

Joint summer service with the South: 30th August 2009

Sermon: "I am with you always"

Text: Matthew 28:26

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

For the last eight weeks we have been exploring who Jesus is, who Jesus himself says he is, through the 'I am' sayings.

We began with **the great I am [1]**: God who was, who is, who shall be. Eternal God who exists, without us, in loving faithful relationship but chooses in love to be our creator, our provider and our saviour. Jesus identified himself with the great I am.

He also called himself **the bread of life [2]**: the basic foodstuff of so many cultures, the essential of life, what we all need to live and to thrive. Jesus in creation at the beginning of time provides the good things for us to eat. Jesus in the act of recreation, through the cross and the empty tomb, provides the bread of eternal life.

Jesus also spoke of himself as **the light of the world [3]**: the light that shines in the darkness of sin, pain, grief, death without being overcome; the light that shows what is wrong within us and within our world but also points to the way out of the darkness.

Jesus the gate[4]: the one who watches our coming in and going out. The one who protects us both as we rest and when we are out in the world. The one who is the gate out of darkness and death into light and life.

Jesus the good shepherd [5]: the one who leads us to clean water and good pasture, from illness to wholeness, through danger to safety. The one who leads his flock, not out of self-interest, but through love and indeed will give his very life for them.

Jesus the way, the truth and the life[6]: Jesus the only way to a real relationship with God. The one who reveals the truth of God's love for us. The one who shows by his words and his example how we should live.

Jesus the true vine [7]: the one to whom we all must be joined if we are to live and to flourish. He is the source of love and power for all we try to do. He is the vital factor that unites us all as one body, one people, one church.

Jesus the resurrection and the life [8]: the bringer of hope into the most hopeless of situations so that we allow God to do the impossible in our lives. The one who died but rose again so we all might live

These great 'I am' sayings are different portrayals, different threads, woven together to make one glorious picture: a picture of Jesus not as a holy man, a compassionate healer, a wise teacher, even though he was all these things,

ut a clear presentation of Jesus as divine, Jesus as God. This is the fundamental, the unique claim of our Christian faith Jesus is God, God with us, Emmanuel. Each of the 'I am' sayings of Jesus confirms it.

In our other reading this morning, in his letter to the young church at Colossae, Paul writes, [Colossians1:5].

'Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.'

Jesus Christ shows us who God is because Jesus is God. Everytime Jesus says 'I am' he is making the claim to divinity.

The sayings we have been looking at over past weeks have come from the Gospel of John and the writer of that gospel is never backwards in coming forwards about the divinity of Jesus. He makes no secret of it but shouts it clear from the rooftops throughout his gospel. But today we are reading from the gospel of Matthew. And it is perhaps fitting for the last sermon in the series that we have gone right to the end of the book, to the very last sentence, to find our final 'I am' saying:

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The resurrected Jesus, the risen Christ, is saying to his disciples 'I am with you', 'I am with you always'. These are his last words before he physically leaves them. What does he mean by them?

It might help us understand if we consider for a moment our gospel reading as a whole. In the Gospel of Matthew the Risen Christ only meets with the women at the tomb on that first Easter morning. He tells these women to pass on his instructions to the disciples: **'Tell my brothers to go to Galilee and I will meet with them there.'**

In this gospel there are no meetings on the road to Emmaus, no meals in the Upper Room. There is no dawn breakfast on the sea shore. In Matthew the Risen Jesus first meets with his disciples on a mountain in Galilee.

For the writer of Matthew mountains are where great things have always happened: Abraham with his son Isaac; Moses and the giving of the law; Elijah hearing the still, small voice of God. For Jesus too: one of the Temptations by the Devil; the Sermon on the Mount; the Transfiguration. Mountains are symbolic of clarity. We can get a great view from a mountain: - where we have come from but more importantly where we are going. The mountain is a symbol of clarity of purpose.

As the risen Jesus meets with his disciples on the mountain in Galilee he makes it quite clear to them what is expected of them, what he is telling them to do. His words are words of sending out. We call it: **The Great Commission.**

There are three elements of this great commission.

Firstly Jesus said to them:

‘Go and make disciples of all nations’.

Go and make disciples. Go and share the good news of the gospel - the love of God – the promise of salvation. Go and share the good news with all nations – not just the Jewish people – not only with your fellow Jews – but will all people.

Then he said that they were to baptise: **‘to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’** – in the name of the Triune God – Holy God, Three-in-one. In baptism people would make a public declaration of belief. They would belong to a new community. They would begin a new life.

Then the third thing the disciples was to do was to teach. He said, **‘teach as I have taught you’**. Jesus taught by word and by example. He was now saying to them: Do as I showed you. Do as I told you. Obey my commands. Follow my example. That is your task. These three things: spread the good news; baptise; teach.

Jesus was not suggestions or recommendations. Nor was he giving the disciples options. These were his commands.

And it was a daunting task indeed. Imagine how the disciples must have felt when they heard his words. They would have felt: inadequate, afraid, overwhelmed, unequal to the task. Are there not times when each one of us feels God is asking too

much of us? times when the challenges before us seem enormous, far too big for us? But remember Jesus’ last words:

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Words that meant: I will be there to help you - to help you through it - to help you do it. Not physically - not in personal human to human presence - but through the Holy Spirit I will be there. I will be there with each one of you. Wherever you are - whatever you are doing - I will be there. I will be there - always.

These were Jesus’ words to his disciples then. These are his words to us now. Because their task is also our task.

1. We too are to go and make disciples: followers of Jesus.
2. We too are to baptise – bringing others to make declarations of faith and begin new lives through him.
3. We too are to teach by what we say and what we do what it means to live the life of Christ

Whatever God asks of us - as individuals - as a community; whatever God calls us to do, God will be with us – always.

The holidays are over. Activities and committees will begin again. Decisions will be made and work restarted. But in all things: God is with us – Emmanuel. Becoming one of us. Living, dying, rising again for us. The eternal connection between God and humanity has been made. There will be no ending. God is with us. God is with us always.

God, the great I am. Providing presence and power.
Jesus said: '**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**' Paul describes it as '**the fullness of God**'.

Jesus was telling them. Jesus is telling us.
Nothing in heaven or on earth can keep me from you.
Nothing.
Whatever you do. Whatever anyone else does.
I will be with you always
I want to be with you always.
I can and will be with you always

He will always be
the food that nourishes us
the light that defeats the dark
the gate that opens into the safety of God's presence
the shepherd that leads us along the path of righteousness
the vine that joins us together and allows us to
bear fruit of love, of joy, of peace.

He will always be
the way of hope
the truth of the never ending justice and mercy of God
life without end.

Jesus said
'surely I am with you always to the very end of the age'

Our eternal life has already begun.
A life we know now only through the Spirit

but a life we will know completely
when time will be no more
and we are all part of the eternity of God.

Jesus said: go and make disciples of all nations

Let us go.
Let us follow his example and his command.
Let us go and share the good news
God is with us always.

Amen