

He said, "I Am"
He said, "I Am"
John 8:51-59
February 18, 2018

Again, welcome to worship today on this first Sunday of Lent.

John Smith was the only Protestant to move into a large Catholic neighborhood. On the first Friday of Lent, John had a big juicy steak on his grill. Meanwhile, all of his neighbors were eating cold tuna fish for supper. This went on each Friday of Lent. On the last Friday of Lent, the neighborhood men got together and decided that something had to be done about John; he was tempting them to eat meat each Friday of Lent, and they couldn't take it anymore.

They decided to try and convert John to be a Catholic. They went over and talked to him and were so happy that he decided to join all of his neighbors and become a Catholic. They took him to church, and the priest sprinkled some water over him, and said, "You were born a Baptist, you were raised a Baptist, and now you are a Catholic."

The men were so relieved, now their biggest Lenten temptation was resolved.

The next year's Lenten season rolled around. The first Friday of Lent came, and just at supper time, when the neighbors were sitting down to their tuna fish dinner, there came the wafting smell of steak cooking on a grill.

The neighborhood men could not believe their noses! What was going on? They called each other up and decided to meet over in John's yard to see if he had forgotten it was the first Friday of Lent.

The group arrived just in time to see John standing over his grill with a small pitcher of water. He was sprinkling some water over his steak on the grill, saying, "You were born a cow, you were raised a cow, and now you are a fish."

Lent. Some wonder what it is (it's not what you find in your dryer; that's spelled differently!)

Lent is the 40 days (not including Sundays) that the Christians observe in preparation for the suffering, death, then resurrection of Christ.

Lent is a time of self-denial and discipline. Some people give something up – candy, pop, Facebook, etc. – for Lent.

Lent is a time of tradition. Some people eat fish on Friday, or wear ashes on their forehead on Ash Wednesday.

Lent is a time of repentance. People examine their hearts and ask for forgiveness for what they have done.

Lent is a time for reflection. People consider if their actions, thoughts, and values represent who God calls them to be.

Lent's 40 days remind us of the 40 days during which Moses repented and fasted in response to the Israelites making the Golden calf, as well as the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting and praying.

During Lent this year, we are going to focus on 8 phrases of Jesus that changed the world.

All of us have had to introduce ourselves to someone else. And sometimes, we've had to go beyond the "Hi, my name is..." introduction to something more in-depth.

In that, we at least limit ourselves in what we say; nobody wants to know about the corns on your feet.

Most of us have also had to complete a resume, listing our educational, training, and employment history. And it's a bad idea to make stuff up on that; every once in a while, you will hear about someone who has done that, and it completely destroys their credibility.

Maybe you have had to write a short bio of yourself, maybe for a newsletter or a webpage. You write something that would be interesting to the reader without boring them.

Then you go to the ultimate. How many of you have had a thought of writing some kind of autobiography to tell the stories of your life?

Telling others who you are is part of life, especially as a leader. You've got to be honest and truthful.

During Lent, we are going to look at what Jesus said about Himself, 8 very important things that will lead us into a better understanding of who He is and what that means to us as His followers. "He said, 'I am...'" will transform your thinking about Jesus. I invite you to turn to page 6 in your bulletin.

But we must begin to understand something that we miss because we don't speak Greek or Hebrew, and this is key to this series. So let me direct you to John 8. At the end of the chapter, we see Jesus in the Temple going toe-to-toe with some people who were questioning who He said He was. It's easy to see the tension building amidst the back and forth exchanges. They thought Jesus called them slaves at one point, illegitimate children at another. They replied that Jesus was a Samaritan (a despised person) and demon possessed. Jesus then said this:

I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!" The people said, "Now we know you are possessed by a demon. Even Abraham and the prophets died, but you say, 'Anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!' Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" Jesus answered, "If I want glory for myself, it doesn't count. But it is my Father who will glorify me. You say, 'He is our God,' but you don't even know him. I know him. If I said otherwise, I would be as great a liar as you! But I do know him and obey him. Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad." The people said, "You aren't even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!" At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.¹

Ok, what is the trigger here that would bring the people to want to immediately stone Jesus? What was it that riled them up so much that they instantly wanted to kill Him? Jesus said 2 words: "I am." But what so big a deal about two little words, "I am"?

Well, let's look at the Greek here.

There are two words: *ego eimi*.² Let's look at the second word first. *eimi* is the verb for "to be" – is, are, was, were, am. We are here. I was there. Sentences like that.

eimi is the form that means "I am." If I was hungry, I would say "*eimi* hungry"; I am hungry. So *eimi* means "I am."

¹ John 8:51-59 (NLT)

² εγω ειμι

Now, the first word is *ego*. We know this word; it's not Eggo as in "let go of my Eggo" but ego, or self. By itself, it is translated "I". I *ego* went to church today. *Ego* miss my wife.

Ok, so let's put the two words together. *Ego* means what? I. And what does *eimi* mean? I am. So *ego eimi* means "I I am." Wait, that's weird. Why does Jesus say "I I am?" Did He flunk grammar at Nazareth Elementary School? What's the deal?

Well, to understand fully what He is getting at, we have to go back to Exodus 3 and the calling of Moses. Remember, Moses was born in Egypt and raised as a prince for 40 years. He left Egypt and spent the next forty years living as a shepherd. Then one day, he sees a bush that burns but is not consumed. And God calls him to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Moses responds and tells God how he can't do this. So then he has this back-and-forth exchange with God. Finally verses 13-14:

But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?" God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you."³

God called Himself I AM (Hebrew YHWH, as biblical Hebrew was written with consonants only). "Yahweh": a name describing His eternal power and unchangeable character. I am.

Fast forward to Jesus in John's Gospel. The Greek equivalent of YHWH is *ego eimi*. So when Jesus used these words, He was saying when referring to himself, "Before Abraham was even born, Yahweh." He was calling Himself God, and the people knew it immediately. That's why the people wanted to stone Jesus. To call oneself God deserved the death penalty, for it was blasphemy.

But that is exactly what Jesus did. By saying *ego eimi*, He was clearly telling the people He is God. He said:

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!"⁴

What a truth this is: Jesus said He is God in the flesh.

Two senior-aged couples were enjoying friendly conversation when one of the men asked the other, "Fred, how was the memory clinic you went to last month?"

"Outstanding," Fred replied. "They taught us all the latest psychological techniques, such as visualization, association and so on. It was great. I haven't had a problem since."

"Sounds like something I could use. What was the name of the clinic?"

Fred went blank. He thought and thought, but couldn't remember. Then a smile broke across his face and he asked, "What do you call that flower with the long stem and thorns?"

"You mean a rose?"

"Yes, that's it!" He turned to his wife, "Hey Rose, what was the name of that memory clinic?"

We cannot allow ourselves to forget this truth: Jesus is God.

Well folks, this is another one of those times when I've bit off more than I can chew. We are not going to get to John 14 today; we'll have to save it for next week.

Left me close with this:

³ Exodus 3:13-14 (NLT)

⁴ John 8:58 (NLT)

In Christ We Have:

- A love that can never be fathomed
- A life that can never die
- A righteousness that can never be tarnished
- A peace that can never be understood
- A rest that can never be disturbed
- A joy that can never be diminished
- A hope that can never be disappointed
- A glory that can never be clouded
- A light that can never be darkened
- A purity that can never be defiled
- A beauty that can never be marred
- A wisdom that can never be baffled
- Resources that can never be exhausted.