

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Princeton, MN

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

The last two Sundays we have heard Jesus say, “I am the Good Shepherd” and “I am the True Vine and you are the branches.” In the Gospel of John there are at least seven or eight “**I AM**” statements that Jesus uses to show us the relationship that He has with His disciples, you and me. Jesus’ “**I AM**” statements would have particular significance to a Jewish listener in Bible days. In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself and His name in the burning bush to Moses with a resounding “**I AM**” (or Yahweh) in Exodus 3:14. Jesus uses the exact same word(s) to describe Himself in the Gospel of John. Below is a list of Jesus’ seven “**I AM**” (Yahweh) statements.

1. “**I AM** the Bread of Life.” (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51) As bread sustains physical life, so Christ offers and sustains our spiritual life through His Word and Sacraments.
2. “**I AM** the Light of the world.” (John 8:12) To a world lost in darkness, Christ offers Himself as the guide and as light removes darkness, so Jesus, the Light of the world removes the darkness of sin, death and the power of the devil.
3. “**I AM** the Door of the sheep.” (John 10:7,9) Jesus protects His followers as shepherds protect their flocks from predators.
4. “**I AM** the Resurrection and the Life.” (John 11:25) Death is not the final word for those in Christ. Because He lives, we too shall live
5. “**I AM** the Good Shepherd.” (John 10:11, 14) Jesus is committed to caring for and watching over those who are His as a shepherd cares for and loves his sheep.
6. “**I AM** the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6) Jesus is the source of all truth and knowledge about God and no one comes to the Father except through Him.
7. “**I AM** the True Vine.” (John 15:1, 5) By grace through faith we are attached to Christ as a branch is to a vine, thus His righteousness and love flows in us to make us holy and then through us to others. Then we cannot help but bear fruit that will honor the Father.

The eighth “**I AM**” statement is found in John 8:58, and it may be the most profound of the bunch. Here Jesus makes two claims that upset the Jews to whom He was speaking. He said that he existed before Abraham who had died perhaps 2000 years prior to Jesus. He also equated Himself to God, specifically taking the holy name that God revealed to Moses in the burning bush, “**I AM**” or (Yahweh), and a name which was so holy that the people of Jesus’ day would not even utter it out loud. Their reaction? They pick up stones to throw at Jesus to kill him, but Jesus hid himself and left the temple, because His time had not yet come. Read the story in John 8:48-59:

*“The Jews answered him, ‘Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’”⁴⁹ Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.’⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.’⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”⁵² The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?’⁵⁴ Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.’⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM**.’⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”*

The Son of God, through Whom the whole universe was made, comes to His own and should have been the object of their worship. He came to be among God’s people to save them, and He has to leave the Temple dedicated to His Father Who sent Him. But Jesus is the eternal **I AM**. He was and is and is to come. He had to leave the temple that day, but He has promised to be eternally present with his people – those who call upon him in faith, you and me. This eighth “**I AM**” statement of Jesus establishes Him as our Lord and our God. He is our Redeemer, the source and center of our faith.

In Christ, Pastor Tischer

(Portions of this letter are from an article, “The Eighth “I am” statement in John’s Gospel” by Rev. David Bahn, retired pastor, LCMS, Texas)