

Theme: Powerful Words – Powerful Passion – “I Am He!”

Text: John 18:4-8

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" 5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. 6 Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. 7 Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." 8 Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way."

Did anyone else find it hard to know what to say to people today? Did you say, “Happy Valentine’s Day!”? Or did you try and acknowledge the fact that it is also Ash Wednesday...but you really don’t know if it’s appropriate to say, “Happy Ash Wednesday”? We don’t normally think of Ash Wednesday as a “happy” day. A day of repentance, yes. A day of commemorating Jesus journey toward the suffering and sacrifice of the cross, yes. But happy? Doesn’t seem to fit.

Thankfully, another word that is associated with Valentine’s Day is very much fitting for Ash Wednesday: **LOVE!** That may not be the first word that comes to mind when we think about Lent, but **love** is truly what Lent is all about. As we begin our Lenten series on this Ash Wednesday we will be looking at some **“Powerful Words”** from Jesus’ **“Powerful Passion.”** Tonight, we’ll be looking at three important words of Jesus from our text—no, not “I love you,” but these three words definitely showed Jesus’ great **LOVE: “I Am He.”**

It was Maundy Thursday night when the events of our text took place in the Garden of Gethsemane. John sets the scene for us in the three verses before our text, **“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons” (John 18:1-3).** Jesus then asked this **“detachment of troops”** (which could have numbered as many as 600 men) **“Whom are you seeking?”** They answered Him, **“Jesus of Nazareth.”** **Jesus said to them, “I am He” (v. 4-5).**

These words don’t seem too powerful. He was simply acknowledging who He was. But look at the effect these words had on this **“detachment of troops.”** **“Now when He said to them, ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (v. 6).** Remember, this was an armed group of soldiers that could have numbered as many as 600 and Jesus was an unarmed, unassuming rabbi/carpenter, yet His words, **“I am He,”** knocked them down. Jesus was giving these men a glimpse of His power as true God and was sending a very clear message by this action: They could not take Jesus away unless He went willingly. In fact, the probable reason Jesus asked them a second time **“Whom are you seeking?”** was to show them that His point had been made and that He was not going to resist their arrest. He answers their reply again with the same words, **“I am He” (v. 8)** but this time the men are not knocked down again. Jesus willingly turns Himself in and asks for the release of His disciples, **“Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way” (v. 8).**

These words of Jesus, **“I am He,”** were not just powerful because they knocked the soldiers to the ground, but also because of what He accepted upon Himself by saying them. John reminded us in the first verse of our text, **Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward (v. 4).** Jesus knew why the soldiers were there. He knew Judas had betrayed Him. He knew what would follow if He turned Himself over to this mob. He saw the mocking, the humiliation

and suffering. He saw the whippings and the beatings. He saw the agony and death of the cross and the God-forsakenness of hell that would happen there. He knew all that would need to be done to save all mankind. He saw all the horrible things He would need to go through alone. He also had every right and had all the power as true God to get Himself out of the situation and not go through with it. He even demonstrated this by knocking down the soldiers with mere words. After all He was innocent; mankind was guilty. We deserved punishment and shame; He didn't.

But John tells us that Jesus **“went forward” (v. 4)**. He willingly accepted all the things He would have to suffer in order to save the human race that He loved so much. He **“went forward”** and said, **“I am He!”** “I am Jesus of Nazareth.” He said this and did this so that He could prove the other “I Am” statements He made throughout His ministry: **‘I am the Good Shepherd’ who ‘gives up His life for the sheep’ (John 10:11)**. **‘I am the bread of life’ (John 6:48)**. **‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ (John 14:6)**. **‘I AM’ (John 8:58)** which was an acknowledgement that He is “Jehovah,” the one true God (Jehovah means, “I AM.”) **“‘I am He,’ and I willingly give up everything to save my creation.”**

Jesus words and actions are a great reminder of what love really is. Love is more than “a feeling.” It's more than “just words.” Love can include those things, but real love is...real! It's gritty. It's messy. It's not afraid to get its hands dirty. Love can be hard. It can hurt, and we can suffer for it. Love is action and act of the will. That is the type of love Jesus has for us. The type of love that is defined by the Greek word, “Agape,” and described by God for us in **1 Corinthians 13**: A self-less, sacrificial, unconditional love, that loves the unlovable, and the undeserving, and is willing to give up everything for the sake of others with no thought of reward—or even love—in return. Love loves just because it is **LOVE**. Jesus loves because He is **LOVE!**

“I am He!” Jesus didn't try to run or hide from the monumental task that was before Him. He loved us too much. He willingly **“went forward”** and met His battle with sin, hell, and death head on. The book of Hebrews tells us, **[Jesus] for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2)**. The **“joy that was set before”** Jesus would also be our joy. His death gives us eternal life; His blood washed us clean of every sin; His resurrection gives us new life and the sure hope of eternal life in heaven with Him. There we will live and reign with Him in glory forever. There we will hear Jesus identify Himself as “I AM” once again, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:6-7)**. Thanks be to God that Jesus is who He is, and that loves how He **LOVES!** Amen.