



## Sermon of September 5, 1999



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### **"Do You Know Your Name?"**

Exodus 3:1-15

During my years of working at UCLA, I had the privilege to meet a few very important people among students; faculty; and professional staff. One day a colleague of mine came into my office to introduce me to a fellow Brazilian well known in California, if not the entire nation, for his interesting writings. He had made an impact during the 60's when he wrote a very attractive little book called "The Teachings of Don Juan". That man was Carlos Castaneda.

Carlos and I became good friends. One day I asked Carlos to tell me about himself. He began by telling me about his name. He had his name changed from Carlos Arantes Caetano to Carlos Castaneda at the time he entered the United States. At the Immigration booth for some reason they could not read his full name and in transferring his papers they changed his name from Carlos Caetano to Carlos Castaneda. Carlos Castaneda was a social anthropologist and was well known among writers and academicians, as Latino. Many thought he was Peruvian, others a Mexican young man, but no one predicted Carlos as Brazilian from the State of Sao Paulo.

Only Carlos and a few of his friends knew about his true name and place of origin. Upon his death, there was discussion in the Los Angeles Times as well as in the New York Times about this mysterious man's place of origin.

Sometimes names can be very hard to deal with. I have been living in this country for over 30 years and many of my friends do not know how to pronounce my name, much less write it correctly. As a consequence, I have been called all kinds of names but my own.

One of the first things I am asked when introduced is "Do you have a nickname?. How are you called?" I never allow for such a thing because I have a name and I want to be called by my name. My son's name is Djalma also. I recall the times when he first entered school and would come home crying because the boys were making fun of his name. One day he asked his mother, "Why can't I be called Bob or Dick or any other American common name but mine?".

Moses faced the same problem. The problem of identity, For it is apparent that Moses did not know who he really was to the point that he admitted, "I am a nobody"... "How can I present myself before the king on behalf of the Israelites... What shall I say?"

I trust you have brought your bibles with you so that you can examine the text with me. The text reveals the true nature of God. A God who manifested himself to Moses in the burning bush as the Holy One and at the same time, a personal God. A caring and loving God who is ultimately concerned with the life and destiny of his children. A God who is constantly involved in the life of His creation and one who identifies Himself with His suffering children and is willing to do something about it. Vs.7- "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated... I have heard them cry out to be released from their slave drivers... I know all about their suffering, and so I have come down to rescue them..."

Our God is ready to do something in the face of suffering and slavery. He becomes the liberating God, willing to set His people free; to humanize those who feel denied from their natural right to coexist as decent human beings; to lead His people into the land of Promise, a land of prosperity, and a land of abundance.

What about Moses? In this text Moses reveals a reluctant character with a self-effacing personality. He raises all kinds of questions to justify his reluctance - "I am a nobody. How can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

It is interesting to notice that no matter how eloquent we are before God to build up our excuses, or to present reasons not to do the task God wants us to do, God always has an answer. God said to Moses, "I will be with you".

But then Moses raises another question, "What can I tell them when they ask me for your name?" God still has an answer, "I am who I am. You must tell them, the One who is called I AM has sent me to you". Vs.14. Here is God revealing Himself to Moses as the God of the Here and Now, the God who is ever present. The God who is an Immanent God, the God who is ready to act; to save; and to redeem; is ready to establish a new relationship with His children.

That is the God of history who is always present and active on behalf of His own creation. God is in charge of lives. He is in control of our destiny. He continues to create and make things new again and again.

The Second Lesson Of The Text Is: God is the God of promise. Vs. 17 "I have decided that I will bring them out of Egypt where they are being treated cruelly and will take them to a rich and fertile land..."

Sisters and Brothers, I am here this morning to tell you the Good News From God! First, you have a name. Yes indeed, and secondly your name is a God-given name. You have a new identity. You are a child of God. You are very important in the eyes of God.

Paul's writings to the Romans (12:9-21) addresses this existential question: Who am I and Whom do I want to be? Williams Willimon commenting on this text says, "In the Christian Ethics, the indicative precedes the imperative. Who am I comes before what ought I to do?" Our action reflects what kind of person we are.

The Third Thing That I Want You To Know This Morning Is: You have a promise from God. And that promise is, "I will be with you." No matter where you go, no matter how difficult the challenge, I will always be there for you and with you. That is the promise. Isaiah 42:6,7, and 16. Psalm 139:7.

And Finally, The Text Reveals Another Important Truth About The Person Of God: God is the God of action. God wanted Moses to act on His behalf to liberate the Israelites. God calls you to act on His name. He calls you into a "new being" or into a "new creation". As such, He is willing to empower you and to anoint you with His Grace so that you will be able to act on His name and be a blessing to others. That is your charge, that is the mission: To serve, to share God's unconditional love. For that you need to become a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Discipleship implies losing one's own life for the sake of Christ so that you will find it again.

Jesus outlined the cost of true discipleship: To forget oneself, to carry one's own cross and follow Jesus. Matthew 16:24. That is the action call. That is the mission.

The God of History is a Caring God. The God of Promise is the Sustaining God. The God of Action is the Incarnate God who became one of us in order to identify Himself with our suffering. He is the God who takes our shattered and fragile beings and makes us whole again. He is the One who takes our self-effacing personality and makes us courageous human beings, faithful and valiant disciples of His in the world.

The question is: Do You Know Your Name? Has your life been changed by the Power of God? If so, God has a promise for you and that promise is an action. He commissions you and I to go and share the Good News from God that we have in the person of Jesus Christ.

Go and be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: *Create in us, O God, a new being. Give us the mind of Christ, the mind of service to others. Help us to realize that You are there for us and that You are always with us. For this we pray in the holy name of Jesus, Our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

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