

[17 PENT 1stLuth God's Name]

17 PENTECOST

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Exodus 2:23-25, 3:1-15, 4:10-17; John 8:58

*God's Name**Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

As you heard in the Bible passage from Exodus, God arranges a meet-and-greet with Moses, and on the proverbial name tag that says,

HI! My name is...

God simply writes in the two-word phrase, *I AM...!?!?*



Now...**I** am...fairly confident in asserting that these two words form one of the most commonly spoken phrases in **my life**...AND, I would guess, in **YOURS** as well: **I AM...**

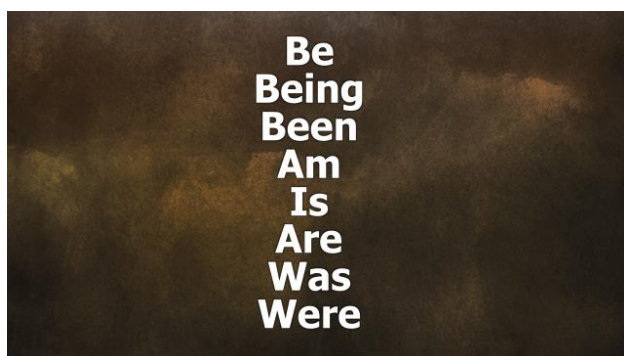
Tall short happy sad
 Madly in love happily ignorant the list is endless of things that I AM...
 and **YOU ARE.**

Yet...since God claims **I AM** as his ***holy handle***, I figured I'd better check out some resources to see what nuances might be at work in God's *verbish* choice of a name.

My search through online dictionaries and references reminded me of being back in 7th grade English Class with Mrs. Meech. She would stand at the chalk board...parsing verbs and diagramming sentences...with her **back** turned to *our class*...the largest group of kids ever to go through the Shelby, MT, Education system... That poor lady was the paragon of patience...we were good kids, just not quiet kids...so I didn't learn much English that year...not because **I** was in trouble...you believe me, right?

So...as many of you probably learned a long time ago, I AM is the first person singular of the verb, *to be*, which makes it:

- a. one of the very first verbs anyone learns when studying any European language... AND
- b. it *has many usages and meanings, both as a **main verb** and as a **helper verb*** AND
- c. ...it is **the** verb that has the most forms in the English language: 8 of 'em! Take a look...



(<https://sites.google.com/site/englishgrammarguide/Home/the-verb-to-be>)

8 different variations of a two-letter verb. So...now you know exactly what God meant for us to appreciate about his self-designation: I AM...right?? You got it?? ...Yeah...me neither!

Because of its prevalence as a **helper** verb, we usually use I AM to designate something **more**, something **additional**, something **specific** about ourselves:

I AM – Scott, a pastor/spouse/father/son/sibling/friend...

It's almost like God's claim to be **I AM** needs something more to flesh out its meaning like folks have done throughout history. For example:

The heavyweight champion boxer, Mohammed Ali, is famous for saying:

I AM...the GREATEST

Said the first female British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher:

I AM...extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.

Staying with people British, the great Winston Churchill once said,

I AM...always ready to learn...although I do not always like to be taught

The author Charlotte Bronte said:

*I AM...no bird; and no net ensnares me;
I AM a free human being with an independent will.*

And one more famous author, Oscar Wilde, said this :

*I AM...so clever that
sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I'm saying
(**I know that feeling very well!!!)***

But God simply says...**I AM**...and leaves it at that!

Now, in the area of **philosophy**, the words I AM were immortalized by Rene Decartes back in 1647. This French academic coined the famous phrase, *I think...therefore I am*. His legendary assertion, in a sense, touches on what differentiates human beings from...all other animals. The very act of thinking about one's own existence serves—at minimum—as proof of the reality of one's own mind; there must be a thinking entity—in this case the self—for there to be a thought about existence.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Descartes)

Here's what I think he means. For 14 years, we had a great dog named Mayday...



He was a golden retriever mix that we rescued from the pound. We taught him to lie down, roll over, speak, shake paws, we'd put a treat on his nose and he'd wait for us to give the ok before he'd flip it up and catch it mid-air. He was a great companion...

...but I'm fairly sure that he never once wondered what his life might have been like if he'd been born a bird, a buffalo or a baboon... So in a very real sense, his name also could have been I AM simply because *he was* – always living in the moment: just happy to have his ears scratched, go on walks, roll in the snow, and chase squirrels.

Now, I'm pretty sure that there's very much more to God than that...that God is not just content to be in the moment, so let's jump into the arena of **language study**.

There the declaration, I AM, carries with it both some **claims** and some **rejections**.



If I were to say to you I AM...the quarterback for the Minnesota Vikings, that would be false – and you'd most likely say, *Well, yes, sometimes they play like you are the quarterback...but other times they win!*

However, if I were to claim that I AM...the oldest son of Bob and Athalie Fuller, my claim would be true, and would prove false to anyone else in the world who tried to make that same claim.

So if here God takes out the copyright license on the brand name ***I AM***...in the very same way, no other ***god*** can use it to claim their divinity... NO ONE!!!

At the very base level, God is here making an astounding claim. It's as if the Lord is proclaiming, When I say ***I AM***, I'm **also** saying that **NO OTHERS ARE**... I ***alone*** EXIST, other gods DON'T. I'M REAL, THEY'RE NOT...

Now that's not to say that ***gods with little g's*** don't have power over us...



Take a look at the seven deadly sins and tell me that they never point you in the wrong direction, have no negative affect on your life...

This is why the Almighty says:

I AM...the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods...

Well, if the definition of a GOD is – *a person or thing of supreme value* – **what are some other gods-with-little-g's that make themselves known in our lives?**

-money

-worry

-peer pressure

-addictions

So what is it about this God named ***I AM*** that can help us in our struggles with all these other ***little-g-gods*** that can cause so much heartache, so much grief, so much pain??

I think we'll find our answer when we return to the story of Moses and the burning bush.



One day, while Moses is tending the family flock, he comes across a sight that scares the daylights out of him

-a **bush** that's ***burning brightly*** without ***burning up!!***

And then, as if **that's** not weird enough...the burning bush starts talking!!!

Only – as he quickly discovers – it's not the flaming shrub that's speaking... it's God, almighty God, who says to Moses:

I AM...THE GOD OF YOUR FATHER, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB...

And then the Lord says some things that are VERY interesting. Turn to the passage in your bulletins or to page 49 in your pew bibles. Look at all the verbs that God uses starting in verse 7:

1. I have **seen** the misery of my people who are in Egypt.
2. I have **heard** their cry

3. *I **know** their sufferings*
4. *I have **come down** to **deliver** them from the Egyptians and **bring them**...up to a land flowing with milk and honey.*
5. Then God says to Moses, *I'm going to **send you** to Pharaoh, to the meanest, most powerful ruler in the world as you know it – and you're going to make him let my people go!!*
6. And when Moses is justifiably frightened by this whole crazy arrangement, God says to him, *Don't worry...**I will be with you.***

So what do all these other verbs tell us about God?? It's absolutely appropriate that God's name is I AM. For with it God:

-Stakes a claim on the truth that THE LORD is the only REAL GOD...

-AND the fact that **I AM** is also a *helper verb* is also *absolutely appropriate* for look at how God commits himself to help the people in need: seeing, hearing, knowing, coming down to help, and promising to be with...

God is AWARE of everything that's going on in our lives – **and** in the world around us...

God is SENSITIVE to the pain that people are experiencing...

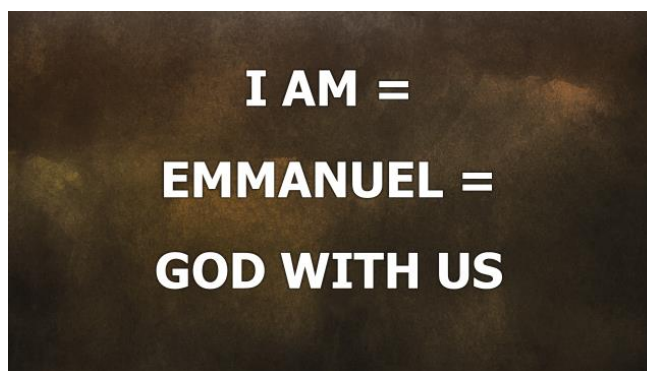
God is NOT just going to sit by and watch – he's going **do something** about a problem

God is always going to **work through ordinary people** like you, me and Moses to do some extra-ordinary things

AND God is always **present**: *with us* and *for us* – God will never send us alone to do the difficult work of life. It may not be easy, and it may not happen overnight, but with God behind us, ahead of us and beside us, we can trust that all will be well.

So it comes as no surprise to hear Jesus claim the very same name: I AM... Says the Lord in our gospel passage for today, *Before Abraham was...I AM* with everything that little powerful verb means...

It also comes as no surprise that Jesus is called Emmanuel – which means *God with us...*



The ONE who IS...is WITH US and FOR US...

Look at the way that Jesus lived his life as a *helper verb*:

- he taught about God's grace
- he fed the hungry
- he healed the sick
- he gave sight to the blind
- he raised people from the dead
- he freed people from their demons
- he welcomed the outcast and
- he died...to take away the sin of the world...

God SEES what's going on in our lives.

God PLANS to bring help to those in need.

God will often USE US – ordinary people – to to share the good news of his extra-ordinary grace.

And God PROMISES to be WITH US every step of the way.

These four things tell us exactly what God's name means: I AM means that God is REAL, that he SEES what's happening, that he KNOWS what's going on, that he PLANS to help, that he will put US TO WORK helping others, all with the beautiful knowledge that he will be standing right BESIDE us all the way. I AM...so very grateful to worship a God whose name is I AM. Amen.