

What's In A Name – from Pr. Erickson – April 2019

Our theme for the Lenten season is THE SEVEN "I AM's" of Jesus in John's Gospel. I'd like to share a thought from each of the four "I AMs" we have meditated upon so far in Lent, both as a review for those who have been able to enjoy the soup suppers and the short services that followed, as well as an incentive to those who couldn't, to open John's Gospel and let the Lord speak to you as you prepare for Easter.

First a reminder that when Jesus says, "I AM", he is talking about who He is for you, and for me. Each name is an invitation and a challenge for our faith to appropriate what is in His name. Now the Apostle John gives us a number of names of Jesus that do not come from Jesus' own mouth such as "The Word", and "The Lamb of God". But the ones we have been considering come directly from Jesus himself as recorded by John.

And each "I AM" is actually a double pronoun in the original, "I, I AM". When Moses asked God, "Who shall I say sent me (to Pharaoh), Jehovah God said, "Tell him 'I AM' has sent you". This name means the uncreated, eternally self-existing One. Jesus uses the I AMs in the same way to reveal his own Divinity. Each name is accompanied by a 'sign', a miracle that exemplifies the name.

"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE" (JOHN 6:35). The feeding of the 5,000 is the miracle Jesus does and then teaches us that He is "The Bread of Life" that gives life to the world. Few things make our mouths water like fresh bread. Jesus says that He is the true bread, the bread we are to eat, the nourishment we require, the substance that once ingested and digested fills our whole being with Himself, for He is the Bread. Sounds like Scripture which is spiritual bread, and Holy Communion which is bread and wine.

"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" – (John 8:12). This saying is followed by the 'sign' of the healing of the man born blind in chapter 9. Jesus' audience is composed of unbelieving people with spiritually darkened minds who are plotting how to kill him. They are blind. The irony of the 'sign' that follows, the healing of the man born blind, is that the blind man is given both physical

and spiritual sight while the Pharisees who have physical sight are themselves blind to the illumination that Jesus can give. Light does many things in our world: It reveals, it banishes darkness, it heals (seasonal affective disorder), it makes things grow, it attracts. These are things that Jesus does as the light of the world.

"I AM THE DOOR" AND "I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD"- (JOHN 10). The joining of these two names is appropriate because they both have to do with the image of the sheepfold and the sheep. Both names are contrasted in John 10 with the dangers of predators and thieves and robbers. Sheep provide much benefit to owners: wool for clothing, milk and meat for food, leather for covering things (tents and containers), and they reproduce more of their own kind. Sheep however are not characteristically intelligent and as herding animals follow blindly; they are also defenseless.

Jesus is "The Door" to the sheepfold, which is a symbol of the church. The door is the entrance, and there is only one. Jesus. Those who would take advantage of the sheep in their vulnerability are those who come in some other way than the door. Jesus is "The Good Shepherd". He is 'good' because He cares about his sheep, He knows them by name, they recognize his voice because it communicates safety and provision for their needs. The extent of the love of the Good Shepherd is that He "lays down his life for the sheep", He risks himself in defending them and saving them. This is what we celebrate in the Lenten Season and Easter, the laying down of the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus loved us to the extreme, to the Cross. He took our sin and became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

All of this because "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all". Yes, there is something of the sheep in each one of us. We can be mindless, following whatever attracts us, defenseless, and lost. Do we have the courage to admit our condition, and turn to Him who laid down His life for us? Make this the best Easter ever by turning to Jesus.