



# Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren

Continuing the Work of Jesus ....Peacefully, Simply, Together

February 9, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren in the Diaspora.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to personally thank Mary Etta Reinhart, Kay Swarr, Lori Holzhauer and Ed Heidinger II for all of their efforts in putting together and leading the wonderful worship service for this past Sunday on YouTube when our services were cancelled due to the snowstorm. We are blessed with so many gifted brothers and sisters in Christ who are willing to be used in the Lord's service.

Wednesday, February 17 is known as Ash Wednesday which officially begins the season of Lent which leads us to Easter Sunday. We will not be having a worship service this year on Ash Wednesday. For the past few years bread and cup communion was offered the Sunday before Ash Wednesday which would be this coming Sunday. The deacons decided that we would not have communion on February 14 but would have bread and cup communion on Sunday, March 21 in place of love feast this spring due to all the COVID concerns. The hope is that we will have our traditional love feast on October 3 which is World-Wide Communion Sunday.

February 21 will be a special day in the life of our church as Rita Carter will be ordained to the Christian ministry in the Church of the Brethren. Rita is currently serving as a volunteer pastor of visitation. The ordination will be conducted by Pete Kontra, district executive of the Atlantic Northeast District. The ordination will occur at the beginning of the 10:30 service which will enable people who attend the 8:15 service to attend Rita's ordination and then be excused.

The sermon series for the next several weeks will focus on the I AM sayings of Jesus beginning on February 21 with 'I Am the Good Shepherd'. An introductory sermon to this series will be delivered this coming Sunday on the theme: 'I Am Who I Am: Deity Defying Definition'.

By the time you read this letter you should have received a letter concerning a challenge called 'The Mission Stimulus Fund'. Please give prayerful consideration to this outreach mission opportunity.

I will be working with the Ministry Commission and the Church Board to ascertain our pastoral staffing needs in order to move us forward with a plan to ensure that all of our ministry bases are being covered.

And lastly, sometimes over the years I felt like I needed a shot in the arm to keep going. Well, I really DO need a shot in the arm, and I mean the COVID vaccine. I am eagerly awaiting my 'shot in the arm' so that I can more effectively minister to our church without needing to be so cautious. Until that time I will personally be very strict about wearing a mask in worship. While this is not ideal, I may be trying some creative ways to preach and lead worship in ways that are safe according to my medical advisor.

"May the Lord watch between me and you, when we are absent one from the other." *Genesis 31:49*

Bob Kettering, Interim Senior Pastor

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## I AM WHO I AM...WHAT'S IN A NAME?

- I. In the beautiful 24<sup>th</sup> Psalm, David asks the question: "Who is the King of Glory?" It is a question which has been asked time and time again by people who have sought to know the Creator, Sustainer, Omnipotent God of the Universe. Throughout the history of humankind, men and women have sought to know the identity of God...the NAME of God...the NATURE of God and the NATIVITY or origin of God.

-Jesus asked the question about his own identity to his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?" "Who do you say I am?"
- II. During the next several weeks the sermons at our church will address who Jesus is by examining various Biblical texts of self-disclosure when Jesus said: "I am the door"..."I am the vine"..."I am the way, the truth and the life"..."I am the light of the world"..."I am the bread of life"..."I am the good shepherd"...and "I am the resurrection and the life."
- III. Each of us has numerous names. My children call me dad. As a child my name to most was Bobby. Most people today call me Bob...spell it backwards or forwards it is still Bob. Some who do not know me well, call me Robert. My driver's license says I am Robert Dennis. Some have called me Pastor Bob or Pastor Kettering. A few might call me Reverend Kettering or Mr. Kettering. My wife, Lib, calls me dear...usually. My grandchildren call me papa. My nieces and nephews call me uncle. There are a few other names I have been called over the years by people, but I wouldn't want to repeat those names to you or anyone for that matter. I prefer that people just call me Bob.

-the point is we all have numerous names by which we are known...first names...middle names...last names...maiden names...nicknames...relational names and titles. Many times the names by which people call us are determined by their relationship to us.
- IV. The same is true with the names of God. There are several names for God in the Old and New Testaments. One of the common names for God used by the people of Palestine prior to Abraham was El, spelled E L. In the Hebrew language God is often referred to as El and then connected to another Hebrew word to describe the nature of God. Enclosed in your bulletin is a sheet listing the names of God in scripture, the meaning of that name, the application, Biblical reference and comments concerning the names of God.

- V. But the very special name for the one true God of Israel in the Hebrew language is Yahweh. In the English language Yahweh has often been mistranslated as Jehovah. The name Yahweh, or sometimes spelled without vowels as YHWH was so holy and hallowed among the Jews that they did not say that name lest they blaspheme it. Jesus called God 'Abba' which is Aramaic and equivalent to our English word daddy.
- VI. In Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet the conversation in Act 2, Scene 2 involves a discussion of Romeo's family name- Montague. The question asked in the play is: "What's in a name?" Juliet then makes her famous statement: "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

-in our day and age we may very well agree with Juliet; a rose is a rose; it really doesn't matter what you name it or call it. But this was not the case with ancient Jewish culture. For the Jews and people of other ancient civilizations it was believed that the nature or identity of a person, an object or even a god or goddess was expressed in its name.

-these ancient peoples believed that the actual name of someone or something was filled with power and vitality. The naming of children in the scriptures was a very significant and sacred act. In I Samuel 25:25 there is described an ill-mannered fellow named Nabel which means fool. The Biblical writer said of Nabel: "For as is his name, so is he."

- VII. Sometimes people choose names for their children for what the name means. My parents had just two children: me and my brother who was 17 years older than me. For years he prayed for a baby brother and then lo and behold one day his prayer was answered and I was born. My parents told him that he had prayed so long and hard for a brother that he could name me. So, he went to the Hershey Public Library and got a book of names which listed the names and their meaning. He named me Robert. Robert means fame.

-there are people who don't like their names and some even try to change their names. It reminds me of the guy whose name was Joe Stinky. He hated his name and went to a judge to legally change his name. Joe Stinky was asked by the judge what he wanted his name to be, he said change it to Bob...Bob Stinky.

-sometimes manufacturers spend large sums of money to choose just the right name so their product will achieve significant sales. In ancient times, in order to know a person, it was extremely important to know that person's name. It was also crucial to

know the name of God if people were to enter into a personal relationship with that god and to call upon the name of that god in worship.

-the Psalms are abundant in references to calling upon the name of the Lord: "Sing praises to the name of the Lord". "O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth." In Romans 10:13 Paul tells us that "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." In Philippians chapter 2 Paul speaks of a day when all people shall call upon the name of the Lord saying: "God has highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a hymn that says it like this: 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; let all heaven and earth proclaim. Kings and kingdoms will all pass away but there' something about that NAME'. At baptisms we baptize in the NAME of the Father. in the NAME of the Son and in the NAME of the Holy Spirit.

- VIII. Now with all this as background, we at last come to the specific text under consideration this morning from Exodus chapter 3 in which Moses comes into the presence of the one true and living God as a bush that is burning but is not consumed. It is here in this setting that God speaks to Moses.

-God, first of all identifies himself as the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. But God does not reveal his name; he only reveals his mission to Moses to bring forth the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt.

-then in verse 13 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' And God said: "Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.""

- IX. What a curious name for God...I AM WHO I AM. In Hebrew it reads Ehyeh asher Ehyeh and translated into English means I AM WHO I AM or it could be translated I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE. The name for the God of Israel, Yaweh, is based upon the infinitive verb TO BE which is EHWEH. Sometimes this name has been translated as Jehovah. Now here is the interesting thing, the name of our God, the God of Israel is not a noun but a verb.

-what a strange name for God to assume and yet very significant in our understanding of our God, particularly in light of the importance of names in ancient times which you recall I said expressed the nature and identity of someone.

- X. The name of God: I AM, speaks to us of God's nature in that God is not bound to the past nor is he reserved for the future, but he is present and active in our world and in our lives in the present tense. Many of the pagan people of ancient times worshipped gods and idols who had no power over the present.

-the pagan gods it was believed established the cycles of nature and then let the world run on its own without their divine help or intervention. That is why the ancient peoples worshipped the sun and moon- the cycle of day and night. They worshipped the seedtime and harvest- the cycle of the seasons. They got involved in fertility cults, worshiping the cycle of birth and death.

- XI. The pagan gods were for the most part not thought to be presently active in the world. This is dramatically portrayed in the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah saw the power and presence of God differently than pagan worshipers who identified God with fire, wind, earthquakes, etc. Elijah tells us God is not there, meaning he is not confined to nature but is present in the still small voice. Our God is not bound to nature but over it.

-the God we worship is actively communicating with His people and intervening supernaturally and miraculously in the lives of those who call upon his name. By God revealing His name as I AM.

- XII. He is telling us that we cannot define him...we cannot confine him...we cannot enshrine him. God is not the sun or the moon or the stars but he is as Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:6 "Above all and through all and in all."

-one of the most interesting books I read while in seminary was a book by G.E. Wright entitled: "The God Who Acts". The Bible is the record of God at work among his people of every age and time...working toward a goal.

-the world is in constant transition, but God remains the same. The prophet Malachi records the word of the Lord: "For I am the Lord, I change not!" God does not change, but he causes people and events to change according to His divine will and purpose.

-the writer of Hebrews in speaking of Christ says: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." Jesus himself speaks of his transcendent nature in the Gospel of John when Jesus said: "Truly, truly. I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

- XIII. In the Book of Revelation John records God saying: "I am the Alpha and Omega, who is and was and who is to come." The best way God could help us understand his nature was to tell us that he is I AM. God deals with us daily. In this new year of 2021, take

comfort in knowing that God is here for you...he is with you...and close beside you...no matter what pandemic or political conflict or crises may enter our world and our individual lives.

-God is not going to allow us to think of him only in terms of the past...the God of history, even though he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Nor dare we define God's activity as only dealing with us in the present. God sent his son and named him Emmanuel which means God is with us.

-nor is God just to be thought of in terms as some cosmic entity out there in the future. The Psalmist said: "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God!"

XIV. God's name is I AM...YAHWEH. He cannot be confined, contained or constrained. He IS and WAS and always WILL BE the great I AM...past...present and future. God is with us now and he will be with us throughout the new year ahead of us:

- when sorrows come...the Lord will be with you...I am here
- when adversity strikes...the Lord will be with you...I am here
- when sickness afflicts you...the Lord will be with you...I am here
- when blessings come your way...the Lord will be with you...I am here.

-no matter what you face in 2021 or beyond you need not face it alone. The Lord will be with you! We have the assurance wherever two or three are gathered together in his NAME, he will be in the midst of them.

-now that God has disclosed his name, over the next several weeks we will explore the names with which Jesus chose to identify himself and what that means for our lives. Who would have thought that Mary's baby boy would be THE GREAT I AM!