

Discovering Who I Am in Christ

Exodus 3:14-15 John 8:51-56

When it comes to speaking a language, there's nothing more basic than learning the "to be" verb. In particular knowing the first person singular: I am

Ich Bin, Yo Soy, , Naneun Im Ni Da, Wo Shi, Io Sono, eu sou, I Am. I probably butchered some of those words, for I am no expert when it comes to speaking different languages. Actually it would have been very helpful to have had a better grasp of Spanish while we were visiting our daughter, Amanda and her husband, Bobby, in Honduras last week. Fortunately we had them to do a lot of translating for us.

Today we begin a sermon series on the "I Am" sayings of Jesus. The resource that we will be using in our "Soup and Study" – The God We Can Know, will serve as a guide for this series. The author of the book, Rev. Rob Fuquay, describes the "I Am" sayings as "rich in imagery and steeped in historical meaning" that "provide powerful insights into the heart of God and God's desire to know and be known." So each Sunday we will be looking at the "I Am" sayings of Jesus" I am the Bread of Life, I am the Light of the World, I am the Good Shepherd, I Am the True Vine, I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and lastly on Easter Sunday, I Am the Resurrection and the Life. I believe that our examination of these sayings during the season of Lent will not only help us to understand the context of these words, but deepen our faith and our relationship with Jesus Christ.

So let's dig in and explore the meaning behind the "I Am" sayings. When we say "I Am" it often is a means of identification. I am a pastor, someone else may say, I am a teacher, a farmer, I am a homemaker. Or we might say I am a father, a grandmother, I am a child, I am an American, I am a United Methodist (our new members now have that new identity). To say "I Am" is to make a claim about yourself.

In today's OT lesson we have Moses' encounter with God. God has given to Moses a special mission. To go and speak to Pharaoh with an important message. *You must let my people go.* Can you picture this: God was sending Moses who had fled from Egypt after killing an Egyptian soldier back to Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world and making such a demand to release the Hebrew slaves. Moses, had to be thinking:

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God, You've got to be kidding. Of course it's in this passage where Moses comes up with all kinds of excuses as to why he's not the man for the job. Finally needing some reassurance and confirmation he asks God, Well, when they ask who sent me, what is his name, what shall I say? Moses believed there would at least be some weight behind his request if he could give God's name. God tells Moses: Tell them: I Am Who I Am" has sent you. You can't get any more basic or fundamental than that. I Am who I Am. God is the Great "I Am". There are a lot of descriptions of the nature of God in the Bible, Our refuge, our Rock, our deliverer, but foundational to all of them is the very being of God: I am who I am.

Now you can see why Jesus caused such a stir among the children of Abraham. Jesus is giving witness to the Pharisees about their understanding of the law and their relationship with God, He warns them about depending on their ancestry rather than their belief in God. They accuse him of being a Samaritan and of having a demon. They question him: Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets who died? Who do you claim to be, Jesus? You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? And then the clincher: Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Well, that didn't sit too well. To make such claims was blasphemous. The Scripture says "they took up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

Before we explore the "I am" sayings of Jesus, we must discover and hold on to this wonderful truth. Jesus Christ is the great I am. Jesus came to this earth as the very Son of God, and revealed to us who God is. Jesus is "I Am".

I want to say to you this morning that getting a hold of that basic truth creates a fundamental shift in how we see ourselves. For when we see Jesus as he really is, we can take a new look at ourselves.

We are persons who have been created in the image of God. It's part of the creation story. Male and female God created them. And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good.

But we know the story, as human beings we thought we had a better plan, we messed up, and we have broken that relationship with God. We

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became a broken people, in essence we distorted our image of ourselves. We damaged our identity. We live beating up on ourselves and other people. We don't have to look beyond the mirror, to see we are sinners and we often live as sinful people. But God loves us too much to want us to be enslaved by our sins, to be people who have no hope.

And it's the recognition of who God is: The Great I Am, The God who deeply loves us, that can begin the transformation of our own self-identity.

Because in light of seeing who God is, we recognize our own sin and brokenness and our need for restoration. Those of you who were at the Pops concert will remember that I played a song from the 50's entitled I Am Not Worthy. Based on that very concept, when we recognize the God who is the Great I Am, we see who we really are, a sinner in need of God's grace. They are the sentiments of Jacob as he prepares to meet his brother Esau. He says to God: I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant. They are the feelings of the apostle Paul we read in I Corinthians: For I am the least of all of the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. The song, I Am Not Worthy was written by Bea Bixler who after experiencing God's healing as a sick child, recognized her gift for music and became a pianist and song writer. The words of the song describe that recognition of our position before an almighty and all loving God. I repeat the words of that song: I am not worthy, the least of his favor, but Jesus left heaven for me. The Word became flesh, and he died as my Savior, forsaken on dark Calvary. I am not worthy, this dull tongue repeats it, I am not worthy, this heart gladly beats it. Jesus left heaven to die in my place. What mercy, what love and what grace.

Here's the thing...when we see who God is, when we get a sense of God's amazing love and grace, we no longer need to live with that sense of unworthiness. When I turn to the one who is the great I Am, I realize that I am made worthy. I see who I am as a child of God, one of God's creation. In other words, I can truly see my own identity, I can discover who I am, who I was created to be, when I look to Jesus, the One who is the great I am.

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What better time than now as we begin this season of Lent, to acknowledge this wonderful truth. This is a time of soul-searching, of spiritual examination. A time to take a close look at ourselves and see ourselves as we truly are. We see our sins, our brokenness, our needs before an awesome God. This can be a time to also turn to the Lord in faith, to trust in what Jesus has already done for you. Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness. Christ worthiness allows us to see our worthiness. Our relationship with God is restored in Christ, we are made worthy because of who Jesus is. I can see who I am and whose I am. I can claim my own identity, when I identify with Jesus who says, I am.

When I truly grasp this important truth, it changes how I look at myself, and it also changes how I look at others. I begin to see that part of my purpose in life is to help others see their worth in God's eyes. That each person has been created in the image of God. Yes, that image has been distorted by our sin, but we have been given a mission and ministry of restoration, helping others reclaim their identity in Christ.

As many of you know, I just returned from Honduras. Joanna and I had the privilege of visiting with our daughter, Amanda and her husband, Bobby who are serving as missionaries in LaCeiba. It was our first opportunity to see their surroundings and to see the ministry they have with children at risk at a home called Casa Feliz. One of the blessings of our time there was meeting with the children. Some are orphans, many are from troubled homes, some have been abused, others have been abandoned by their parents. These are children who some had labeled "unworthy" or left to fend for themselves. This ministry is seeking to change that perspective and give these kids a different outlook on themselves and a hope for their future. Through love, education, and the witness of faith around them, it is a ministry of healing, restoration, seeing their worthiness as a child of God.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must realize that is what we are all called to do. Maybe not as a missionary, but as a servant of God seeking to minister to others.

This is the calling for each of us as disciples of Jesus. Once we recognize our own identity in Christ, we are challenged to look for those ways we can use the gifts God has given us to bring a sense of hope and new identity to others.

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One of the legends about the beautiful Helen of Troy over whom many battles were fought tells of the time that she was lost after one of the battles. When the army returned to Greece, she was not on any of the ships. Menelaus went to find her at great personal peril. Finally, he finds her in one of the seaport villages. Forgetting who she was, she had become a prostitute. Menelaus finds her in rags, dirt, shame and dishonor. He looks at her and calls out: Helen, You are Helen of Troy. Her back straightens and the royal look comes back. You see, knowing her true identity changed everything.

Knowing our identity in Christ changes everything. This is our testimony when we allow Christ to change our lives. To see our true identity, our worthiness as a child of God. The Great I am says to us. Remember who you are, my child, my creation, a person of great worth. Now go, and help others discover the same.

Our new members were asked to support the church with the affirmation of their vows. One of those vows was through their gifts...not just the material gifts we give, but the recognition that my God given gifts must be used in the service of Christ.

You and I serve a great God. His name is "I am who I am." Jesus, our great "I am" gives us a new purpose, We can reclaim our identity. We discover our sense of self-worth. And because Christ has changed us we also discover our call to be in ministry with others helping them to see their worth and reclaim their identity as well.