

A Sermon for 11th Sunday after Pentecost

August 4, 2024



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New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

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[Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a, Ephesians 4:1-16, John 6:24-35

I AM

Today we hear the first of three passages in the Gospel of John where Jesus tells us quite clearly, "I am the bread of life." He will elucidate this statement for the next two Sundays' readings, and the reality of this statement can settle into us.

The Gospel of John has many statements from Jesus that begin with "I AM." These remind us of God's profound statement to Moses from the Burning Bush, "I am that I am." Moses may have wondered what that meant, but he certainly acted on it, as God's agent to liberate God's people. God's statement to Moses said, essentially, "I am God and I exist." Jesus begins statements with I AM several times in the Gospel of John, and we know that he is therefore co-existent with God. We need not concern ourselves with the twelve-hundred-year time difference between Moses and Jesus, because God's existence does not depend on our chronological time. God is. God has always been. Jesus stands on earth at a specific time, but he also lives in God's time, now and always. Let's try to get our minds around that.

One of my spiritual directors, Pittman McGehee, encouraged me to think of time as very fluid, and what matters is how we understand, in any given time, the significance of our lives. As we talked, I said more than once, "Oh, now I get it!" I understood things that had happened to me ten, twenty years earlier. Pittman challenged me to find the significance somewhat closer to the time it happens, so that I could say: Now I get it, and it is happening now! I think that is the point of all these statements beginning with I AM. It is always now, and it is always significant.

Let's think back about 3000 years ago, to the time of King David. Our first reading today is the famous moral correction from the prophet Nathan. King David somehow fooled himself into thinking that it was OK to commit adultery and to kill the husband of his lover Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan tells him a parable that exactly parallels David's deeds, but Nathan couches it as a simple story of a rich man and a poor man. The rich man

has everything he could want, but the poor man has just one little lamb. The rich man steals the poor man's lamb, slaughters it and prepares a meal for a traveler. The poor man is left with nothing. David is furious when he hears the story, vowing to punish the rich man. Nathan fixes David with a beady eye and accuses him: "You are the man!" David finally gets it: his guilt overwhelms him as he says, "I have sinned against the Lord." This story is about a particular deed in a particular time, but it is also timeless. God's judgment is another I AM moment.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians acknowledges that we all have different gifts to offer. He ticks off the possibilities for service: some will be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, and all these gifts bring us together for the glory of God, and help us to grow in a unity of faith.

Paul writes in a particular time, for a particular people, but as we read his words today, they have a timeless quality, calling us to be empowered by God's spirit. The following beautiful passage always brings me into a spiritual place of strength:

There is one body and one Spirit...
One hope of your calling,
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all,
Who is above all and through all and in all.

This is a beautiful description of the Christian community living in faith in Paul's time, in our own time, and also beyond time. This is a description of you and how the Spirit moves among you. How do you do all the wonderful things you do? Because you are empowered by the Spirit. You are here for your friends, embracing them with love and compassion. You are here for the larger community, feeding them through the FISH food pantry, caring for people with special needs, providing for children's needs through your giving of school supplies.

When you gather here, your presence centers us in time, and right now,
We Are.

We love God and each other.

We are here, in One Lord, One faith, One baptism, in one God and Father of all.

We are New Life, we receive new life, and we give new life. Glory to God, working in us, accomplishing more than we can ask or imagine.