

There are seven "I AM" sayings to be found in the gospel of John. Let me remind you of them.

1. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (6:35). Spiritually hungry? Jesus is the bread of life. "Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).
2. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" (8:12). Spiritually blind, groping around in the dark looking for meaning and enlightenment? Jesus is the light of the world. "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).
3. Jesus says, "I am the door" (10:9). Seeking the door to salvation and to heaven? Jesus is the door. "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).
4. Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd" (10:11). Wandering? Lost? Jesus is the Good Shepherd. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).
5. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life". Spiritually dead and dying? Fearing death? Jesus is the resurrection and the life. "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).
6. Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). Wondering what is the way? Unsure of the truth? Searching for the meaning of life? Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).
7. Jesus says, "I am the true vine" (15:1). Wanting to live a life of meaning and fruitfulness? Jesus is the true vine. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15: 1, 5).

There is also an eighth "I am" statement that is found in Revelations 22:13

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

These are the seven statements in St John's Gospel which begin with the words "I AM".

Today I would like us to think about the words which begin each statement, "I AM".

What do they mean?

What is their significance?

Why were they so shocking to many who heard Jesus use them?

The answers to those questions lie way back in the history of the people of Israel. They go back to the very beginning of the story of how they were set free from slavery in Egypt, led through the Red Sea into the wilderness and on into freedom in the land that God had promised them.

And at the very beginning of that story God speaks to Moses from a bush burning in the wilderness.

From the burning bush God tells Moses that he has heard the people of Israel crying out in their suffering as slaves in Egypt. The good news is that God is going to act to set them free. The bad news, as far as Moses is concerned, is that God wants Moses to lead his people out of Egypt.

Moses protests and finds all sorts of reasons why he's not the right person to go. His first protest is that he's a nobody: "Who am I that I should approach Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Another question from Moses: "If I come to the Israelites and tell them that the God of their forefathers has sent me to them, and they ask me his name, what am I to say to them".

And here is the bit that is really important for us.

God says, "I AM who I AM, tell them that I AM has sent you to them"

For the people of Israel, it is I AM, or, Yahweh, who has always been their God. He was the God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and he will be their God for all of eternity. He is outside time, the eternal one, "the One who was and is and is to come".

The Name is holy and sacred and is never spoken out loud. Instead, when the word Yahweh appears it is replaced with the word "Adonai", or "Lord".

Now, when Jesus makes the seven “I AM” statements he does not use the words for “I am” which would be used if he was saying something like “I’m hungry” or “I’m going for a walk”. He uses the eternal name “I AM”, the Jewish name for God- the unspoken name.

And any Jew who was listening, whether they were religious experts or not, would have known immediately that Jesus was making shocking, and in some eyes even blasphemous claims about himself.

There are other instances in St John’s Gospel of Jesus using the words “I AM” in relation to himself. Sometimes the meaning of what he says is ambiguous, sometimes it’s clearer. And it’s not surprising that many of his listeners were outraged and angry.

It’s very easy for us to condemn those who charged Jesus with blasphemy. Perhaps we feel certain that we would have recognised the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth and believed him. But would we?

Have we never felt threatened by people who hold different views from us?
Have we never felt angry when someone challenges our way of doing things?
Have we been hurt and upset when someone ridicules something that is precious to us?

Have we ever met someone whose whole way of living calls into question the way we live our lives?

Maybe sometimes we need to listen more closely and with more honesty to what Jesus says to many of the religious people of his time and think about whether he might say the same sort of thing to us if he were to turn up here one Sunday morning. And how would we react?

These are some of the things we may want to think about as we meet together during Lent. Because the decision we make about who we think Jesus is has implications for the way we live our lives as individuals and as a church community.

God reveals himself as being “I AM who I AM”

And Jesus makes these statements about himself which begin with those words “I AM”

In each of them Jesus uses picture language to show us something of himself – we might think of them as forming a self-portrait of Jesus. They also say something about him in relation to us. So, for example, when Jesus says “I AM the Bread of Life” he is perhaps saying that he is as essential to the life and health of our souls as bread is to the life and health of our bodies.

It's as if he's saying "I AM"

Your Light,

Your Bread of Life

Your Gate

Your Way, your Truth and your Life

Your Good Shepherd

Your True Vine

Your Resurrection and Life."

Because as God promised Moses, "I will be with you" so he promises us "I will be with you". "I AM", with you always, to the end of time".

Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the "Alpha and Omega" in Revelation 22:13. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Among the Jewish rabbis, it was common to use the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to denote the whole of anything, from beginning to end. Jesus as the beginning and end of all things is a reference to no one but the true God. This statement of eternity could apply only to God. It is seen especially where Jesus proclaims that He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

Perhaps in that one verse from Revelations all the "I AM" sayings in John are all summed up.

Amen.