

Weekend of the Passion (B/RCL)
Passion According to St. Mark
March 24-25, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

*Again the high priest asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"
Jesus said, "**I am**...."*

Each year a different part of the Passion account jumps out at me. Out of the long story we just heard, Jesus' two words "**I AM**" are all caps and bolded in my mind. Maybe that's because His brief interchange with the high priest is the part I memorized for Saturday night's dramatic presentation. I really had to "dwell" with the passage for it to sink in. (Memorizing is harder now than when I was 16 and Sr. Francis Maria assigned soliloquies from Shakespeare and the Middle English prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* for us to commit to memory for extra credit!)

*The high priest stood up in the middle of the gathering and examined Jesus. "Aren't you going to respond to the testimony these people have brought against you?" But Jesus was silent and didn't answer. Again the high priest asked, "**Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?**" Jesus said, "**I am**...."*

When Moses stood in front of the burning bush and was told to remove his shoes, for he stood on holy ground, and then was told to go to Pharaoh on behalf of the Israelites, he asked:

*"If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**" (Exodus 3:13-14a)*

So when Jesus says to the high priest, "**I am**," there's far more power to that than we might imagine.

Holy Week is an especially sacred time when hopefully "the old, old story of Jesus and His love" strums the strings of our souls, speaking deeply to our hearts and not just

registering with our heads. The “I am” sayings from the Fourth Gospel spring to mind when I hear Jesus break His radio silence and boldly announce to the high priest “**I am.**” These ways in which Jesus describes Himself tell me what it means that He is the Christ. They tell me what the Son of the Blessed One does for me, what His relationship is to me:

- **I am** the bread of life. (John 6:48)
- **I am** the light of the world. (John 9:5)
- **I am** the good shepherd. (John 10:11)
- **I am** the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25)
- **I am** the way, the truth and the life. (John 14:6)
- **I am** the vine; you are the branches. (John 15:5)

The One who says, “**I am** the bread of life” feeds me with His Body broken for me and nourishes me with His Blood, shed for me, as we will remember on Maundy Thursday evening, and at every Eucharist we share with each other and with Him.

The One who says, “**I am** the light of the world” allowed His earthly light to be extinguished on the cross, as we will remember on Good Friday. It is He whose light blazes forth again when the Easter fire is lit in our little cemetery on Holy Saturday night.

The One who says, “**I am** the good shepherd” is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, including **my** sins, and it is who leads each of us and our loved ones through the valley of the shadow of death when we experience our own Calvary.

The One who says, “**I am** the resurrection and the life” is also the One who fulfilled the promise that He would rise again on the third day, as the angels reminded the women at the tomb on Easter morning.

The One who says, “**I am** the way, the truth and the life” is the One who stands beside us at graveside as that passage is read, keeping the promise that wherever two or more of us are gathered in His name, there He is in our midst. He is our spiritual GPS, our godly

GoogleMap, our dependable Wayz, our true north, pointing us toward and **being** our Sacred Source and Divine Destination.

The One who says, “**I am** the vine and you are the branches” is the tree we sing about in our sending hymn, *There in God’s Garden*¹:

*Its name is Jesus, name that says, “Our Savior!”
There on its branches see the scars of suffering;
see there the tendrils of our human selfhood
feed on its lifeblood.*

*Thorns not its own are tangled in its foliage;
Our greed has starved it, our despite has choked it.
Yet, look! It lives!
Its grief has not destroyed it nor fire consumed it.*

*See how its branches reach to us in welcome;
hear what the Voice says, “Come to me, ye weary!
Give me your sickness, give me all your sorrow,
I will give blessing.”*

*This is my ending, this my resurrection;
into your hands, Lord, I commit my spirit.
This have I searched for; now I can possess it.
This ground is holy.*

Again the high priest asked, “**Are** you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “**I am....**” There’s no earthly way we can know **all** of what that means. But during this Holy Week may the Holy Spirit help us spread our arms a little wider to encompass more of Him and His saving love. This ground is holy. This time is holy. Amen

¹“There in God’s Garden,” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #342, text by Kiraly Imre von Pecselyi, music by K. Lee Scott.

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