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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday of Easter (Series B)

April 26, 2015

Text: John 10:11–18

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For millennia, Christians have recognized the 7 “I am” statements in John’s Gospel. Seven times Jesus says, “I am...” I am the Bread of Life (6:35), the Light of the World (8:12), the Gate (10:9), the Good Shepherd (10:11), the Resurrection and the Life (11:25 – 26), the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6), and the Vine (15:5). The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke don’t record these 7 “I am” statements; they are unique to John’s Gospel.

What’s most startling about these statements is that Jesus is echoing the burning bush event in Exodus 3. As you may recall, Moses was shepherding his father-in-law’s flocks on Mount Horeb when he came across a bush on fire yet it wasn’t consumed. The Lord spoke to Moses through the burning bush commanding him to take off his sandals for Moses was on holy ground.

During that dramatic event, the Lord revealed His highest, most sacred name, “I am.” In Hebrew, it’s Yahweh. Listen to Exodus 3:13–14 but keep in mind the 7 “I am” statements of the Lord Jesus as I do so, “Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

In addition to the 7 “I am” statements, Jesus on two different occasion states He is “I am.” The first was John 8:58 where Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” The Jew heard it and understood immediately what Jesus was claiming – I am the I AM of Exodus 3, I am God Almighty – for the next verse says, “So they picked up stones to throw at him...” Stoning was the OT death penalty for anyone guilty of blasphemy and those Jews believed Jesus was committing blasphemy. The second occasion was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is about to be arrested. Judas Iscariot is there with soldiers. When they ask for Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord

responds by saying, “I am” (18:6). The Jewish soldiers immediately fall to the ground for Jesus has spoken the sacred name, the I Am of Exodus 3. It is the highest most sacred name and Jesus claims it. Eternal God is about to die for His rebellious people.

Now...I want you to hear again what Jesus says in today’s gospel reading, “I am the good shepherd” (vs. 11). What does this mean for us except that Almighty God is our Good Shepherd. Jesus is, in part, claiming to be the great I am of Exodus 3 and at the same time the divine Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. “The Lord is my Shepherd.” The Lord of Psalm 23 and the eternal, self-existing one of Exodus 3 is your shepherd.

He’s no hired hand, drawing a wage, but lacking a deep relationship with the sheep he’s watching. Quite the contrary. “I am the good shepherd.” Jesus defines what makes this shepherd good, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (vs. 11, 15). That’s what makes this Shepherd different from every other religious leaders and so-called gods, ancient or modern. The sheep aren’t sacrificed for the shepherd. They aren’t called upon to serve the shepherd. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dies for His beloved sheep.

Everything we hold dear about Jesus’ death and resurrection is contained in those last three words of vs. 11, “for the sheep.” For you and me, Jesus endured God’s hot wrath against sin on the cross. For you and me, Jesus allowed death to swallow Him whole. But dear saints of God, for you and me – for the sheep – Jesus takes His life back again permanently destroying the claim that sin, death and the devil held against you. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would not be separated from His sheep. The love of the shepherd for His sheep! It’s sheer amazement.

The Good Shepherd comes looking for His beloved sheep. Or to put it even more bluntly and concretely, the Lord Jesus came looking for you because He knows and loves each and every one of you personally and individually. Jesus said, “I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” (vs. 14–15). Jesus understands and knows our strengths and weaknesses. He does not recoil in disgust at our failures; He does not grow weary in our wandering off like lost, foolish sheep so often do. He is the Good Shepherd filled with the love and power and might of God Himself to seek and to save His beloved sheep, you and me and every Christian.

Martin Luther once made this helpful comment about Jesus our Good Shepherd:

My friend, if we can nourish ourselves, rule ourselves, keep ourselves from error, through our own merit attain grace and forgiveness of sins, all Holy Writ must be a

lie, for it testifies of us that we are lost, scattered, wounded, weak and defenseless sheep. Then we need no Christ as a shepherd to seek for us, gather us together, lead us, bind up our wounds, care for us, and strengthen us against the devil. In that case He gave His life for us in vain, for, if we can obtain all this by our own strength and devotion, we do not need Christ's help. But this passage says the very opposite, namely, that you are a lost sheep and you cannot, of yourself, find the way to the shepherd. Of yourself you can go astray, and unless Christ, your shepherd, sought you and fetched you back, you would simply fall prey to the wolf. But now He comes, seeks you, finds you, and brings you back to His flock, that is, through the Word and the Sacraments back into the Christian Church, gives His life for you, keeps you henceforth in the right way, that you fall into no error. There you hear nothing about your own strength, good works, and merits, except that your strength, good works, and merits mean going astray, being defenseless and lost. Christ works, merits, and manifests His strength in this alone; He seeks, upholds, and leads you. He wins life for you through His death. He alone is strong enough to protect you so that you do not perish, and are not snatched out of His hand.

For these and so many other reasons the image of Jesus being our Good Shepherd resonates with our hearts and minds. We know that Jesus did something that we couldn't do for ourselves.

The great I Am of the burning bush in Exodus 3 and the Lord of Psalm 23 and the Good Shepherd of John 10 are all the same person: the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and God. In the midst of so many things that have changed and are changing in our world, our Good Shepherd leads and guides us, loves and feeds us, forgives and strengthens us, and ultimately brings us to our eternal home in His kingdom. I am the Good Shepherd, says the Lord Jesus. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Leave this place under the care and love this divine, Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.