

Title: "Jesus and the Great I AM"
Text: John 8:48-58 (and Exodus 3:1-15)

Turn with me today to the Gospel of John, chapter 8.

- All this year we have been inviting the writers of the New Testament to "re-introduce" us to Jesus.
- But this Wednesday is Ash Wednesday which begins the season of Lent,
 - and throughout the 7 weeks of Lent leading up to Easter I want to give Jesus the opportunity to "reintroduce himself."

In the Gospel of John, which we have been studying together in our Adult class on Sunday mornings,

- John records 7 "I Am" statements of Jesus.
- They are 7 statements in which Jesus tells us himself about who he is.
- He says, "I am the light of the world."
 - I am the Gate for the sheep,
 - I am the Good Shepherd,
 - I am the Bread of Life
 - I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,
 - I am the True Vine,
 - I am the Resurrection and the Life."

We are going to spend time on each of these "I Am" sayings over the 7 weeks of Lent.

Today I want to give a little preview of these "I AM" sayings,

- by reading for you this passage in John 8:48,
 - where we come in on a rather heated conversation Jesus had with some Jewish leaders who were rather antagonistic to these claims Jesus made for himself.
 - Jesus ends the conversation by saying something they found to be truly an outrageous "I AM" statement.
-

"Before Abraham was born, I AM," Jesus says.

- And at this they picked up stones to stone him.

The Jews Jesus was talking to were ready to stone Jesus to death for saying these two simple words, "I AM."

- We think, "What's the big deal? Why kill someone for that?"

-They thought, "It's blasphemy. He deserves to die."

In our earlier reading from Exodus today we find the reason for all of this.

-It's the story of Moses at the burning bush.

And you remember the story?

-It's 1500 years before Jesus was ever born into the world.

-The Jewish people descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are enslaved in Egypt.

-They are making bricks to build the pyramids for the Pharaohs.

Moses grew up as an adopted son in the Pharaoh's own household,

-but now he is out in the wilderness of Midian tending sheep.

-He ran away from Egypt many years before because he had killed an Egyptian while trying to rescue a fellow Israelite.

So Moses is out in the boondocks tending a flock of sheep and minding his own business,

-when all of a sudden he notices a bush a little ways away.

-The bush seems to be engulfed in flames,

-but the branches of the bush aren't really being burnt.

It's an unusual sight, and makes Moses curious enough to go and check it out.

-And as he approaches this strangely burning bush, he hears a voice which seems to speak to him right out of the burning bush, saying his name: "Moses!"

Now if he thought the burning bush was curious, this really startles him. The bush knows his name!

And then it says, "Come no closer. First take off your sandals for the place you are standing is holy ground."

So Moses does what he is told. He takes off his sandals.

-This day is getting curiouser and curiouser.

- Then the bush speaks again, "Moses, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."
- And he goes on to tell Moses that He has heard the cries of Abraham's descendants in Egypt,
- and that He has decided to set them free from their slavery and bondage there.

And the Lord says, "Moses, I have decided to send you to the Pharaoh of Egypt to bring my people out of captivity."

Now what would you say to all of that?

- Moses quite naturally says, "What did you say your name was again?"
- He's not quite sure what to do with this whole experience.
- He says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God says, "Don't worry. I will be with you."

And Moses says, "Yeah, right. But give me a little more to go on here.

- When I am standing there in front of the most powerful king in all the known world,
- just who shall I say is sending me?
- What name shall I give him?"

And God says, "I AM."

Now imagine Moses standing there in his bare feet before this burning bush.

- He waiting for a name. "I am....who?"
- "Come on, voice. Tell me who I should say sent me."
- And God says, "Tell them I AM."
- And Moses is still waiting with baited breath, "I am Moses.
- Who are you?"

And God thunders, "I AM who I AM.

- That is what you are to say to Pharaoh.
- Tell him, I AM has sent you to them.
- That is my name, and the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

It's a powerful moment in the history of the Jewish people.
-It's the moment when the God of all creation reveals his personal name to them,
-and invites them to call upon that name for their deliverance and rescue from bondage and slavery.

In Hebrew it is the four consonants YHWH,
-which we have come to pronounce either as Jehovah, or as Yahweh.
-But it is the first person singular of the Hebrew verb "to Be:" "I Am."

That is the name God calls himself.
That is the name God gave to Moses to take before the most powerful king of the earth in that day.
That is the name by which that earthly king was brought to his knees before the amazing power and might of YHWH.
That is the name which became so holy to Jewish people that they stopped saying it for fear that they might take the name in vain.

So now can you begin to imagine how those Jews felt that day when this man Jesus said,
"You claim Abraham as your father. Before Abraham was born, I AM."

They couldn't believe their ears.
-Not only did he just pronounce the most holy name out loud and in public,
-but it sounded to all the world like he just used the name for himself!
"I Am," he just said. "I...AM!"

That's why they heard blasphemy that day.
-Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth turned itinerant preacher had just taken God's most holy name
-and claimed it for his own.

It was pretty shocking then, and if you think about it, it's still pretty shocking today.
-Jesus claims as his own the very name of God.

- And he does this because he knows himself to be the Father's only begotten Son.
- All through this chapter Jesus speaks of God as his Father
 "My father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me," Jesus says in v.54.
 "Though you do not know him," Jesus goes on, "I know him. I'd be a liar if I said I didn't."

And it's not the only time Jesus makes such claims.
 "I and the Father are One," Jesus says in John 10:30.
 "I am in the Father and the Father is in me," he says in 15.

You see, the Father's name is his name in the same way that I am a McPheeters because my father is a McPheeters.
 -So Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I AM."
 -It's my name, too.

And the Gospel of John goes on to record these 7 specific incidents where Jesus uses the "I AM" for himself,
 -and adds to it some of his "Godly" attributes.
 -I am the Light of the World.
 -I am the Good Shepherd.
 -I am the Bread of Life, he who comes to me shall not....
 -I am the Resurrection and the Life.
 -I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me,
 -because I am the Gateway.

But today, before we spend time looking at any of these "I AM" sayings in Lent,
 -I want us to think for just a minute about what it means right here for Jesus to simply say, "I AM," all by itself.
 "Before Abraham was born," he says, "I AM."

It's just like God saying to Moses, "Tell Pharaoh "I AM" sent you. That is my name all by itself. I AM."

Think about that for a moment.
 -Before there are any words or attributes to describe WHO God is, HE Simply Is.

"I AM," says the Father. "I AM," says the Son.

Before any of you ever were born, "I AM."
Beyond any words you could ever use to describe me, "I AM."
Above any attribute you could ever ascribe to me, I AM.

You see, "I AM" as a name actually proclaims God's eternal,
infinite, uncreated BEING.
-He was and is and always will be. God simply IS.

Do you see that?
-You and I are created beings who live and die.
-Our lives have a beginning and an end.
-We are finite, and we are bound by time.
-But that is not true of the great "I AM."

Yahweh exists for ever and He is always the same.
-God does not grow older.
-His life does not wax or wane.
-He doesn't gain new powers or lose the powers He has.
He simply IS.

And He is eternally PRESENT with us.
-"I AM" is the 1st person singular of the verb, "to be"
and in the present tense.

Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I Am."
-You see, it is still in the present tense, even though he is
talking about Abraham who lived 2000 years before.
-For God, time does not work like it does for us.
-He is eternally present, always here, always now,
always today.

And He is unchangeable.
-The same yesterday, today, and forever,
because He simply IS the way He is.
"I AM who I AM" God says.
"Before Abraham was," Jesus says, "I AM."

Now I don't know about you, but I can be quite changeable.
-I change my mind, I change my clothes, I change my mood.
-At times I can be loving and kind and compassionate,
-at other times I can be self centered and stubborn and
rather callous.

- At times I can be full of faith and hope.
- at other times I can be full of doubt and fear and insecurity.

But God, Father, Son, and Holy, is not like that.

- I AM who I Am, he says, and I always will be.
- My character does not change.
 - I am slow to anger and abounding in love because that is who I am!
 - I am just and kind and merciful and mighty.
 - I am holy, righteous, pure, and truthful.
- Or as Jesus says, "I am the light of the world, the bread of life, the way, the truth, and the life!"
- I am these things always and forever.

I am who I am before Abraham was ever born.

I am who I am right now in the present.

I am who I am until the end of time.

- This is my name, says God the Father. This is my name, says God the Son. This is my name says the Holy Spirit.
- The name by which I am to be remembered for all generations.

My friends, towards the end of John's Gospel, where he is telling of the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in chapter 18,

- the soldiers come for Jesus with swords and spears and torches to lighten the darkness of night.
- Jesus steps out of the darkness into the light of those torches and asks them, "Who is it you want?"
- And the guards say, "Jesus of Nazareth."
- And Jesus responds, "I AM."
 - And the power of Jesus' statement knocks the guards to the ground.
 - It is the same words. "I AM who I AM."

And the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2, that at the resurrection of Jesus,

- he is raised to the right hand of God in heaven and is given the name that is above every name.

And it's not that Jesus didn't own that name while on earth.

- We have seen here today that he did.

- But Paul says that while on earth he “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”
- And many on earth did not acknowledge his right to claim the name of God as his own.

But even now in heaven at the right hand of the throne of His Father,

- Jesus owns that name in full, the name that is above every name.
- And the day is coming when every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and even under the earth,
- and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The name that is above every name is the Great I AM, YHWH, Jehovah God,

- We get to call him also Jesus,
- Our ever living Savior, Lord, and friend.

Let us pray.