

March 20, 2024
The Sixth Wednesday of Lent
Pastor Matt Duerr

The Great "I AM" The True Vine

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Yahweh. The Hebrew name of God, and it simply means I AM. We've been looking how Jesus used that name, Yahweh, "I AM" in describing Himself. He did it in John chapter 8 as He taught, which talked with the Pharisees saying "I AM" Under everything, I'm the very state of being of the entire universe. But we've seen that He followed that up also with "I Am the Resurrection and the Life." "I am the Light of the world. I am the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep." And He makes the point, He lays it down of His own accord. No one laid it down for him or took it from him. He was in total control. Last week we saw I Am the Door, the door to the sheep now.

And tonight, we hear Jesus saying, "I am the true vine." We find this in John chapter 15. And again, context is everything. It was Maundy, Thursday, the Thursday of Holy Week. Jesus was having the Passover meal with His disciples. During that Passover meal, He identified that Judas was the one who was going to betray Him. Right after the meal, He gave the disciples some troubling news that they were going to abandon him. Peter made the comment that 'even if all these abandoned you, Lord leave you, I will never do it.' That's when Jesus knows better and says to him. "Peter, before the rooster crows, you're going to deny me three times." And then he embarked on a frightful time of teaching and prayer with and for His disciples. Yeah, it was much more than just those couple of hours before Jesus says this week. Holy Week, we call it.

It begins in a rather amazing way. Jesus is coming into Jerusalem and the crowds greet Him. They're waving palm branches, which is a sign of victory. This would have been very offensive to the Romans to see this. They lay their cloaks down on the ground so that the donkey that Jesus is riding on would not touch the ground, but would be above it, like it was holy. It's also fulfills the prophecy of Zachariah 9:9 about Jesus coming

in on a donkey or the Messiah coming in on a donkey on the colt, foal of a donkey. But as He comes in, the people are crying out 'Hosanna to the son of David.' (One of the titles for the Messiah) Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. And from there, He went right up to the temple and you can just see the people, their expectation rising of what's He going to do? What's He going to do? Is He going to claim His kingship? No, He looks around and leaves. But He does come back roughly the next morning on Monday. And that's when He clears the temple. He chases the money changers out and tells them you've made my Father's house a den of thieves. This did not sit well with the religious leaders and so we see that on that Monday the Pharisees came and they challenged Jesus, asking Him the question, "are we to pay taxes or not?" If Jesus says no, well then they report Him to the Romans. Oh, He's telling us not to pay our taxes. If He says yes, well who here likes paying taxes? Then they would say 'look at this, Jesus is in league with the Romans.' You know what Jesus did? So, give me a coin. He gets the coin, holds it up. "Whose image is on it?" Caesars. "Well then render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God what is God's." You can just see the Pharisees dropping their heads and going "that Jesus" and starting to walk away.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines there are the Sadducee's. Another part of the religious leading groups of Israel. They are the ones who did not believe in a resurrection. Many of you have heard me say it before. That is why they were so sad, you see. Because they thought live life to the fullest, because when you die, you're dead. What's over? And so, they come to Jesus and they're going to challenge Him on the resurrection, and they do it with this most magnificent little story. There was a woman. She married a man. The man died. But he had six brothers. The next brother married her. He died. They all married her. They all died. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Kind of impossible, huh? Because she was married all 7. And Jesus does not play around with human logic. Listen to His response. You are wrong. Boy, that's not politically correct, is it? You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. And then He goes into saying that in heaven we are not given and taken in marriage, but we're like the angels. And people will

ask, well, what's that mean? Well, the angels never fell. Imagine what life would have been like if Adam and Eve had not fallen into sin and none of us had fallen into sin. Were Adam and Eve married? No, no, God created them a fit for each other and they were a fit for each other for eternity. There was no need for a marriage certificate. That came later when people were abusing marriage and divorcing and leaving their spouses for different women and all sorts of stuff. When we get to heaven, we'll be restored to what we were supposed to be. We will be with our spouse, our fit, forever. This is what He's saying.

And then He continues on. As for the resurrection, God himself says I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. I am the God of Jacob. He's the God of the living and not the dead. And the result? The two enemies, the Pharisees and the Sadducees got together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him. You know what comes next? The same crowd that that we're saying Hosanna to the son of David, by Friday morning, were yelling "crucify Him!" When Pilate asked, "isn't He your King?" They said, 'We have no king but Caesar! Crucify Him!'

How did this happen? Why did this happen? Well, I think in 2024, looking back on our own recent history, we can understand it a little bit. Because the experts had told them 'Jesus isn't really the Messiah. You can't trust His words. Trust us.' They were false minds. And they had spoken with authority, and they had turned the people against Jesus.

This is what Jesus is addressing. He knows what has happened. He knows what is coming. And he's telling his disciples about it. And so, He says, "I am the true vine, I'm the only one, and I bear witness to the truth. I am the true vine and my Father, (who as we heard last week, was the doorkeeper) is the vine dresser. Now what's the job of a vine dresser? He prunes. If there's a branch and it's not growing any fruit, you cut it off. It's worthless and if you have a branch that's bearing fruit, you prune it so that it will bear even more.

And then He goes into a theme "and abide in Me." He begins with a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine, which is true. But then it's abiding in me. He's that true vine and you will bear much fruit. If you

don't abide in me, you're not going to bear fruit. My father's going to cut you off and throw you in the fire. That begs the question. How do we abide in Jesus? Well, He tells us. First, He says abide in my word, and my word abide in you. Very simple Scripture, The Bible, it's our baseline. It's our standard. It's why we're doing the walk through the Bible as God's narrative. It's God's eyewitness account. It's the truth, and it's what we use to measure things. We listen to what is said, what the experts say, we watch what they do, what people do, and we compare it, contrast it with God's word and then we make a judgment. If what is said lines up with God's word, then it is truth. And if it does not, it is false. It is either a part of the vine and it abides in God's word and stays true to it. Or it is not a part of the vine, and it needs to be cut off and out of our life.

Secondly, he says abide in my love. Think about what Jesus had to say about love. A Pharisee came and asked him. Good teacher, what is the greatest commandment? And Jesus's response first was, why do you call me good? Only God is good. But then secondly, the great commandment is this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself and the second is that love your neighbor as yourself. Love God. Love neighbor. And that's what the Agape love is, and that's the word Jesus. It's sacrificial love. We put others first. This is contrary to what we see in society today. But it really is all about Him and it comes with an expectation. This is His commandment to us. Just as I have kept my father's commandments. We are to keep His commandments at the level at which Jesus kept His Father's, perfect.

Then there's the second part in His, "This is my command" statement. That you love one another as I have loved you. Jesus knew He was going to the cross. He knew He was going to lay down His life of His own accord and be brutally killed. He knew. He would die. And that's why Jesus then says, "Greater love has no person than this. That someone laid down his life for his friends." And talk about friends, Jesus continues, "You are my friends, if you do what I command." It's a natural tie in there; a natural tie into agape love. It's not about me, it's not about the individual, it's about God. It's about our neighbors.

I'd like you to consider what Jesus says. You did not choose me. I chose you. So often today we hear people saying things like I decided for Christ, I chose Christ. And Jesus Himself says, no, you didn't, you didn't choose me. I chose you. I died on the cross for you. I redeemed you. I bought you. Your mine. And, not only did I choose you. He continues. And appointed you. Appointed us, for what? That you should go, number one, and bear fruit. Bear fruit by keeping His commandments because when you love one another, when you go and make disciples, you are keeping His command.

Secondly, He tells us. "Ask whatever you will of my Father in my name, He's going to hear you, He's going to answer. Of course, remember, if you ask for something that is not good for you, the Father will say no. That's why we always pray according to His will. But we are to boldly go before the Father and lay everything out before Him. Whatever is in our lives.

And then third, He's appointed us that we should go and He repeats Himself, gives that command, love one another. So look around you, here's the people we're supposed to love. And as you walk out of church tonight and you look around and you see people around. The call is to love them too. To bring the love of Jesus to them. To love them well, like they've only once been loved before. And that's by Jesus who put all of us ahead of Himself, He died on the cross, so that we might be His. It's time for us to park those words, "I, me, my." Park them in the closet somewhere and start looking out for "they and them and for our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ and love them as we have been loved. In our Saviors name.

Amen.