



February 17, 2013
Pastor Megan Hackman
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

I Am Who I Am Ephesians 3:13-15

Larry and I did not have the pleasure of being here last week when our own Ellis and Rachel White announced they are pregnant. Congratulations, again, friends. Cyndi Toone made the suggestion to Rachel that she not tell us what names they're considering. You know how we are—if they're considering the name Matthew, I'll come back with, ooh. I knew a Matt once. Ugh. Are you sure you like that name? It doesn't matter that Matthew means "gift of God" because to me, the name Matt means all these boys from elementary school I've associated it with.

The God of the universe has let us know what his personal name is. And when Jesus invokes God's name, people have really dramatic responses to it. In John 8:58, a previously quiet crowd becomes violent and determines to kill Jesus with stones. In John 18:6 a violent mob becomes silent, literally falling over at just the utterance of the name. How could this name—just 2 words—have contained so much power? They're 2 seemingly insignificant words, but they're God's name. And it's the title for our next sermon series in the book of John. What are they? I Am. In order to understand the use of I AM in John, we need to go backwards toward the beginning of the Bible.

The first time we see the powerful declaration, I AM, is in the book of Exodus. The God of the universe, the God who heard the groanings of a people enslaved and is about to go on a divine rescue mission, the God who shows up in a bush that didn't catch fire, He spoke through Moses to those people, his people. And he let them know his personal name, just 2 words: I AM. These words will reverberate throughout the Scriptures and be spoken in Christ with dramatic reactions.

Let's turn to Exodus 3:13 and see this marvelous revelation God has for us.

"Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

This is the Word of the Lord.

I. I AM is with you, Moses.

To understand why the Gospel of John makes such an intentional use of the name, I AM, we have to dig in a bit and understand first why it's so awesome that God reveals his name. Then we can begin to understand why this particular name is so incredible.

Names were not just about the letters that identified who someone was. I'm Megan, she's Rachel. Now you can greet us in the hallway by name but you wouldn't be any closer to knowing anything about me. Let's say my name was Megan Kennedy. Well then you might begin making some assumptions about my upbringing, my political views, and what coast I was from. But that's still far from the kind of significance we're talking about here.

There are myths from this same time period that talk about deities hiding their names because they didn't want another deity or a person to have power over them. Divulging your name to someone meant letting them in on deep, essential parts of who you are. And Moses wants to know who God essentially is. In Exodus chapter 3, God has just given Moses a huge task. He's going to be taking on the Egyptian Pharaoh and all their deities to deliver God's people from slavery.

Pharaoh isn't just one man in one country. At this time, he was the super power of the globe. His power seemed limitless and his armies innumerable. God just promised Moses that he would be with him. And Moses wants to know, oh really? You're with me? Who are you really? What can God reveal about himself that will give Moses the confidence that this God has the power to take on the world's superpower using one shepherd? Moses is asking an audacious question! Who are you really? He's asking that of God who shows up in a bush without it catching on fire.

What's more audacious is that God tells him. He reveals himself to him. He speaks to Moses in Moses' own language, which was Hebrew. God speaks a unique phrase that is to tell Moses something essential about his very character. That's what a name is about. It's so awesome that God wants to reveal to people his name, that is his very essential being. And what's so awesome about his name is God says he essentially is living presence.

We have on the banner here the phrase that God tells Moses is his name in verse 14, I AM who I AM. God's name is a verb because he is essentially living and active. He's just told Moses in verse 12, I will be with you wherever you go. God is in his very essence there. He's present. He IS. And his very essential character doesn't have an addendum to it. It's an incomplete sentence, so it seems. I want to ask God, I AM... what? I AM deliverer? I AM all-powerful? I AM the host of all the angel army hosts? God is all those things. But right here what he says is, my

very being, as God of the universe, is not in relationship to anything or anyone else. He transcends any limitation of being. He's entirely self-sufficient. I... just... AM. I AM who I AM.

Don't you want to fill in the blank? I am ____? I daresay that we have taken to proclaiming who we think God to be, and not who he said he is. We have, in effect, proclaimed God is__... God is what? lord of the evangelicals; god of just Sunday morning; god of eternity but not right now; god with limited power to heal; god of theology but not architecture, chemistry, engineering—god doesn't belong there. My prayer life can get so messed up because I think this way. I've made God in and of himself, I AM, insufficient. I want what he can give more than I want just him.

In the last week, 2 friends have asked me 2 questions that have called me out and helped me to see that I have limited God to be a fulfiller of things, a means to an end, a vending machine of spirituality, rather than an all sufficient being. Last week a friend asked me what I have learned about God since I became a pastor. But the first things in my mind were things that God has taught me about myself. So God has become a teacher who points out to me things that need to change. And Friday Larry asked me, who is God to me right now? And the only thing I could think was he's the words inside of me that are convicting me.

And these are true things about who God is—he is our teacher and the voice of conviction—but they're so limited. They're so relative to me and what I need. They're so focused on the lower case letters, I am. Megan is. Megan is in need of healing. Megan is in need of wisdom. But God says I AM. Do you see the difference? Here God is a box of I Am fill-in-the-blank statements, and I go out and pick which one I need for that day. God in the burning bush is I AM. Unlimited! Do you pray as if you want to select which pieces of the God box you're ready to have in your life? Or do you pray to hear from I AM? We don't get to decide who God is! God is not a derivative of our own thoughts, wants, and feelings. He wants to save us from all the lower case g deities we make God out to be who then fail us. So he told us who he is! He is I AM. He IS! Limitless! All-Powerful!

In Exodus 3:13 God promised Moses that he will always be with him. Now, God comes down to Moses' level and says, I'll let you know my personal name. It's I AM who I AM. That means I am, always have, and will always be with you. Then he adds, I AM is sending you. Who's asking him to go? The one who is limitless, who created everything out of nothing, that God is sending you, Moses. Then verse 15 has this extra bit about God's name that I love. I AM is forever going to associate his essential being and his essential character with this people. He tells Moses in verse 15, I AM is the God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Here we get the very personal name, Yahweh.

Look down at verse 15. It's probably written LORD with all capital letters in your Bible because it's the personal name that Jewish tradition holds you're not even to say out loud. Yahweh. Before this scene with the burning bush started, God reminds us, that he is the one who heard the groanings of his people, who remembered the covenant, who saw the people, who knew them intimately, and who executes a rescue mission for his people out of slavery. God answers the request of his people to be known and he saves them. When Moses wants to know who he is, God says, I AM is with you, Moses. Know me personally as Yahweh. I'm the one who will rescue my people. Right here in the middle of the declaration of Yahweh's name in verse 15, God says "I am to be remembered" by this name "for all the generations." It's not just the name that's on the nametag that's to be remembered, so you can say to your friends, "Did you know God's name is Yahweh in Hebrew? Yeah, it's a verb. It's cool. I'll get the unspeakable name of God tattooed in Hebrew right here because that's cool."

Remember, the name is significant because it's telling you something essential about who God is. And God is to be remembered through all the generations as THE BEING, the only being, who is and will be hearing, seeing, knowing, and rescuing us. That's what God wants shared.

In Exodus 9:16, God tells Moses why he has revealed his name to Moses. The purpose is so that God's name might be proclaimed in all the earth. God's intention is for this specific revelation of who he is to lead to the proclamation of I AM throughout the whole world! In the Egyptian myths of Moses' time, other "little g" gods hid their names in fear that people would have power over them. But not so with Yahweh. He reveals his name so that we can know him and proclaim who he is. He wants to save us and the whole world. That's why he revealed that HE IS. But just like the Israelites, we forget his name. It is one of God's chief complaints to the people through the prophets—they forgot who Yahweh was! And this is going to sound really simple, but they forgot because they failed to remember.

That's why this year of Jubilee is critical as a church. It's about remembering who God is by testifying who he is and has been and will be to one another. We want to be the church that remembers who God is! We want to remember how he has revealed himself to us. And so we're setting aside dedicated time to remind one another who God is and to declare back to God when we have seen him rescue us, how we have heard him, and where he sent us. The first time we're going to do that is next Sunday, February 24th. So let's pray together for 50 minutes at 5:00 next week, plus an old-fashioned Jubilee potluck after. Especially if God seems silent and distant to you, I hope you'll come and remember and celebrate with me I AM next Sunday night for a time of community, Jubilee prayer.

II. In John, I AM is with you.

Next Sunday morning we'll be back in John. We're going to see this personal name of God, I AM. God is once again revealing himself to a people who have forgotten

who God is. In the person of Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, God is taking action to reveal once again that HE IS the God who remembers his covenant. And he moves to rescue his people from sin and death. Jesus comes in and claims, I AM has returned to you with a divine rescue mission. I am I AM.

Pastor Jeremy taught us what I AM is in Greek. Does anyone remember what it was? Here's a hint... lego my ___? Ego emi That's right! I AM! Five times Jesus says just those 2 words ego emi, It is I. The Jewish leaders knew exactly what Jesus was alluding to when he said I AM. When he even hinted at this phrase, they picked up stones to kill him! It was blasphemy to say I AM. Jesus isn't just associating God's name with his own. He's not just a prophet as Islam and Mormonism would try to limit him. He is saying I AM God. Everything that is essential to God—that he is eternal, creator, that there is nothing outside of himself—Jesus was claiming all of that just by saying I AM.

In John 17:6 Jesus says, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world." God came in the flesh and manifested himself to us in Jesus Christ. Seven times he says I AM with a metaphorical statement. When Jesus claims all these I AM statements, he is wanting his people to know something essential about who God is.

Let's prelude the next couple weeks here. Jesus said I AM what? I AM the... (bread, door, shepherd, way, truth, life, vine, resurrection). Jesus says, do you want to know who God is? His very essential being? His character? Look at me. I AM. And I AM is for you, and for you, and for you, the bread of life, the way, the truth, the resurrection. It's an audacious claim. The Jewish leaders could handle all the signs and miracles Jesus did, but he proclaims this name, and they pick up stones to kill him or fall over as though dead.

Jesus' name, I AM, squelches every fear we have, just as it did Moses. He has power over everything that will come against you. HE IS and before him there is nothing. He has the power over illness, addiction, storms, slavery, depression, unjust lawsuits, people who would destroy your reputation, and judge you. Evil itself—He has and he will defeat it all! I AM promised Moses his presence, and let me tell you. His name has not changed! He is I AM who will be with you wherever you go. He is with you in the doctor's office, the prison, and at 3am when your baby wakes you up. He's with you where you don't want him to be. He just IS.

III. I AM is with you, and you, and you... Are you with I AM?

Hear his name, Church! God, I AM, has revealed his name to you in his very Word! And by the death and resurrection of Jesus, he has adopted you as his own. You're in his family and bear his name. He told Moses his name because he wanted his name proclaimed in all the earth. Will you leave behind all the statements you have created about who God is and be willing to embrace the mystery and the awesomeness of I AM? Will you risk everything like Moses did in

order to follow I AM? He is the only God. Salvation is only through him. Without I AM, there is nothing.

Before Jesus died on the cross for you, he said I am going to leave you with my Holy Spirit, but I'll be coming back. And on that day, every eye will see me. The angels are looking forward to that day. In the final pages of the Bible, we are given this picture of the angels who are even now singing to God. They are singing his name. HE IS the one who is and who was and (what's it say?) _____ who is to come! Twice we hear that same song in Revelation. But then in Revelation 11, we have my most favorite song of Scripture. Revelation 11:15 says that on the day when "The Kingdom of our world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and Christ," on that day, the angels sing a different song. They sing, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was." There's no more is to come! For on that day we will be with him face to face declaring that he has come and forever will be I AM. Just I AM. In the eternal present!

We won't have to cry out anymore, Come Lord Jesus. He simply will BE. This is our joyful hope! I AM is with you and with me. And forever he will be.

Won't you believe I AM has revealed himself to you? We're going to pray in a moment, and if you have not ever said, "I will not follow a God of my own creation; I will follow Jesus, I AM," would you let today be the day that you follow God who has come on a rescue mission for you? If you doubt God's realness, if you doubt that he simply IS I ask that as we pray, would you whisper your own words of boldness, asking like Moses, that God would reveal himself to you. He honored Moses' request to be known, and it is God's heart that you would know him. He hears you. He sees you. He knows you. Those of you who have long anticipated that day sung about in Revelation, will you whisper these lines after me as an assurance of your faith in Jesus? And those of you who are just beginning to acknowledge that I AM is with you, I invite you to whisper these words after me maybe declaring your faith for the first time.

Jesus, you are I AM.
You are with me.
I have been afraid to let you be everything.
So I have created little gods in your place.
Forgive me for not trusting you, I AM.
I want to be with you forever.
Would you write your name on my heart.
Would you claim me as your own.
Now and forever.
Let your name be known through my life.
In Jesus' Name. Amen.

If this was the first time you acknowledged who Jesus is, will you please come forward after the service and let one of our prayer team know that you have told

God that you want to be with him? We would love to continue praying and talking with you. This is our hope, and this is the truth: I AM is with you. Thanks be to God.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. Exodus 2: 23-25. Reflect upon a time when you knew God heard, remembered, saw and knew.
 2. Exodus 3: 13-15. Do you believe that God is present with you? How does that affect your day-to-day life?
 3. In what ways do you go about remembering what God has done for you?