

# Really Good News God Knows Your Name

## Exodus 33:12–17 (NRSV)

Moses said to the Lord, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ **13** Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” **14** He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” **15** And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.” **17** The Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”

**Introduction.** I don't know about you but there are times when I really long to hear some good news. When I have been battered by lots of negative stuff, I want to hear some positive stuff.

We have been through what seems like a long season where much of the news we have received has been negative and conflicted. We have had a constant diet of pandemic news, most of which was not good; news of racial injustice and unrest; lots of political conflict; and being reminded often the Vols football team was 3-7 in 2020. Most of us are ready for some good news.

## SLIDE 1

As people who follow Jesus Christ, we are people of the Good News. Not only are we called to share the good news that is at the heart of our faith, we need to hear and be reminded of that good news. That news can change our perspectives and attitudes significantly and breathe fresh breath into our lungs and hearts.

So for the next few weeks, we are going to focus on some really good news. We will explore some of the fundamentals of the good news we have received from God. For most of us, this will not be new information. Yet I believe being reminded of this news will have a huge positive impact on us. There will be some among us who will hear this good news for the first time or a new way that will bring hope and healing.

So are you ready for some really good news?

## Moses' Story

Moses had come out of what was one of the worst experiences of his life. It was definitely one of his worst as a leader. After having led the Hebrews to the foot of Mt. Sinai where they set up camp, God called Moses upon the mountain where the patriarch had an encounter with God unlike anything any other human being had experienced. Moses spent days in God's presence and God gave him the Law.

But while he was there with God, unrest grew in the Hebrew camp. The people began to wonder what had happened to their leader and began to murmur.

## SLIDE 2

All of this set the stage for them to give some of their gold to Aaron, the priest, who formed an idol for them to worship. The people began bowing down to their golden god.

As this transpired, God grew angry at the people who so quickly had rebelled against Him. He threatened to destroy the whole group and build a new nation through Moses. Moses interceded for the people and God relented. When Moses finally came down from the mountain and saw the people worshiping the idol, he became enraged. The measures that followed were unpleasant and drastic for all.

All of this left Moses' reeling and wondering if he could and should lead this band of people. Could he accomplish the mission God had given him to do? (While few leaders may go through something as radical as this, most have experiences that have left them upset and wondering if they should lead their group.)

A few days after, Moses went to the place that had been set aside to meet with God, a sanctuary in the wilderness. There he began to work through this issue as to whether he could lead the people. He replayed before God his call to lead the people from their bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. He desperately needed reassurance from God to keep going. (Have you ever been there in your life?)

Moses reminded God and himself of what God had told him - "*I know your name.*" Moses asked God to give him reassurance and favor - to have his presence be with the people and him as they continued their journey. Moses was really in need of hearing some good news from God.

To him, God then made a promise and a statement. God promised that he would do the very thing Moses asked - go with the people and him. Then he spoke again these powerful words of assurance and grace - "*I know your name.*"

Does God know your name?

## The Great Treasure.

When I was a teenager and young adult, Holston Conference was led by Bishop Ellis Finger. Being a UM pastor's kid, I would from time to time encounter the bishop. Honestly I do not remember much about Bishop's Finger's administration. I do not remember any sermon he preached or any decision he made. But there is one thing I remember about him, he knew my name. Not only did he know my name but it seemed he knew the names of all the pastors in the Annual Conference and their spouses and children. He was a name machine. I am not sure how he did it but he was great at remembering names. As a young man and having the bishop call my name made me feel important.

## SLIDE 3

Your name is one of the most important treasures you possess. It is something that is uniquely yours even if your given name is held by others - Bill Smith. It is a treasure even if you do not particularly care for one or more of your given names. Your name is your name. When someone calls out your name in a crowded room, you look to find who is calling out to you. Often you will answer that call because your name was used. (Watch what happens when you check out at the grocery store and call the name of the cashier.)

## SLIDE 4

An extremely wealthy man once wrote: *A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches* (Proverbs 22:1a). Solomon knew the value of his name and keeping it unmired was vital, even more so the resources he owned. It is important to live in such a way as we guard a "good" name.

I have long understood how important our name is to each of us. That is why I work hard to remember people's names. It takes attention, effort and practice to remember names. I have discovered that I am not as good at that as I used to be. I think it is because I have so many names stored up here. Surely it is not because I am getting older.

But you know, *it is one thing to be able to attach a name to a face*. While that is important and means something to the person you call their name, *it is another matter to attach a name to the person*.

As a pastor, there are many pastors in our annual conference to whom I can attach a name. For example, I can easily identify *Brandon Berg who is the pastor of First Church in Bristol, VA*. But that is about the limit of what I know of Brandon. If he entered a room I could call him by name. I can attach his face and name.

But on the other hand, I can attach the *name Randy Martin to the person*. I have known Randy for a long time and know a lot about Randy. The two of us have many experiences together and lots of conversations. I can tell you more about Randy than you would want to hear. I also know part of Randy's heart. When somebody asks me, "Do you know Randy Martin," I can say, "Yes, quite well."

When God said to Moses, *"I know your name,"* it was more than an affirmation of being able to identify him by name. God was saying he really knew Moses.

So does God know your name?

### **The Shepherd and His Sheep.**

One of my favorite chapters in the Gospels is John 10 where John shares Jesus' words about being the Good Shepherd.

## SLIDE 5

In that section, Jesus says: *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me"* (John 10:14).

The practice of caring for sheep in Jesus' world is very different from what most of us know in the USA where we place sheep in large fields with fences. In Jesus' world, shepherds spent much time with their sheep and in a sense, lived with them. The shepherds would often name each sheep and could easily distinguish each one and know about its personality. In the evening, shepherds would often bed the sheep in high walled pens. Then in the morning lead the sheep to pasture. To do so the shepherd would start on the way from the pen and call the sheep by name to follow. They would follow when they heard their name called by their shepherd.

Jesus' words are a message to us. Jesus knows us. He knows your name. He knows my name. He not only can identify us by name in a crowd but he really knows us well.

In Psalm 139, we find the psalmist talking about how God knows him. He shares how God saw his unformed body when his mother was pregnant with him. He wrote of how God knows where he is and where he is going. He told how God knows the words on his lips before he speaks them. (Does anyone know you that well who can predict what you will say in a given situation?)

The psalmist had come to know what is true for all of us. God knows our name. God knows us ultimately and intimately. We are known by God. Hear this really good news: God knows your name.

### **Turning your ears to God.**

Samuel came into this world through a miracle birth after his barren mother became pregnant and gave birth to him. She was so excited about him, she dedicated him to God. So after he came of an age where he could essentially care for himself, she and her husband took him to the house of God where he served the High Priest, Eli and the Lord.

One night after Samuel had gone to sleep, he heard his name being called, "Samuel." He jumped to his feet and ran to Eli but learned Eli had not called for him. This happened a second time and then a third time. After the third, Eli realized it was God who was calling his name. He instructed him to reply to the voice, "*Speak for you servant is listening.*" Up until that point, Samuel had not known of God speaking to him. When he returned to his bed, the voice returned. Samuel responded with the words, "Speak for your servant is listening." Then God spoke to Samuel and gave him an important message.

## **SLIDE 6**

God knows your name. God knows you intimately. There are those moments when this God who knows you calls out your name - a still small voice or booming burst; sometimes heard with ears and sometimes only with the mind. We have to tune our hearts to hear God's voice. As we do, we can come to know God intimately as well.

This morning, do you know the God who knows you?

Perhaps this morning or recently you have been sensing your name being called. Perhaps it is an invitation to follow Jesus for the first time or return to a relationship with him that has been ignored or abandoned.

Perhaps it is God simply wanted to you to hear these beautiful words: I love you.

Perhaps it is God calling you to engage, reengage or continue in some type of ministry.

Where you are seated or here at this altar, I invite you to respond to God as God speaks your name: **Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.**