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In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

Often times when we meet someone for the very first time, it's rare, in fact it may never happen, that someone just directly outright asks us, so just who are you? What are you capable of? That would be kind of rude.

Often times when we meet someone for the first time, we ask more gentle questions sometimes to get to that same answer. What's your name? Where are you from? What do you do? But we never asked directly at least out right. Or maybe you do I don't. Who are you? What are you capable of? But this is exactly the question that Moses asks of God upon meeting God at the burning bush.

Moses is out past the wilderness, he's got his father in law's sheep. He sees a bush burning but not consumed. And he turns aside and then hears the voice of God, the voice of God that says, I'm the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that I've seen the oppression of the people, of your people, my people in Egypt. And I'm sending you Moses to save them. Moses is adamant that he does not want to be the one to save the Israelites, but Moses winds up asking God's name. And here's what's important we've got to unpack for a second. In our society names are used for recognition. "Oh there's Rob, there's Sue, there's Betty." We recognize people through our names. And while that was an aspect in the ancient Hebrew times, names also had an aspect of definition. Your name defined the type of person you were. And so some very clear aspect or examples of this is Jacob whose brother was Esau and Jacob stole Esau's birthright, the name Jacob in Hebrew means trickster. Another example from the New Testament when Simon becomes Peter. Jesus was really just calling Simon the rock because Peter is

Hebrew for rock upon which Jesus will build His church.

So names designated not simply recognition but definition.

So for Moses to ask God God's name he was saying “wait hold on here. If you're going to send me to save the Israelites just who are you. What are you capable of?”

And so God responds with the word, or phrase rather “I am that which I am.” But here's where unfortunately our English translation gets in the way a bit. What God actually responds with is the verb of being. God's name is the verb of being. Now in English you and I know the verb of being as “to be” verbs - am, is, was, were, be, been and being. But God responds with the Hebrew word of verb and beingness. This is the essence of God. So let's unpack that.

First of all God defines God's self as a verb. In fact I'm told, this was years ago, that the literal translation of the opening of the Gospel of John in Spanish literally says God is a verb. So God, God self, God is claiming that God is action. God is motion. God is evolution. God is not static or stationary but he is continually in in motion. This is also reflected in our understanding of the Trinity where ancient Christian Fathers understood that the Father the Son and Holy Spirit were in a continual dance around each other and that dance spilled over into creation. So in one sense God is a verb. God is action.

But on the other sense God is being, God is totality of life and totality of existence. And so we have this incredible organic and intimate blend of God's self being fullness of action but also fullness of being.

So the next time you're somewhere and you get into some argument I'm sure that you do at cocktail parties over the nature of

God. If it gets to somebody complaining or arguing about spirituality and another one complaining about physicality. You say “yes.” If the argument is around a life of faith of contemplation or action you say “yes.”

To be alive to be a follower of Christ and God is to be being and action. And so who God is claiming who God is, is transformative power and life.

God is, was, and will be transformative power and life. God has the power and the desire to transform us our very beingness into who we were always meant to be. And in Scripture oftentimes this transformation comes with a name change as well. So Abram and Sarai, the old and wizened and barren couple, became Abraham and Sarah, the mother and father of the family that ultimately blessed the entire world. Like I said Jacob the Trickster wrestles with God one evening and becomes Israel. The father of the twelve tribes. Israel means one who struggles with God. Again Peter, Simon initially Simon who denied Jesus three times after the resurrection fully becomes Peter the rock on which the church is built. And Saul, the persecutor of Christians, becomes Paul the proclaimer of the good news to the Gentiles and the world beyond the Hebrew people.

Today we don't change our names so much to acknowledge this transformative power in God, but through our names at baptism we acknowledge this transformative power. So at baptism if you've been baptized, or if you will be, we will say a person's first and middle name, I baptize you so in the name and the essence and power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There's great power in God's name of both in spoken and in essence. In fact Judaism understands this power quite well. I remember. So this puts a whole new context into the third commandment. Do not take the Lord's name in vain. They weren't talking about just using the word God flippantly. It's to act in a way of the essence of

being of God that was unworthy of God in Jewish practices. When the cantor reads or comes across the written name of God in this in the Hebrew Scriptures they actually don't say the written name. They say a different name. And there are certain understandings of Judaism today that won't even write the word God. Maybe you've come across this. They write G-D. That is because they are respecting and honoring the profound power of the name of God. So God is inviting us into the fullness of life, the transformative power of action and being by calling upon God's name. See, God is continually calling all of us by name. God invites us to call God by name as well. All right, how do we do that?

Well, explicitly as Christians we do this by using and calling upon the name of Jesus. Now there's a double entendre here. First, we live into the power of essence and being in resurrection that is Jesus. But we also can end prayers in Jesus's name.

But there is an implicit way that all of us can call upon the name of God in every moment of our life that I wish was mine, but it actually is an ancient Hebrew understanding.

So let me explain the name of God as known in Hebrew Scriptures is four letters. And again because of its sacredness it's never been given vowels. This is an odd thing of the Hebrew language. There's no vowels. People actually went and put it in later. But because the name of God was so holy, it's never been given vowels. And so God's name is written in Hebrew text.

Are these four letters Y H W H.

And so if you were to try to pronounce it again without vowels it would sound like this. (breathing sound).

We say the name of God every time we breathe. Ruach the Jewish word for Spirit, is also the Jewish word for the wind. The wind

that hovered over the beginning of nothingness at the time of creation. The thing that we do unconsciously, that our bodies are trained to do whether we like it or not breathed is the name of God. If we didn't do it in a matter of minutes we would be no more. To breathe is to call upon the name of God which puts a hold totally new perspective on this awareness of mindfulness and meditation today on the practice of the breath on being in touch with ancient practice of yoga about being in touch with how we are breathing even in the midst of tension. You know it's scientifically proven that if you take ten deep breaths your blood pressure drops so breathing is a way of calling the palm. The very nature of action and beingness that is God.

So while we continue to explore together what it means to be Jesus followers to live the abundant life to understand God's life and world as it's always been known and desires to be known in the kingdom of God. I want to encourage you in your daily life and our life together that when it feels rough when you're confused or alone both individually but also corporately, when this world feel feels like it's just going to hell in a handbasket, breathe, Let's breathe individually and communally let's breathe and rest into the power and beingness of God because that is what it means to call upon God's name.

Breathe.