

TITLE: I AM HE

TEXT: JOHN 18:1-11

I – NO IDENTITY CRISIS:

One of the questions you'll hear discussed among theologians from time to time is when exactly Jesus knew who he was and what he came to do. If you listen to these learned men and women you soon start to think that they believe Jesus had some kind of an identity crisis. I think perhaps they think too hard.

I have to believe Jesus always knew whom he was and what he had been sent here to do. He may not have known how it would all progress, but I don't believe he ever had an identity crisis. Let's look at it a little shall we? For thousands of years the Israelites had heard prophecy after prophecy about the coming Messiah, the one who would come and redeem them, such as the one you heard read tonight from Isaiah. Before he was born the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her who her baby would be and even what name to give him. An angel appeared to Joseph and told him all about the coming baby and who and what he was. I have to believe they passed this information onto their special child, don't you? At the age of 12 he stayed behind in Jerusalem and told his angry parents they should have known he would be doing his heavenly Father's work. His mother urged him to help when the wine ran out at a wedding and he told her it wasn't yet his time. Do you really think he didn't know who he was?

Even if there had been even a smidgen of doubt, don't you imagine it would have been removed when he was baptized and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove landed on his shoulder and a voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my Son?" I don't believe Jesus had any kind of an identity crisis at all.

II – THE PEOPLE HAD TROUBLE WITH HIS IDENTITY:

It was the people who had trouble with his identity. He spent three years traveling the region healing the sick, raising the dead, and doing other miraculous signs and yet some questioned who he was. He drove demons out of people and fed thousands of people with a couple loaves of bread and some fish and yet they didn't all catch on. He even tells some people plainly, like the woman at the well, that he is the Messiah, yet some still didn't believe.

Perhaps worse of all was the disbelief of those who should have believed... the church leaders. They were the keepers of the scrolls, the Bible at the time. They could

recite the prophecies forward and backward. They knew what Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Daniel, and all the other prophets had said, that the Messiah was coming. Yet when he stood right in front of them, they didn't get it! He told them he was the Son of God but they didn't believe it. Instead of trying to check him out and prove he was the Son of God, they did everything in their power to prove he wasn't. They even accused him of being an agent for the enemy, Satan.

Discrediting him didn't work though. They couldn't trap him with questions. They couldn't get him to make the masses mad so they would stone him. They couldn't get him to stop preaching or teaching and trying to tell the people who he was, so they decided to kill him. If he was dead he couldn't make such claims anymore could he? So they started plotting and before long they got a break. A disciple named Judas who evidently hadn't grasped the true identity of Jesus came to them and agreed to betray this Jesus into their hands.

III – TEXT:

Listen to the Apostle John's narration of that betrayal and the arrest of Jesus...

John 18:1 - 11 (NLT)

¹After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. ²Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had gone there many times with his disciples. ³The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a battalion of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

⁴Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him. Stepping forward to meet them, he asked, "Whom are you looking for?"

⁵"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he,"^o Jesus said. Judas was standing there with them when Jesus identified himself. ⁶And as he said, "I am he," they all fell backward to the ground! ⁷Once more he asked them, "Whom are you searching for?"

And again they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth."

⁸"I told you that I am he," Jesus said. "And since I am the one you want, let these others go." ⁹He did this to fulfill his own statement: "I have not lost a single one of those you gave me."^o

¹⁰Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. ¹¹But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup the Father has given me?"

The end of humanity's identity crisis involving Jesus starts tonight. In four days, three days after his death tomorrow, he will remove all doubt about his claim to be the Son of God, about his claim that if they tear down the temple of his body he will rebuild it in three days, and his claim that he is the Messiah sent to cleanse the world of it's sins and redeem them in the eyes of God.

He sits and talks with his disciples, telling them about his impending death and the fact he will return. He sends Judas out to do what he's going to do and then he eats the

Passover meal with the disciples and institutes the Lord's Supper, which we'll share with him ourselves in a few moments. Then he goes out to the Mount of Olives and grapples in prayer with the burden he's about to carry and the pain, which will come with it. Having turned himself over to the will of God he goes to be arrested.

600 Roman soldiers plus untold numbers of Jewish police and religious leaders are on the way up the hill to arrest him. The clanging armor, marching footsteps, as well as the torches for light would have been seen and heard by Jesus for a considerable distance, yet he doesn't flee, he doesn't hide he confronts them and asks who they're looking for. When they say "Jesus of Nazareth" he says, "I AM HE." It then tells us that as he says it everyone falls to the ground. It's at this moment that all questions of his true identity should have been removed. As he said "I AM HE" and they all fell to the ground from the very power of the words they should have known whose presence they were in. The last one to hear these words was a man named Moses who fell to the ground and hid his face because he knew he was in the presence of the Almighty God. It's at this moment they too should have known they were in the presence of God!

IV – THE GREATEST I AM:

On the Sunday before lent began we began discussing these two words of Jesus, "I AM." We've talked about them on Ash Wednesday and every Sunday of Lent. We've examined Jesus telling us:

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

I AM THE GATE

I AM THE VINE

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Yet I believe this is the greatest "I AM" uttered by Jesus. He knew who he was, he knew what he had been sent to do, he knew there was no other way for us to be cleaned of our sins and have eternal life. He also knew how hard headed we were, he knew that we would not stop sinning, he knew that there would be those who would never get it, never grasp his identity, and never be grateful and full of love for what he did, but he did it anyhow.

He stepped out of the shadows of a dark garden into the light of torches carried by the enemy and uttered the words which would lead to his arrest, his kangaroo trials, his embarrassment, his beating, his mockery, and his gruesome death on a Roman cross where his identity was proclaimed for all to see on the sign nailed above his head

which read “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” Yet he uttered them anyhow. He said “I AM HE.”

V – MY IDENTITY:

I don’t know about all of you, but I’m certainly glad he chose to reveal his identity that night, because it’s in his identity that I find mine. It’s what he said and did this Holy week that makes it possible for me to believe he is truly the Son of God. It’s what he did and went through that cleansed me from my sins, made me whiter than snow, made me acceptable in the sight of my God.

It’s his “I AM” that allows me to utter the same words, to say I AM FORGIVEN, I AM A CHRISTIAN, I AM A CHILD OF GOD. And it’s in that identity I now claim that I fully understand the power of those words uttered that night, I AM HE, the one who came to save you.

My question for you this night is this, “Do you have an identity problem?” If you do I invite you to correct it this evening as we partake of communion together and remember what our Lord and Savior went through for us. Open your heart and tell Jesus tonight... “I AM YOURS.”

AMEN