

Week One: I AM

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

²⁹Jesus said, "Throw your lot in with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God's works."

³⁰They waffled: "Why don't you give us a clue about who you are, just a hint of what's going on? When we see what's up, we'll commit ourselves. Show us what you can do."

John 6: 29 – 30 (MSG)

If you have ever read the Harry Potter books, you know of the "One that shall not be named." The crime Voldemort committed against Harry's family and his community was so horrific and felt catastrophic, that for years, no one in the community would speak his name. Because of this, Voldemort kept his power. People were so scared of his power and the possibility of him coming back, they could not speak his name. Until Harry said, no more! He will not hold power over himself or his family's history and thus revealing the mystery of how Voldemort gained and lost his power in the story.

We begin this Lenten series studying the "I AM" statements of Jesus as written in the book of John. These statements do not seem to be any big deal but as examples, as Jesus often did, as Jesus being sustenance, light, protection, a path. But if we try to understand why the "I AM" statements are so significant, we must start at the beginning. In Exodus 3:14, God, so far unnamed, tells Moses to go to the Israelites with a message. Moses asked if the people question who told him this message, what should he say? God responds with: "I AM has sent me to you." I AM, the name of God, was given to Moses. In the time of Moses, this statement was extremely powerful. God now had a name, an identity. Not only was his name spoken, but His name means: to be, to exist, in other words I AM, I have always been. The name of God is so sacred, the Jews will not even say the name Yahweh but instead they will say Adonai (a divine name, translated "Lord," and signifying, from its derivation, "sovereignty") or Elohim (strength and power). However, neither of these words are the actual name of God. This name is never to be spoken or written. So, when Jesus stands up and says: "I AM", for the first time, not only is He speaking the unspoken name of God, but He is claiming to BE God. Did he just take away the power of God? Or did Jesus just say, "I AM because I love my people?"

I Am, Yahweh, my Father, let my heart be filled with your presence. In times, when I may forget, please remove that fear and remind me you have always been with me and will always be with me. Amen, so be it!

Thursday, February 15, 2018

by: Phil Hornbostel

“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” ---Revelation 22: 12-13.

In these familiar and profound words, God tells his people that his immortality is not a future covenant, but rather a simple statement of fact. He tells us that he has always been, and always will be: “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Psalm 90: 2b). And while we believe in the eternity of God, we are, in the Lenten season, asked to accept the impending death . . . of God.

How can this be? How can an everlasting God be facing death? Through the incomprehensible love and grace of God, we are given Jesus, as a living and true sacrifice for our sins, for all the horrible and selfish acts that we have committed, are committing, and will commit, through the rest of human existence. And we simply cannot understand why an immortal God would do this. We can meditate on this gift of grace; we can pray for comprehension of why God lays down his life for his people. But, in the end, this is indeed the peace that passes all human understanding: The Lamb of God, the Son of God, that has walked as a man with us, ever since his birth in Bethlehem, is now going to *die!*

God is going to die for us. What wondrous love is this, oh my soul?!

Father, I want to understand the depth of love that you feel for me, but I cannot. It makes no sense that you would care so much for me as to give your life for me, through your Son, Jesus Christ. And so, in this season of repentance, all I can do is offer my humble thanks and praise, for all that you have done. Amen

Friday, February 16, 2018

by: Juel Pierce

When I think of the “I AM” sayings of Jesus, I first go to God’s declaration to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” No one else can define who God is. So, when John records Jesus declaring, “I AM,” it is clear that Jesus is divine. Jesus is God. The only one who can define who Jesus is, is God the Father of Jesus.

And yet, in this year of Mark, we encounter many people who want to define Jesus. Mary his mother, and his brothers want to bring him home “where he belongs.” Those who are sick or demon-possessed want him to be a healer. The scribes and Pharisees want to define him as a blasphemer, a sinner, a law-breaker, someone who hangs out with unclean people, even Beelzebul, the ruler of demons.

Who Jesus is, it is clear, is someone who has come to be with us in our humanness. Jesus is someone who is like us, because he loves us. And because Jesus is like us, we are like Jesus. Many people want to define us. As a woman, I’ve experienced that a lot: You can’t be a

preacher or a chaplain (some say) because you're a woman. All of us are in some way defined by others according to what we look like—whether we are skinny or fat, dark-skinned or light-skinned, smiling or frowning; by what we sound like—deep-voiced or high-voiced, whiny or angry, loud or soft.

Jesus, in claiming the "I AM," also gives us the gift of "I AM"—I am baptized, I am the beloved child of God, I am the one whom God has called.

Thank you, Jesus, that you have called us to follow you and so to be like you. Thank you that I AM the baptized, beloved, chosen of God.

Saturday, February 17, 2018

by: Jeff Langdon

I AM.... For those of us on this side of the Cross, the words that Jesus speaks, I am.... echo those words that Moses encounters in the burning bush on Mount Horeb. Here God is self-labeled as "I am who I am". This is the symbol of an awesome God who simply claims, "I am", and nothing more. What else needs to be said. God is!

To me, few verses in the Bible create more of a sense of awe of this awesome description of God as those found in Genesis 1. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'... so God created humankind in God's image." The notion that something about us resembles God should stir more than a little excitement and some self-reflection.

Because if God is "I Am", then we, who are created in God's image can claim that "I Am" and "We Are"... But We Are What?

We don't have a photograph of God. But if we are created in God's image we may indeed share a resemblance or likeness of God. That image is seen both in ourselves individually and corporately as the Church. And importantly that likeness is on display to those around us and to the rest of the world.

So, what does the world see? There are a multitude of verbs of activity that are connected with God. God is compassionate. God seeks justice. God expresses care and pronounces goodness. God displays mercy. God loves extremely well. God is present. These same words are used to describe Jesus.

The question is, how do we reflect those characteristics? How do we demonstrate our connection to God? Or, do we reflect something that is not God-like or not Christ-like? What do our neighbors see and encounter from us? What would you want them to see?

God, help us remember that you have named and claimed us as your own, and that you even created us to bear a resemblance to you. As we encounter our world let us remember in whose

image we are made, and who and what we reflect. Help us to remember to see that others also are created in your image. Help us to improve our serve. Amen

Sunday, February 18, 2018

by: Pastor Roger Lenander

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14 (NRSV)

This is part of a remarkable event in which God encounters Moses (*Exodus 3:1-15*). Let me say that again. GOD ENCOUNTERS MOSES. Moses isn't searching for God. God seeks out Moses. This is an important distinction in the God and Human relationship. God encounters us in this life. We may hear about God, read about God, here others teach about God. None of that gives to us the ability to encounter God. That is God's domain. God will choose to be known to you in God's time and fashion.

The Psalmist writes, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) While we do not encounter God in our own wisdom and strength, God does give us the faith to prepare for God to encounter us. In that moment everything changes. Our life is no longer one of seeking to be known by God, but God acts intentionally to be known to us.

Come Lord Jesus and reveal your presence in our lives. Amen.

Monday, February 19, 2018

by: Brenda Bass

God said to Moses, "I AM Who I AM. Thus, you shall say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you." Exodus 3:14

When someone asks you, "Who are you?", how do you answer?

Generally, we answer and describe ourselves with the roles we have in life: I am: a student, a wife, a father, a daughter, a son, a sister.... you can continue the list to describe yourself to someone you are meeting for the first time.

Moses was minding his own business – tending the sheep, when he met God for the first time in an unusual manner: a burning bush, that wasn't burning up! Moses, understandably, asks questions to find out who/what is speaking to him and commissioning him for the momentous task of freeing the Israelites from generations of slavery. Moses asks God, "How am I going to tell the people who sent me? What do I say?" God answers in an unusual way – "I AM has sent me to you."

God doesn't focus on the past and everything that God has already done – creating the world, saving Noah, blessing Abraham and Sarah with many descendants. No, God focuses on the present – I AM. I am the God of the here and now, I am the God who walks right beside you, I am the God who is calling you and commissioning you to great and wonderful things! I, the God who created the world and breathed life into you, send you out to the world (for Moses it was Egypt), to proclaim God's Word and free people from whatever is enslaving them.

What a commission! What a proclamation! During this Lenten season as we work through many of the I AM sayings of Jesus; may we remember I AM is with us every moment of every day!

Dear God, we thank you for being with us every moment of every day as we work to spread your grace and mercy to all those whom we meet. Amen.

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

by: Jim Pierce

Our focus in this series of Lenten devotions is on the "I AM" statements of Jesus in the gospel of John. But what caught my eye when I began to read John was the "I AM" statements of someone else—John the Baptist.

In response to questions from the priests and Levites, John responds clearly, "I AM NOT." I am not the Messiah. I am not Elijah. I am not the prophet. A little later, in response to their question about why he is baptizing if he is not the Messiah, John again replies, "I am not—not worthy to untie the thong of Jesus sandal."

Who is John? He answers, "I AM the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

In clarifying who he is not and who he is, John invites us all to complete our own "I AM" statements. I am not able to save myself from any of the things I need rescuing from. I am not able to buy or earn my way into God's grace and kingdom. I am totally dependent on Jesus, the one who is the I Am of God, for healing life and salvation. And, out of my helplessness and need I am able, like John, to point other seekers to the one who is "the way, the truth, the life."

Jesus, God's gracious I AM, open my eyes each day to my need for your healing power. Open my eyes each day to those whom I can join in their need and lead to you as well. Amen

Week Two: I AM the Bread of Life

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

³⁵⁻³⁸ Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in

action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own whim but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me.

John 6: 35 – 38 (MSG)

I, like the disciples in this passage, was not able to picture what Jesus was saying when he said he was the Bread of Life for the longest time. Then I had a mentor explain it to me like this: find some bread and feed it to the birds. Notice how the birds gobble up the bread. When the first few pieces are gone, notice how some birds will fly away and some birds stay, eagerly looking for more. The birds will stay in that spot until you stop throwing the bread to them. But Jesus will never not be the Bread of Life. We should be the birds who stay and eagerly look for more.

When something bad happens to us, or we lose something and are need of a replacement, we seem to pray more at those times. God, please take this pain away. God, please bring this to me. God, lead me in a good decision for what I want. When we feel our prayers have been answered, we gobble up the bread and fly away with filled tummies. Or sometimes, we fly away because we think God is ignoring our perceived needs. God knows we do this. But look at what Jesus said to the disciples: "I hold on and I don't let go." Because he does not let go, he keeps providing us with sustenance, to keep doing his work; strength, to keep going though times may be hard; and protection, for the times we may stray from his path. Because he does not let go, he sacrificed his life for us.

I Am, our Bread of Life, thank you for always feeding us and never letting go. Amen, so be it!

Thursday, February 22, 2018

by: Phil Hornbostel

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs". A second time, Jesus said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep". Jesus said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt, because Jesus had said to him the third time 'do you love me?', and so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you". Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" --John 21: 15-17.

Jesus has said to his disciples, including *us*, that "I am the Bread of Life". And for providing for us not only the bread of salvation through the Eucharist, but also our daily needs, we offer humble thanks. But as we share our love of Jesus through our thanksgiving and thank offerings, he tells us, as he tells Peter, "I want you to turn this love *outward*. I want you to pay it forward. I want my love to dwell within you, to move you to reach out to those around you, who are also my disciples. They may not have your faith, your strength. Life may have dealt

them a more tragic lot. They may be in want, or they may not feel the love of God that you have found”.

In our receiving the Bread of Life, we pass the loaf down the row to the next disciple and the next. But what if we find ourselves at the end of that row? Now what? Well, then it's time to find another disciple, another row, other children of God who need to receive that same Bread of Life. And then pass the loaves. There is plenty to share with all our neighbors; loaves abound!

“Lord Jesus, I give you thanks for providing me all I need, because you are truly the Bread of Life. Give me a more charitable and loving heart, to share the love of God with all your sheep, throughout the world. Amen”

Friday, February 23, 2018

by: Juel Pierce

I am a bread baker. For years I have baked honey whole wheat bread for my family. One of the things that I love about baking bread is knowing everything that is in it. (Whole wheat flour, dry milk, yeast, salt, water, honey, and a little oil.) Amazing, isn't it, that I can turn those things into bread! Of course, it isn't just me. It's the farmer who grows the wheat and the canola, the dairy farmer who milks the cow, the bees who make the honey and the beekeeper who harvests it. And the yeast! It's alive! If the yeast weren't there, I might have crackers, but I wouldn't have bread.

Bread is called the staff of life. If you have bread, you can make it through your life's journey. Of course, even if you make your own bread, you depend on others. Bread is a symbol of all we need for life, and as such it symbolizes all those sisters and brothers we need for our life together to be whole.

When Jesus says he is the Bread of Life, he is not talking about just my life, but our life together. As the Bread of Life, Jesus brings us together. We need bread. We need the Bread of Life. We need the bread that we receive from others. And without others with whom we can share our bread, we do not have the Bread of Life.

The bread I make will leave you hungry, unless you eat it again at the next meal. But Jesus promises that when we receive him as the Bread of Life, we will never hunger again. That's because we share our Bread with others, who also share it with us.

Let us pray. Jesus, give us the bread we need daily. And especially we pray for the Bread that you give us. Open our hands and our tables, that we may share your Bread with all those who need it. Amen.

Saturday, February 17, 2018

by: Jeff Langdon

In John's Gospel account, right after the feeding of the 5 thousand in Chapter 6, Jesus made the first of the recorded I AM statements. Jesus was gaining in popularity. In fact, the crowds wanted to take him --- by force if necessary --- and MAKE him their King. Because of this, Jesus crossed the lake to get away from their demands. But the next day when they figured out where he was, the growing crowd commandeered boats and followed him across the lake.

It was at that point that Jesus told those in this large crowd: **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."** John 6:35 John tells us that the people grumbled, mumbled, argued, and whined....and ultimately many if not most left him.

Evidently, some of His closest disciples wanted Jesus only for what they could get out of Him. They had no real interest in a relationship with God. John even uses this sad indictment: **From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.**

Now Jesus, who was totally God, was also totally human. He felt what any of us would feel. He experienced the pain of rejection ... especially the rejection of those he had considered close friends. Jesus turned to his disciples with a question that must have been hard to ask: **"You do not want to leave too, do you?"** Jesus asked the Twelve.

But Peter spoke up for the group and answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." **John 6:67-69**

Peter understood what the crowds had missed. In some way the disciples were beginning to understand that they weren't there to be fed, or to start a Jewish revolt against Rome, or to find a new list of rules to keep. They were there because they believed and knew that Jesus was the Holy One of God ...the Messiah...the Bread of Life. All they needed was what they already had...Jesus himself.

The question is this...is He all you need? ... Is Jesus YOUR Bread of Life?... Does Jesus satisfy your hunger, or do we seek satisfaction elsewhere? If you had been there the day Jesus preached the Bread of Life sermon would you have walked away, or would you have echoed Peter's words, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...?"

God, help us to remember that you are the Bread of Life. Satisfy us with your love, grace and mercy. Help us to be satisfied and draw us back to you when we want to seek satisfaction elsewhere. And when being fed, send us out to reflect your love to the world in all we do. Amen

Sunday, February 25, 2018

by: Pastor Roger Lenander

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" Luke 24:30-32 (NRSV)

Since 2010 First Lutheran has served over 10,000 meals for the Sunday Community Dinner. Originally it was for the homeless and people living in shelters and expanded to include anyone in the community. It has never been primarily about physical hunger. Founder Ricky Kimble was driving home from work one day and as he passed the Salvation Army Shelter he recalled that when he was a resident of the shelter Sunday afternoon was the most powerful reminder of his separation from family and friends. So, he gathered some co-workers and through those first summer months the crowd grew as they grilled on the parking lot. Then they came to ask me if First Lutheran would be able to provide a place for the cold months. The rest is history. A core of people continues to come each month. Many of them come to the weekly Wednesday Café for the same reason. It feeds our hunger for belonging. Gathered around the table we remind one another that we are not forgotten. We not only eat together, we pray, cry, hurt, and hope together. And without fail, at the end of every meal, we attest that Jesus was with us. At the end of the meal we also can say that Jesus was here as our hearts were burning within us with the holy love that satisfies our hunger. Luke 24:30-32 (NRSV)

Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, let this food to us be blessed. Amen.

Monday, February 26, 2018

by: Brenda Bass

Have any of you ever had to use week-old bread as part of a meal?

Our forefathers and foremothers probably had to do that every day, for almost every meal was comprised of a soup-like dish and when the old bread was soaked, it filled a stomach just like meat. Meat, if it was eaten daily, made up a tiny portion of any meal served.

Our forefathers and mothers also knew that the soul had to be fed and each pioneer family, parents and children alike, read from their Bible daily. Where bread filled their stomachs, the words of our Lord filled their hearts and minds. In fact, most pioneer children were taught to read using the family Bible.

In our daily lives today, each of us search for the fullness that only Jesus' love can give us. When we are in doubt, we ask our Lord to give us strength and ask for answers. That "bread" is ultimately in our hearts and minds before we even stop thinking the question. God fills us up whenever we are hungry – all we need to do is ask.

Thank you, God, for giving us the Bread of Life. Thank you for filling us up every day. Amen.

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

by: Jim Pierce

Exodus 16 begins with the whole congregation of Israel complaining. God heard their cries for release from captivity and brought them dramatically out of slavery in Egypt into a freedom

journey headed to a promised land. Now, on that journey through the wilderness, they complain, "It would have been better if God had just killed us back in Egypt, where at least we had our pots of stew and our fill of bread. You have brought us into this wilderness to kill us with hunger." (Exodus 16:3 paraphrased)

The day after he fed the five thousand, Jesus finds that the crowd, once fed, had followed him by boat, from one side of the sea of Galilee to the other. Here they were again, demanding another meal, presumably one of many to come, a sign like that manna in the wilderness that God was with them. Their demand echoes that of their ancestors. "You can't call us to follow you and not feed us!"

In response Jesus didn't say, "Okay, sit down." but "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

It seems they, and we, get a little mixed up on what the bread of life is. We want to believe prosperity gospel preachers who tell us if we just put our trust in Jesus we will have all that we want in abundance. That belief wakes us up each morning asking, "What are you going to do for me today, God?" "How are you going to show me you love me today?"

The lesson of manna in the wilderness is that God provided the Israelites, and us, not all that we want but simply what we need. And while we and all of God's creatures do indeed need food in our bellies to fuel us through the day, what we need much more is the assurance that God is with us to get us through this day.

As a faith community, we believe that Jesus, the Bread of Life, calls us each to be that assurance, that sign, that bread which tells another, "God is with you today." How can you be that sign today? Where do you experience that assurance today?

Bread of Life, thank you for those who are a sign of God's presence with me today. Use me to be a sign of your presence for someone hungering for that assurance. Amen