we look to something created for the attributes of God or do we look to God for the attributes that belong to him?

Compassion is an attribute of God! But when we want to feel heard and loved, maybe we run to the comment sections of our Facebook page for affirmation before the pages of Scripture that comment on the compassion and grace God has worked for us through Christ.

Grace is an attribute of God! And there’s nothing wrong with a counselor, but maybe we run to a counselor to justify our mistakes before we lay our sins before our “slow to anger” God?

And what about truth? Because the LORD overflows with truth, but maybe we become our own golden calves when the truth of God’s law conflicts with our desire to live together before marriage. There are many attributes that belong to God, but one that should shake us to the core. “He will by no means clear the guilty.” We are guilty of treating God’s name like noise, just like the Israelites.

So put yourself back in the shoes of the Israelites. They had just slapped the name of the LORD on this golden bovine. The commandments had been shattered spiritually before God and physically by Moses at the sight of their rebellion. God had every reason to abandon his people, but Moses approached the LORD as their representative and made one simple request just before this account: “LORD, please show me your glory.”

And how did God respond? Not by showing Moses his face. Not by demonstrating his almighty

power. But by proclaiming his name, because **It’s God’s Name, Not Noise.**

And this is what the LORD proclaimed, “**The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and overflowing with mercy and truth, maintaining mercy for thousands, forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin.**”

You were looking for compassion? **God says to you, I am compassionate.**

You were looking for grace? **God says to you, I am gracious.**

You want someone to justify you? **God says to you, I forgive guilt and rebellion and sin.**

But how do we deal with the next line that God declares about himself? – “He will by no means clear the guilty!” – God doesn’t simply clear the guilty. He doesn’t look at our sin and pretend that it never happened. No, he takes our guilt upon himself. And this is where the attributes of God proclaimed to Moses become tangible for us in Jesus.

The LORD is compassionate. What does that compassion look like? It looks like Jesus. Jesus didn’t merely feel sorry for sinners from a distance, no he came to us in flesh and blood. He touched the untouchable. He welcomed the outcasts. He wept with those who mourned. And when he saw you trapped under the guilt of your sin. His compassion moved him stumbling step by stumbling step up Calvary to suffer in your place.

The LORD is gracious. What does that grace look like? It looks like a cross that belongs to us, being occupied by Christ. You didn’t need another voice to justify your actions; you need the voice of your Savior declaring the debt you owed “FINISHED” on the cross.

The LORD forgives guilt, rebellion, and sin. What does that forgiveness look like? It looks like a crying baby being baptized into God’s holy name. It looks like a broken father confessing all his shortcomings through a waterfall of tears and discovering that even that sin, yes THAT sin is a sin Jesus died for. It looks like a young woman who feels dirty and undesirable, discovering that she

has been washed clean in the blood of Christ, her perfect bridegroom.

This is what God's compassion, grace, and forgiveness look like. They're not just abstract attributes of God's name. They're gifts God has given to you, promises he has kept in his word, and blessings he has prepared for you in heaven.

And remember Moses' question for God? "Show me your glory." God didn't say no. He proclaimed his name, because **It's God's Name, Not Noise!** But remember where we started in Exodus. When Moses asked God his name, God answered, "I AM WHO I AM." But now fast-forward hundreds of years as Jesus stood before the religious leaders of the time, when he declared, "**Before Abraham was, I AM.**" This was no coincidence. Jesus wasn't treating *God's name like noise*. He was announcing to us that the God who said, "I AM," has come in human flesh.

Yes, Moses witnessed God's glory as the LORD proclaimed his name, but we don't have to wonder what God is like. The Apostle John says, "We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The glory Moses could only glimpse has been revealed in Jesus. So, when your guilt tells you that God couldn't possibly forgive you or that you need your own "golden calf", don't listen to the noise. **Listen to God's name.** When you are hurting and looking for someone to care, don't let the noise define God's love for you. **Listen to God's name.**

Because God has already told you who he is. Compassionate. Gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in love and faithfulness. Forgiving guilt, rebellion, and sin.

Look at Jesus. The great I AM came to you. The glory of God was revealed to you. The compassion of God was poured out for you on the cross. The grace of God was given to you. The forgiveness of God was won for you. Look to Jesus to see God's glory on display. This is what God's name means for you. **It's God's Name, Not Noise.**