

THE “I” ISSUES OF THE “I AM”

He is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this third Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord:

For thus says Adonai YHWH, “Behold, I then will search for My sheep and I will seek them out.”¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

All the texts for this Good Shepherd Sunday lead the hearers, you, toward thinking of God as the Good Shepherd, and His people as His sheep. In all the readings, God is the active agent, and His people are the ones who receive the benefits of His action. The Psalm and the Old Testament readings allude to the reality that God would lead His people – through death into life. The Epistle and Gospel readings directly reveal that it is Jesus’ death which brings forgiveness, life, and rescue to His called, and therefore, chosen, people.

In particular, in today’s readings, the prophet Ezekiel and the Apostle John record the words of the Triune God in the Old Testament and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity in the New Testament. In both Testaments, God is the One declaring that He alone searches after, calls for, cares for, and judges between those whom He calls to be His people. That is why we have heard this proclaimed as the week’s theme text;

For thus says Adonai YHWH, “Behold, I then will search for My sheep and I will seek them out.”²

¹ *Isaiah 34:11.*

² *Isaiah 34:11.*

Repeatedly over the years, members of this congregation have been encouraged to count the “I’s” in hymns to determine where their focus lies. Today, the “I’s” of the Bible texts lead us to find God’s emphasis is on all that the Lord has done, does, and will do for His people. Specifically, in our Old Testament and New Testament Gospel readings, God truly seems to have had “I” issues. Ezekiel, recording YHWH’s declaration uses God’s “I” (and related pronouns from the Hebrew) twenty times. St. John, recording YHWH’s declaration, uses God’s “I” (and related pronouns from the Greek) fourteen times. Of those, there are two times in which the “I’s” indicate the Divine Name, by which God had revealed Himself to the ancients - “I AM.”

The good news is that, unlike hymns that have the congregation singing too much about ourselves as “I,” “me,” and “my” of the texts, God’s “I” issues are not “I” problems for us. With that in mind, hear God’s “I” issues begin:

For thus says Adonai YHWH (The LORD, I AM), “Behold, I then will search for My sheep and I will seek them out.”³

Those words follow the Lord’s declaration that the human shepherds of His people, His chosen priests and Levites, have led not tended them with His Word. They, rather, had used their callings by birthright to provide only for themselves. Their lack of pastoral care – shown in their years of inattentiveness to the right practice and teaching of the Word of God – had equipped the people to stray from God and His grace, to worship other gods, and to come under punishment for their sins.

In His promise, the Great I AM is offering hope to the faithful among those

descended from the Promise to Abraham through Isaac. God says that He will, in the Day of His choosing, seek out and search for His true people. Please note that there is no hint, in any of this week's texts, of God's elected people's doing anything to bring God to them, to decide for Him, to choose Him. That is made clear in our theme text:

For thus says Adonai YHWH (The LORD, I AM), "Behold, I then will search for My sheep and I will seek them out."⁴

Those words of Promise are declared as fulfilled in time as Jesus says,

"I I Am the Shepherd, the beautiful One. The Shepherd, the beautiful One, places His soul for the sheep..."⁵

Jesus, in the time of His incarnation, declares, using the imagery of Ezekiel's prophecy, that He is the One whom we often call the Good Shepherd in our translations. But He is much more than our word, "good" can communicate. Hence, today you hear Jesus called the Beautiful Shepherd. That is, He is all that is good, wholesome, perfect, sinless, and holy, all which may be summed up in one word – beautiful. Jesus is the One who would search for and seek out His people.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, that day's equivalent of the false shepherds of Ezekiel's day, declares that the means of His searching and seeking for His people comes out of His voluntarily laying down His life for His called ones. With the Father and the Spirit from eternity the LORD, I AM says:

"As a shepherd seeks his flock in (the) day in which his sheep are scattered, thus I will seek out My sheep; and I will cause to rescue them from all the places to which they have

³ *Isaiah* 34:11.

⁴ *Isaiah* 34:11.

⁵ *John* 10:11.

been scattered in (a) day of clouds and darkness.”⁶

To declare the fulfillment of those words, to people who did not believe in Him, or know the role of the Lord’s chosen shepherds to preach the pure, unadulterated Word of God, Jesus says,

“The hired man then, not being the Shepherd, for whom the sheep are not his own, sees the wolf coming, and forsakes the sheep, and flees – then the wolf snatches them, and he scatters (them) – because he remains (a) hired man and has no concern for the sheep.”⁷

With those words Jesus is declaring that those of the people whom God had given for their spiritual care and feeding are of the same character as the false shepherds – priests and Levites – of Ezekiel’s day. His preaching illustration is given to call them, and those who followed them, to repentance. Further, He is calling them to acknowledge that it is God Himself who has concern for His people. He alone will call them – through the pure proclamation of the Word, Jesus’ Word – out of destruction. That had been promised centuries before, as The LORD, I AM, says,

“And I will cause to bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the lands, and I will cause to bring them out into their land; and I will feed them in (the) mountains of Israel, in (the) fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the earth.”⁸

The promise of God was that He alone would be the Shepherd who would cause another exodus of His people. He would cause them, through the right proclamation of His Word, to come from all peoples, that is all nations. The words for this day are the Promise that opened the definition of the chosen people to include those from the nations not on account of their bloodlines, but, as Jesus has declared, out of His

⁶ Isaiah 34:12.

blood:

Jesus says, *"I I Am the Shepherd, the beautiful One, and I know mine and mine know Me.⁹ Just as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father, also My soul I place for the sheep."¹⁰*

With those words, God declared that He was fulfilling His ancient Promise.

He, the Beautiful Shepherd, was going to place, lay down, His life for His far-flung sheep. Just so His hearers would grasp that the Promise was not restricted, even in Ezekiel's prophecy, Jesus says,

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; and those it is necessary for me to lead; and My Voice they hear, and they will become one flock, one Shepherd."¹¹

Those words bring to clarity the reality of the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy in Christ. Jesus makes it clear to all but the adamantly hard-hearted that His Voice is the One that calls His people to Him. His Voice, that is His Word, is that which draws the wayward, the erring, the spiritually maimed to His care. This is the Word that we declare here each time God, the Beautiful Shepherd, gathers us around His proclaimed Word. You are living in the time He promise, as the LORD, I AM, says,

"In good pastures I will feed them, and in mountains from (the) heights of Israel will be their pastures, there they shall like down in good grazing land, and from fat pastures they will feed in (the) mountains of Israel."¹²

The promise of God was that, when He called His people from the ends of the Earth they would be able to, in faith, depend upon Him to tend to all their needs. This

⁷ John 10:12-13.

⁸ Isaiah 34:13.

⁹ John 10:14.

¹⁰ John 10:15.

¹¹ John 10:16.

¹² Isaiah 34:14.

He does for His called people, even as they ask Him to fulfill His promises, using His words, such as *give us this day our daily bread*. (Remember, that includes all that we need to support this body and life). It is that promise, contained in your daily prayers, and illuminated through today's readings, that you may hold in your mind when it seems that you may be alone and without the things you think you need to support your daily needs. It is the promise that may be used to keep you from temptation to doubt God's provision for your body and life. God who has promised to provide for you will never fail in keeping His promises, even when you may think He has. Our text continues:

"I will be Shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down," says Adonai YHWH (The LORD, I AM).¹³

God again declares that He is the One who will care for His Sheep. The Good Shepherd role God has kept for Himself. He knows that even His faithful human shepherds are not able to be everywhere at all times. Therefore He calls all who will hear that they should know that He alone is the One who has ultimate care for His people.

Jesus says, "I I Am the Shepherd, the beautiful One, and I know mine and mine know Me."¹⁴

Jesus declares Himself, using the Divine Name for Himself, to be the One fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy. As He is God, He reveals that He sees the inner thoughts of people, and intimately knows them to be His chosen ones. Further, Jesus proclaims that His called and elected ones know Him. How do they, you, know Him? You know Him by His Word of Truth: the Gospel that heals after the Law convicts. This too was

¹³ *Isaiah 34:15.*

prophesied in the centuries before Christ Jesus when the LORD (Who includes the pre-incarnate Christ), I AM, says:

*"The lost I will seek; and the strayed I will cause to bring back; and the crippled ones I will bind up; and the weak ones I will strengthen; but the fat ones and the strong ones I will cause to destroy: I will feed them in justice."*¹⁵

Six "I's" conclude our Old Testament reading. One can see that God's "I" issues continue as He lays the groundwork for the Christ. That is, in these closing words, the I AM promises to do all the work necessary to recover all who belong in His eternal land. Four categories of the called ones' brokenness and separation from Him are named. Two categories of their spiritual leaders' failures are noted. God's justice is declared – only those who remain unrepentant receive destruction. Twice the grace is set against once the law.

That means that all others, every one whom God calls into His eternal green paradise through the means of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, enters on account of His grace. Even we, who as God through St. Peter says, *"were all as wandering sheep, have been returned now by the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls,"*¹⁶ may be included in the number of those whom God has called through His Promise, *"Behold, I will search for My sheep and I will seek them out."*¹⁷ The Church gives thanks that the Lord has "I" issues.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection III (LSB One-year series)
Ezekiel 34:11-16; I Peter 2:21-25; John 10:11-16
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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹⁴ John 10:14.

¹⁵ Isaiah 34:16.

¹⁶ I Peter 2:25.

¹⁷ Isaiah 34:11.