

I AM THE RESURRECTION

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In the gospel of John, there are seven “*I am*” statements that Jesus made. These statements would have had significance to the first-century Jewish listener, because God revealed Himself to Moses with a resounding *I AM!* In Chapter 6, Jesus says “*I am the bread of life*”. This was after feeding the five thousand! In Chapter 8, “*I am the light of the world*. This was during the Feast of Tabernacles. And in Ch. 10, “*I am the door of the sheep*”. It further adds that, during a discourse with Israel’s religious leaders, Jesus in essence declared them to be unfit shepherds of the nation. Now unless that went straight over their heads, this was another revolution—type statement that would anger the leaders. Again in Ch. 10 “*I am the good shepherd,*” and in Ch. 14 “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*”

He said this when trying to answer the disciple’s confusion about heaven. And finally in Ch. 15, he declares “*I am the true vine.*” This final saying was in the Upper Room on the night of His arrest.

Something that Rev. Donald said in the Lenten luncheon 2 weeks ago has stuck in my mind ever since. He said that most people focus on the sadness when looking at Good Friday. They forget about Holy Saturday and Resurrection Sunday. He thought we should look forward to Sunday as much as the sad events of Friday.

I found a book on our library shelves entitled *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* by Jean Vanier. In her first sentences regarding Ch. 11, Jean says “This is one of the simplest and most beautiful chapters in the Gospel of John. It reveals how profoundly human and totally divine Jesus is. It is about Jesus loving people and raising from the dead a man who had already been in the tomb for four days, whose body was starting to decompose.”

I have been reading a special edition of Time magazine. It is entitled *Jesus — Who He Was and Who He is*. I found some parts of the article particularly educational. (Especially as I did not grow up in an environment that contained much religious education. The churches I grew up in contained a lot more blind faith than education!)

In the section on Jesus' mission on earth the authors state "talk about Jesus leading a Double Revolution! The strange thing about Jesus's announcement of the Kingdom of God was that he managed both to claim that he was fulfilling the old prophecies, the old hopes, of Israel in a way which radically subverted them. The Kingdom of God is here, he seemed to be saying, but it's not like you thought it was going to be. How so? When Israel's God acts, the Gentiles will benefit as well! When Israel's God brings in his new world, some of Israel's cherished traditions (like the food laws) will be swept away, no longer needed in the new worldwide family! Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will sit down in the Kingdom, and welcome people from all over the world, while some of the sons of the Kingdom will be cast out."

It's no wonder Jesus needed to use parables to say this. If too many people realized the doubly revolutionary implications, he wouldn't have lasted five minutes! First, anyone saying that Israel's God was becoming King was raising a standard for revolution, and, as Jesus himself wryly noted, all and sundry, particularly those bent on violence, would try to get in on the act. Second, to claim to be announcing the Kingdom, while at the same time subverting Israel's national institutions, and/or the fiercely held agendas of certain pressure groups, was asking for trouble. It would be like announcing in a Muslim country that one was fulfilling the will of Allah while apparently vilifying the prophet Muhammad and burning a copy of the Koran.

A bit further on in the article they go on to talk about "Israel being in a great national rebellion, against the creator, the covenant God. Failure to repent would lead her inexorably toward disaster." Jesus' second aim was the one that still sends shivers down the spine two thousand years later. Jesus believed himself called to go out ahead of Israel, to meet the judgment in her place, alone. He drew on the old Jewish beliefs of the coming great tribulation, the time of bitter and harsh suffering and testing for the people of God. This "tribulation" would surely come. But if he went out to meet it on behalf of his people, then they would not need to bear it. He would make a way *through the tribulation, through the darkest night of Israel's exile and distress, and out the other side into the glorious light of the new day that would then dawn*. This, I believe, is far and away the best historical explanation for Jesus's attitude in facing his own death. In his book, *Jesus: A Life* A. N. Wilson seems to agree.

Jesus predicts that the Son of Man will die for his people as a ransom, and rise again.

In *“The Journey through John”* by David Cook, Jesus is truly human. He is also truly divine. Verses 25 – 26 contain Jesus’s fifth I AM statement. “I AM The Resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” Already in this gospel, Jesus has claimed to offer the essence of life, bread, light, and water. Now he is the source of life itself.

To support His claim, Jesus calls the four-day-dead Lazarus out from the tomb. The Jews believed that the spirit lingered over the body after death for three days before leaving for good. In other words, this is a resurrection, not a resuscitation to life. Lazarus emerges, still wrapped in his grave clothes. The irony here is that Jesus’ decision to return to this area, to bring Lazarus to life, is the catalyst for His own death. For it is here that He is threatened, Ch. 10 vs 39. Therefore, they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. And Thomas’s response is prophetic. Ch. 11 vs 16 “Then Thomas who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, *‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him’*. Caiaphas, the high priest that year, also prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. And not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then from that day on, they plotted to put Jesus to death. These of course were the Romans, and some of the Jewish leaders. Jewish leaders had to work with or conspire with Romans. They needed the Romans to do the “dirty deed” of crucifying Jesus, as Jews were not allowed by their laws to put anyone to death.

Rev. Donald mentioned looking towards the Resurrection. I think we need to also look at the sacrifice that God made in sending us Jesus Christ to earth, to teach and live as an example of how we need to live, and *then* to let His son be crucified. This sacrifice I believe we need to honour. In honouring Jesus’ sacrifice, we can work towards having a relationship with God and by working towards our eternal reward.

In this church we also have many examples of sacrifice. Granted they are not on the level of sacrificing our lives for the good of the worldwide population! However, in this day they are important in honouring the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. I am sure everyone can think of sacrifices of time, talents or treasures we have in this congregation. I will not mention any by name, as I would definitely miss many. Our church though is mainly volunteer-run. It is volunteers that plan, cook, and serve Sunday suppers, Friday breakfasts. It is volunteers that arrange for donations of clothing and boots, and run the winter warmth project. It was volunteers who donated over 1000

pairs of socks during the sock drive in the fall. All of our committees are run by volunteers. And we all gladly (not grudgingly!) give of our time and talents.

And we all follow in the footsteps of our elders who also gave of their time and talents, and are now taking a rest and letting the next generations take the helm. This church was thriving pre-covid. After Covid, when we restarted, we have slowly increased our membership and activity again. We have now become a thriving, community — connected church. This is all a way of honouring Jesus' sacrifice on the cross on Good Friday, so that we might have the privilege of looking forward to Easter Sunday and the resurrection.

I really enjoy my time spent volunteering in this church. It's so wonderful to work with such a pleasant, cheerful group. It is uplifting when I am feeling down or sad. I sincerely hope that most of you feel as I do. We make a good team working towards honouring Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Let's keep this up! For the joy of the Lord is our strength!

Amen