

Luke 24:36-49

Easter 3B + April 15, 2018

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

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It Is I

The Word of the Lord from Luke 24:38-39: "And [Jesus] said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

Alleluia: let us praise Yahweh. God's name is Yahweh. When God makes Moses His "apostle" – His sent one – to the Israelites in Egypt, Moses asks Him His name. God responds, "I AM." "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" So God's name is I AM; or, in Hebrew, Yahweh.

Yahweh's name is all over the Old Testament, but you don't see it: English translations replace His name with the word "LORD" in capital letters. It's in deference, I suppose, to those who consider His name too holy for sinful lips to speak; yet God gave His name to Moses to tell to the people.

The name is all over the Old Testament because Yahweh is – of course – all over the Old Testament. It is Yahweh who creates all things by speaking, who breathes life into Adam and creates Eve out of Adam's side. When they sin, it's Yahweh who tells them that the Seed of the woman will crush Satan's head, though He Himself will suffer to do so.

It is Yahweh who blesses Abraham throughout his life, and who provides a lamb so that Isaac lives, foreshadowing Jesus' death for us. It's Yahweh who renews that promise of redemption with the Passover meal, telling the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb and mark their doors with blood so that they might be spared death and mourning. When He leads the people of Israel out of Egypt, He protects and delivers them from Pharaoh and his armies at the Red Sea.

It's Yahweh who provides manna during their years in the wilderness, and it's He who institutes all of those sacrifices you can read about in Leviticus. It's not the most exciting reading, but He makes clear to the people: your sin makes you unholy, but you're cleansed of sin by the shedding of blood – and not your own, but the blood of a sacrifice.

That's a *little* bit of what Yahweh, the great I AM, is up to in the first five books of the Bible, also known as the books of Moses.

He doesn't stop there. When Israel rebels against Him, He faithfully sends prophets to call them to repentance and to remind them of His mercy and promises of life. He keeps repeating that He's promised a savior to deliver them from sin and death. He declares in Micah 5:2 that the Savior will be born in Bethlehem, and makes the astounding promise in Isaiah 7:14 that He will be born of a virgin. In Jeremiah 33:15 He promises that, by the work of this Son of David, He will make the people righteous; and He adds in Ezekiel 34:20ff that the Messiah will be a shepherd who gathers His people and saves them. In the book of Daniel, He foretells deliverance from death as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are delivered from the fiery furnace, accompanied by one who looks like the Son of God (Daniel 3); and Daniel is preserved in a den of lions (Daniel 6). He foretells the resurrection with the prophet Jonah, presumed dead in the belly of a great fish three days and nights before he is regurgitated from the "dead." In Hosea, He promises to redeem His people, despite their infidelity; in Joel, He promises the Holy Spirit because the Messiah comes. All of that is Yahweh speaking through His prophets. All of that is the great I AM at work.

Of course, He also declares in Isaiah 53 that the Messiah is to be pierced for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and sacrificed for our sins. His blood will be shed to redeem us. This too is Yahweh at work.

And then there's that prophecy of the Messiah in Malachi 3:1 too, because Yahweh proclaims that the messenger (John the Baptist) will "prepare the way before Me." "Me," He says. Yahweh Himself will be the Messiah.

So go the books of Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament, and so go the psalms. We chant psalms in church every week to sing about Yahweh, about Jesus. Psalm 2 declares that the Messiah is the Son of Yahweh (Psalm 2:12) who is opposed by rulers and peoples; and Psalm 23 makes known that He is Yahweh the Good Shepherd who delivers from death, providing His people with life-giving water and food (Psalm 23). In Psalm 22, He is poured out like water, scorned by man and rejected by God, His garments divided; and though He dies, Psalm 34 declares His bones are not broken; and in Psalm 118, He lives again, proclaims the works of the Lord and is called the cornerstone of the Church.

It's the theme that runs through the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. That's an important phrase – it's a name for the entire Old Testament. So if the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms all speak of the Messiah, then the entire Old Testament speaks of the Messiah.

To put it another way, the entire Bible is about Jesus.

This also means that Yahweh, the great I AM, is utterly consistent in His promises and His care for His people. Many today dismiss the Old Testament as an irrelevant historical document, claiming that God used to be a God of wrath but now has changed into a God of love. Yahweh doesn't change: He is the same yesterday, today and forever. (His name is "I AM," not "I'm a'changing.") He is always Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has always hated sin, and He has always promised to save. The New Testament isn't Yahweh changing His mind, but fulfilling the promise He'd made. And repeated. Again. And again. And again.

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This does not cast a favorable light on the disciples in our Gospel lesson. They've been listening to the Old Testament in the synagogue throughout their lives, singing psalms about the Messiah. They've visited the temple through the years and seen the sacrifices. For cryin' out loud, they've spent the last three years listening to the Messiah teach them every single day; and Jesus has repeatedly told them that He would die and rise again.

Yet in our text, they're in a locked room, afraid for their lives and doubting the resurrection. They have no excuse: they've heard the Word that Jesus is risen, but they're letting their sinful nature talk them out of it. Peter and John have seen an empty tomb with neatly folded burial cloths. Just before our Gospel lesson, they've received two breathless guests from Emmaus, who tell them that they've just seen Jesus – and that Jesus spent the journey telling them how the Old Testament proclaimed His death and resurrection, and how Jesus made Himself known in the breaking of the bread before He vanished from their sight.

So the disciples have heard: they've heard what you've heard. But they don't believe.

Then Jesus stands among them, greets them with peace. They're startled and frightened and they think He's a ghost, so He speaks again. Listen carefully and joyfully to His words: "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Clearly, there's good news here. Jesus is present with a body, and the scars show that it's the same body that went up on the cross. As we noted on Easter, Jesus is risen from the dead, body and all; and so death is completely, fully and finally defeated – for Jesus and for all of His people.

That's a lot of joy for the disciples right there: Jesus, their beloved friend and teacher, lives again! But there's another gem, a priceless truth in those words. It just doesn't show up in the English. Jesus says, "It is I." But a literal translation is this: Jesus says, "I AM."

Yahweh is standing before them. Yahweh is standing before them in the flesh. Yahweh is standing before them in the flesh, with wounds in His hands and feet. The same Yahweh who created and sustains all things, the same Yahweh who watched His creation defiled and shattered by the sin of man. Now, He patiently shows them again from the "Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (the entire Old Testament – *His Word!*) that He has stayed true to His plan of salvation and accomplished it all. The Son of God, the second person of the great I AM Himself, has become flesh and gone to the cross to shed His blood to redeem sinners. Jesus is not just one more prophet in a long line of prophets sent by Yahweh. He's not merely an especially virtuous man whom Yahweh has groomed to be the Messiah. He's not a Plan B because Yahweh's original plan wasn't working out so well. He's Yahweh, the great I AM, who has come to do the work of salvation.

On the cross, in an astounding sacrifice for sin, the One called I AM ceases *to be*, for He is condemned and dead for the sins of all.

But now He is risen from the dead! He visits these sinners in that locked room to announce that He has died and is risen for them. This has been the plan, the story of redemption, from the beginning; and He mercifully makes them part of the story.

Behold: Yahweh with scarred hands and feet, for us and for our salvation.

If the resurrection isn't marvelous enough, be of good cheer all the more; for the Lord makes you part of the story too. Although He is ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, He hasn't stopped visiting His people. When He sent His disciples to proclaim the Gospel, He gave them specific gifts to share: gifts that are not just tokens from Him far away, but gifts through which He draws near. He declares that Holy Baptism is not merely a sign of God's favor, but a means by which Yahweh Himself visits you, joining you to His death and resurrection. He declares that He, the Word made nail-pierced flesh, is present whenever and wherever His Word is proclaimed, calling to repentance and forgiving sins. He tells you that in His Holy Supper, you receive not just bread and wine; but you receive His body and blood – crucified, shed, and raised up again.

See, far too many see Christianity as a completed story, as a static tale of what once was, from which we might be able to learn something. It's true that the Scriptures are complete: because in that Word, the Lord Jesus gives you everything you need for eternal life. But the story continues: Yahweh is not done saving. He who created you and redeemed you, continues to visit you, adding you to the story of salvation that will be completed on the Last Day. Yahweh, the great I AM, promises you, "Lo, I AM with you always, even to the end of the age."

Because He lives, you live also.

Because He is I AM, you are and will be alive in Him forever...

...because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Yahweh: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen