

“I Am, Ego Eimi” Part I: I Am The One Speaking To You”
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Countryside Community Church (UCC)
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I. Who we aren’t

Reflection

Welcome to Advent, the beginning of the new year for the church calendar, and the time when we wait, watch, and prepare for God’s next step with us in the world. We know what’s coming. We do this every year, right? So why all the buzz? Why all the excited anticipation? How is this year going to be any different than the previous years we have experienced? Well, that’s just it, isn’t it? We don’t know how it will be different and that’s where the excitement comes in! We know that God is continually making all things new, so what will be new this year? We’ll have to wait, watch, and be prepared to participate, no matter how life unfolds. The fun part of all of this is that we get to do it together.

With Advent we begin a new worship series to explore just who this person is whose birth we await with such hope and promise. Our series is called “I Am,” which in Greek is “Ego Eimi.” In this series we will be studying the “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is the latest of the Gospels, written approximately 70 years after Jesus’s ministry. John’s Gospel is distinct from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke because John’s writer is not concerned with historical, chronological storytelling, as much as giving Jesus a chance to reveal who he is and what he’s called to be about in the world. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is often portrayed as possessing a “Messianic Secret,” meaning he is not forthcoming about telling people who he is. Even when the disciples or others discover that there is something special about him, he immediately admonishes them and asks them to tell no one what they have discovered. This is not true in John’s Gospel. In fact, John is telling people within the very first verse of the Gospel who Jesus is and by what authority Jesus works in the world:

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

John’s Gospel may be the least historical of the four gospels of our biblical cannon, but this does not mean it is the least valuable. In fact, many would say that this Gospel was chosen for the biblical cannon precisely because it was such a different type of literature than the others, and therefore reveals truth in such a way that makes it the most valuable of them all. John’s Gospel is not just about what happened, but what it means, and we could all use some time sitting with meaning for a while.

Overall, there are eight “I Am” statements of Jesus in John’s Gospel.

John 6: 35, 48 I am the bread of life

John 8: 12, 9:5 I am the light of the world

John 8: 58 Before Abraham was, I am

John 10:9 I am the door

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd

John 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life
John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life
John 15:1 I am the true vine

In our series we will be exploring five of the eight statements between today and Christmas Day:

November 27: John 4:26 I am he, the one speaking to you
December 4: John 10:11 I am the good shepherd
December 11: John 6:35, 48 I am the bread of life
December 18: John 15: I am the true vine
December 24: John 8:12, 9:5 I am the light of the world
December 25: John 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life

This first week we are introducing these statements by experiencing the conversational form of storytelling. In these statements, Jesus is in the midst of a conversation with the people around him, comparing himself to those images and religious concepts that the people around him would best understand. Jesus chooses these images because he knows that his audience will recognize their powerful nature.

The first conversation we overhear is not Jesus at all, but rather, John the Baptist who is speaking to the priests from Jerusalem. Let's listen:

Scripture: John 1:19-23

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

John tells the priests "I am NOT the Messiah." By letting go of his ego a little, and sorting through any lofty ideas of who he might envision himself to be or becoming, John was able to better identify with who he actually was called to be. Such is often the case when seeking a clearer sense of our identities. We have to look through and examine all of the things that we are NOT in order to see more clearly who we might be. But it's not just our lofty visions for ourselves that we need to sort through. It's also all those images that are assigned to you by others that may or may not suit us very well, like "I am NOT my mother/father/sister/brother" or "I am NOT insignificant," "I am NOT a terrorist," "Homosexuality is NOT a sin," or "I am NOT 'illegal'."

Being free from the labels we put on ourselves and those others place on us, we are better able to recognize those things about us that do shape us and lead us forward in a fuller and richer sense of self. Surrendering one's ego and the labels we carry around, does not make us weak or mean we think less of ourselves. Rather, it clears the way for us to see ourselves more like God sees us. For John the Baptist, God's call was for his life to point toward Jesus, which is a hugely important role and one he took quite seriously in living out. When we see ourselves as God sees us, and we live into this true identity, all of us point to Jesus through that identity. How are you living into your sense of identity and "making straight a path for Christ" in your life?

Reading: "I Am" written by Donna Knutson, read by Dinah Gomez

I AM the one speaking to you...

I am the one who pierces the skin of the universe...

I alone can awaken you

Pin pricks and gaps in the clouds;

Tiny whispers felt near the ribs, covering the heart;

Generations of seekers standing alone at the well...

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

I who whispers and calls you by name...

I who distorts nothing,

"In him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

I AM the one speaking to you

Shadows on the backs of trees, roots drawn to streams...living in the water...wading with bare feet,
skin on sharp rock...cleansing the years...

I AM that which prays within you...when you grow tired, when you forget, when it is dark at night
and you can't sleep

I AM that which trusts your inner vision...your gut, the way synchronicity lines up thoughts and
words, lines up sparrows on the wires in the winter...lines up neighbors for food at the
pantry...back to back and face to face...bone and flesh ...drinking in their eyes and the sound ...

What is that sound?

I AM the one speaking to you ...learning from my search...

"I am what everyone can hear and no one can say...I am mute and my words are endless. "

I AM that which dreams through you...into the night...returning up through the sunrise...

And out the blinds of a window...

that which is miracle and mayhem...

that which is grace and mercy...

that which flows from the thirst of the world to the mouth of a stream...and the bass on the end of
a fishing pole...

Vibrations in the water...ripples on the pond...I AM that which remembers in you, to whom you
belong...

Loud cymbals and crashing gongs...a candle lit in the dark...and I Light and Hearers...

Come towards me, you know me...call upon all the thirsty and all of the blameless...

"Throw away no one...

Turn away no one...

I am the first and the last...

She who is honored and she who is mocked..."

I AM the one speaking the truth and I walk in and I walk out,

Pay attention to me for I am the divine trick playing on all your expectations.

The fool who came,

the Wind among the Purifiers,

the layers deep down covering Soul.

A soft breeze from the mountains...the fall autumn leaves piling up down in the valley.

I am stillness and sound

flat keys on the piano and sharp chords on the guitar

beating drums with a harmony...hearing worship in song...
finding measures.
Ticking clocks...
eternity , Here and Now.
Hope and beauty...
I AM the one speaking to you...
I AM the one speaking to you...
I am the one who pierces the skin of the universe...
I alone can awaken you
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Tiny whispers felt near the ribs, covering the heart;
Generations of seekers standing alone at the well...
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II. Who Jesus is

Scripture: John 4:1-25

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" --although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized--he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Reflection

How are we living into our sense of identity and “making straight a path for Christ” in our lives? The woman Jesus meets at the well does this by waiting and listening until she hears a word of love and acceptance. It is this word that transforms her into living most fully into who she was created to be. She’s tried just about everything. She’s been through 5 husbands already and is working on her 6th. She is tired of having to come to the well at noon by herself instead of being together with the other women of the town who most likely get their water in the earlier hours of the morning when it is not so hot. She is an outcast in many ways. Jewish law forbids Jesus from even talking to her, much less offering her water that “will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” Yet here they are, waiting, listening to each other, connecting in ways that bring out each other’s fullest identities.

This woman is the first person to whom Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah. Why her? Jesus risks everything by speaking with her, he even risks the possibility of her being stoned to death by being in conversation with him. She is a woman, a Samaritan woman, with a bad reputation for collecting husbands, yet it is to her that Jesus first states who he is. He offers her living water of eternal life and even she surrenders her ego to him even as she questions why he would give such a gift to her. But he does. She does not deny her current reputation and she is well aware of the differences in their religious traditions, yet she says she believes in the Messiah who is to come and proclaim all things. In this faith Jesus recognizes the truth in her, a truth that makes a pathway for the truth in him. He answers her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Whether this story told by the writer of John’s Gospel is historically accurate or not, doesn’t dismiss the truth that the story speaks. Clearing away the labels we put on ourselves as well as the ones we accept from others, is what makes the space for our true identities to emerge. When the truth of Christ meets the truth in us, we are called forth into the fullness of our being. This woman at the well leaves her water and goes back to the city, telling everyone about this man at the well. Several people believe her story and return with her to the well to meet him. Many believed what Jesus taught them. He was living as the Messiah and the woman continued to make way the path for Christ in her life.

We are all called to be those who make room for the Christ in each other. When we drop the labels we give to ourselves and each other, we begin to see each other and the world as God sees us: promised children of God. What do you hear in God’s promise for you? How might we help others to drop the labels they carry? How might we help others imagine what the world looks like through God’s eyes? How might we build bridges and tables rather than walls? How are we caring for “the least of these?” John the Baptist used his life to point to Jesus so all could see the Messiah he revealed. How do we as a faith community use our ministry to point to who Jesus is and what God is doing in this world? These are the questions with which the Gospel of John challenges us.

Starting next week we will begin a discernment of ourselves in community, reviewing our mission statement of who we claim to be. I hope you will join us in the opportunities provided for conversation and prayer asking what our identity is as a congregation in Christ. Does our mission statement accurately describe who we are and our calling to participate with God? How are we listening for that transforming word of love and acceptance that the woman heard from Jesus at the well? Does who we say we are, help us “make straight the path for Christ in our lives?” Is our

identity helping us to surrender our egos like John the Baptist and the Samaritan Woman at the well? Is it leading us toward each other and to Christ's living water? Let's just sit with these questions this week, and look for opportunities to be in conversation. You never know who it is that is speaking to you.

Amen.