

**New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio**



Moses' Divine Call, Burning Bush Encounter

**A Sermon for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2026**

Preacher – Scott Bridges

Proper 17, Year A

[Exodus 3:1-15](#)

[Psalms 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c](#)

[Romans 12:9-21](#)

[Matthew 16:21-28](#)

TOPIC — IDENTITY, and CALLING

1. Moses: Identity Awakened on Holy Ground

Moses' story doesn't begin with triumph. It begins with **not knowing who he is anymore**.

He is **eighty** years old — not young, not ambitious, not the man he once imagined himself to be. He is living on the far side of the wilderness, — not in Egypt, not in Midian, not in the life he fled, and not yet in the life he will be called to. I invite each of you to imagine Moses in this wilderness that is before the holy mountain.

Moses is in a life that feels small and settled, but still uncertain. His identity has thinned out over time.

And it is *there* — in the middle of an ordinary day — that the bush begins to burn.

A fire that illuminates but does not consume. A presence that draws him in rather than drives him away.

And then the voice — not thunder, not command, but a voice that sounds strangely familiar.

In the movies, *The Ten Commandments* and *The Prince of Egypt*, the same actor voices both Moses and God. It's a metaphor for something Scripture hints at: **God's call often sounds like the deepest part of ourselves — the part we've ignored or forgotten.**

The divine voice awakens the human voice. The holy summons stirs the inner life. The call of God resonates in the place where identity is waiting to be reborn.

Moses turns aside. He pays attention. He steps toward the fire.

And in that moment — before God gives him a mission, before God sends him anywhere, God gives him **holy ground** — a place where identity is not taken from him, but given back to him.

2. YHWH: God's Name as Living Presence

Moses asks the question every human being eventually asks: “**Who are You?**” And beneath it: “**And who does that make me?**”

God answers in a way no ancient god ever had.

Before giving His Name, God gives His heart:

“I have seen the misery... I have heard their cry... I know their suffering... I have come down.”

Historian Thomas Cahill in “The Gift of the Jews” calls this a turning point, the birth of a new *kind* of God — not a distant cosmic force, nor a deity bound to the cycles of nature, but a God who **sees** and **hears**, a God who **acts**, who **intervenes**, who **moves**.

Then God gives His Name.

Not a title. Not a category. Not a definition.

A **verb**. A breath

YHWH. In Hebrew, ‘Yod, He, Vav, He’

“I AM WHO I AM.” “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.” “I WILL BE WITH YOU.”

God's identity is movement. God's identity is presence. God's identity is action. God defined not by what He is, but by what He does.

And suddenly Moses' identity begins to shift. He is no longer the man who fled Egypt. He is the man who bears God's Name — the man who walks into his calling not with confidence, but with **companionship**.

3. Peter: Identity Misaligned and Re-Aligned

If Moses shows us what it looks like when identity is awakened, Peter shows us when identity is confused.

Peter is the disciple who gets it gloriously right and then disastrously wrong — often within minutes.

He had just named Jesus with perfect clarity: **“You are the Messiah.”**

And then immediately tries to correct Jesus’ understanding of His own identity: **“This must never happen to you.”**

Peter wants a Messiah who avoids suffering. Jesus is the Messiah who transforms it.

Peter wants a Messiah who stays still. Jesus is the Messiah who moves.

Jesus’ rebuke — **“Get behind me”** — is not rejection. It is repositioning.

“Come back to the place where your identity is shaped by Mine.”

Peter’s story reminds us that identity is not static. Identity is a relationship — a continual realignment with the God who calls us forward.

4. The Two Voices: Fear and Calling

Every identity story — Moses’, Peter’s, ours — comes down to **two voices**.

One voice calls us forward. One voice pulls us back. Both sound like our own.

These two voices are not abstract. They are the lived reality of every disciple

The Voice of Fear

Fear is the voice Peter hears first.

It is the voice that speaks in the language of self-protection:

- “Don’t go there.”
- “Don’t risk that.”
- “Don’t step into anything you can’t control.”

Fear wants a Messiah who stays still. Fear wants a God who fits our expectations. Fear wants a calling that doesn’t cost you anything.

Fear always sounds reasonable., familiar. Fear always arrives disguised as caution, prudence, or common sense.

Fear is the voice that says, **“This must never happen to you.”**

It is the voice that tries to reshape God into our expectations instead of letting God reshape us into His.

Fear is not evil — but it is limiting. Fear is a stumbling block

It keeps us small. It keeps us safe. It keeps us – stuck.

Fear is the voice that says, “Stay where you are. Stay who you are. Stay in control.”

The Voice of Calling

Calling is the voice Moses hears at the bush.

It is the voice that speaks in the language of invitation:

- “Take off your sandals.”
- “Pay attention.”
- “Step toward the fire.”
- “I will be with you.”
- A voice speaking “You don’t need to know who you are yet — you need to know who I am.”

Calling awakens the divine spark. Calling resonates in the deepest part of the self — the part God planted. Calling feels like possibility, movement, and life.

Calling always speaks in the language of trust. Calling always feels like invitation. Calling always asks us to walk into something we cannot yet see.

Calling is the voice that says, **“I will be who I will be — and I will be with you.”**

Tension and Discernment

These two voices are the soundtrack of every spiritual life.

Moses hears the voice of calling. Peter hears the voice of fear. And we each hear both — often at the same time.

You know these voices; you have each heard them. They are **your** stories. At different ages. In different seasons. In different wildernesses.

Sometimes fear is louder. Sometimes calling is clearer. Sometimes they overlap so closely we can’t tell them apart.

But identity — true identity — is shaped by the voice we choose to follow. — Fear or Calling.

“*Stay*”, or “Follow; “*Avoid the Fire*”, or “Step in and be transformed”; “Define yourself”, or “Let Me name you.”

The question is not: **“Do I hear a voice?”**

We all do.

The question is: **“Which voice is shaping my identity?” “Which voice is shaping my mission?” “Which voice is shaping my next step?”**

Identity is shaped by the voice we choose to follow.

5. Our Identity: Named, Accompanied, and Sent

Identity is not something we manufacture. Identity is something God speaks, reveals, and grows in us over time — often through seasons that feel unfinished or in-between.

— Identity Evolving

Every identity story begins where Moses began — in the place where we are not who we were, and not yet who we will be. We each know that place in some season of life. I know it from my own story.

As I approached the landmark of forty, I found myself searching for work with more stability and room to grow. Two part-time jobs opened unexpectedly — roles that drew on my skills, stretched me in new ways, and fitted together well.

It wasn't dramatic. But it was holy ground — the kind of place where God quietly returns us to ourselves.

Fear was present: "Who am I now?"

But another voice was present too: "Pay attention. I am here. I will be with you."

God wasn't giving me work. God was rebuilding identity — through accompaniment, not achievement.

— Identity Re-Aligned

Identity is not a one-time revelation. It is a continual realignment.

You learn through the seasons of your life that identity is not each element of your life, your identity is the presence of the God who moves with you through your journey

About the time I turned fifty-three, after a decade of work that had grown responsibility from a few stores to more than a dozen, my employer cut the full-time field team by half.

A title gone. A routine gone. A community gone. A decade of meaning gone.

And again, two voices:

The voice of caution — "Stay safe. Don't risk."

And the voice of calling — “Turn aside and see. Something is glowing. I will be with you.”

Identity is not static. Identity is a relationship — a continual returning to the God who leads us forward.

— Identity → Mission

Moses is not sent because he is confident. He is sent because God is present.

Peter is not restored because he is perfect. He is restored because Jesus is patient.

And we are not called because we have clarity. Each of us are called because God has a Name — a Name that moves, accompanies, and enlivens.

In at least these two seasons of my life, God’s presence was active with possibilities on my journey to find how my identity would change.

God’s identity shapes your identity. Your identity shapes your mission. Your mission shapes your journey.

6. The Burning Bush and the Cross

The burning bush and the cross reveal the same God and the same Name.

The God who comes down comes down again — this time into suffering, into abandonment, into death.

The cross is not the opposite of the burning bush. It is the burning bush carried to its fullest expression.

The bush shows us God’s presence. The cross shows us God’s purpose.

The bush shows us God’s fire. The cross shows us God’s love.

The bush teaches us that God’s presence enlivens. The cross teaches us that God’s love redeems.

Jesus embodies the verb-Name of God: **“I will be with you. I will move toward suffering to redeem it. I will move toward death to defeat it.”**

God’s presence is active, not abstract. God’s Name is movement, not stagnation. God’s identity shapes ours.

7. The God Who Calls Us Forward

Identity is not a fixed possession. Identity is not a title we hold or a role we perform. Identity is the Name spoken over us by the God who moves — the God who burns without consuming, the God who suffers without abandoning, the God who calls without coercing.

This God calls *us*, calls us into His Name— not because we are ready, not because we are certain, not because we have clarity, but because He is present.

So, the question becomes:

**Which voice are you following? Which Name is shaping your identity?
Which fire is illuminating your next step?**

Because the God who called Moses, the God who re-aligned Peter, the God who has walked with me and with each of you through every in-between place, is calling you still

- calling you forward,
- calling you and I deeper,
- calling each of us into the life that bears His Name.

And that Name — the Name that is a verb, the Name that is a promise, the Name that is a presence — goes with you.

Always.

Amen.