

“I AM WHO I AM”

John 8:48-59

Trinity Sunday, June 16, 2019

We've all heard about them before, I'm sure, haven't we? I am talking about those people who, unfortunately, end up becoming the **VICTIMS** of a **MISTAKEN IDENTITY!**

One such instance is that of a young lady named **Whitney Cerak!**

In 2006, she became the victim of a terrible automobile accident, along with three other college girlfriends, who were riding in that same car with her in Upland, Indiana. One of the girls was so severely wounded that her head and face were completely wrapped up in bandages. For five agonizing weeks, **Whitney Cerak** lay in a hospital bed; unable to speak.

Of course, there were love ones, constantly at her side, who prayed and did their best to comfort her. But, as it turns out, these family members and friends were not really Whitney's family members and friends at all! They were the family members and friends of another girl, who had died in that accident, named Laura Van Ryn, but whose body had been mistakenly identified as that of Whitney Cerak.

While Whitney's parents were so surprised and grateful to learn that their daughter was alive, Laura Van Ryn's parents now had to confront the reality of their daughter's death.

You see, it all turned out to be the case of a **MISTAKEN IDENTITY.**

Sometimes, people become the victims of a mistaken identity, but in today's computer-age, they can also become the victims of a **STOLEN IDENTITY** if another person successfully hacks into their computer, stealing very vital and important information from them.

Friends, on this day when we celebrate the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, with other believers all around the world, we can give thanks to our God, who has revealed himself to us as ONE DIVINE BEING IN THREE DISTINCT PERSONS, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

You see, by our God has revealed himself to us in the Bible with some 953 names or titles that he assigns to himself, to give us a very clear picture and understanding of who he is, and what his intentions are to us.

In our **OLD TESTAMENT LESSON (Exodus 3:13-20)**, we probably hear a familiar discussion taking place between Moses and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at a burning bush, where Moses, now 70 years old, was attending sheep as a shepherd, when all of a sudden there a bush on that terrain that catches on fire!

This wasn't so strange, in and of itself! What was strange is that the bush itself never burned up. When Moses drew near to that bush, he heard the Voice of God speaking to him, out of it, in no uncertain matter: "Moses," the Voice said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

The next thing that happens is that the **LORD GOD** identifies himself: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

And then, Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Moreover, in **Exodus 3:10** we hear God tell Moses: ***“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt!”***

Many of us here today, well remember Moses’ initial objections to God’s call, but when he acquiesces then Moses asked the LORD God what might seem to us, actually, to be a very worthwhile and legitimate question: ***“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”***

God said to Moses. **“Tell them – ‘I AM WHO I AM!’”**

“Say this to the people of Israel, the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you! This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations” (Exodus 3:14-15)!

Brothers and sisters, **THE MOST IMPORTANT NAME FOR GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT** is a name that is usually translated in English Bibles with that four-letter word **“LORD,”** but with each of those four letters appearing as a capital letter! The importance of this name for God, is that it is, in, the **HEBREW PARTICIPLE FOR THE VERB “TO BE,”** that could also be translated as **“BEING”** or the **“One who causes all things to be.”**

May I repeat this again?

The importance of this name for God, is that it is, in, the **HEBREW PARTICIPLE FOR THE VERB “TO BE,”** that could also be translated as **“BEING”** or the **“One who causes all things to be.”**

Friends, even in the English language, the verb “to be” is in a class all by itself. When it comes to our conjugating verbs there are transitive verbs like the verb “to play,” that conjugated goes like this: “I play, you play, he or she plays, we play, you play, and they play!”

But in the verb “to be,” which is an intransitive verb, the word for this verb changes completely. It is: “I am, you are, he, she, or it is. We are, you are, and they are!”

This word **“LORD”** which can be most literally translated into English as: **“I AM WHO I AM,”** occurs **6,822 times in the Old Testament.**

That’s more than three times as often as the simpler Hebrew word for “God,” which is “Elohim,” that appears 2,600 times, and the even the other word for “God,” the Hebrew word “El,” that appears 238 times.

Friends, this Old Testament name by which God reveals himself to us, sometimes translated as **“YAHWEH,”** or **“JEHOVAH,”** or the **“LORD GOD;”** or even **“I AM WHO I AM,”** is full of some very important implications for us.

Here we are reminded that God’s name teaches, first and foremost, that **HE EXISTS.**

And yet many people who live out their lives in this world may do so --- as if he does not exist! And even if they believe that he exists, they live as if this truth makes no difference to them at all in their daily lives! These are the people King David himself is referring to in Psalm 14:1, **“Only the fool says in his heart ‘THERE IS NO GOD!’”** By the way of a hopefully meaningful analogy, let me ask you to call to mind for yourself, right now, that man who was elected the President of the United States, who by far, in your opinion is the best and most loved president that ever lived in the White House! **Do you have that president in mind?** Let’s suppose that your very favorite President of the United States, whose life upon this earth, coincided with yours, had sent a personal invitation, inviting you and all the members of your immediate family to come to the White House for a Christmas party, as the Commander in Chief’s and First Lady as their guest.

You gladly go, and you enter that cozy room named the GREEN ROOM AT THE WHITEHOUSE, YOU SEE THE PRESIDENT SITTING RIGHT THERE, NEXT TO THE FIREPLACE. You walk into the room, but you never take the time to go over and introduce yourself to him, nor to thank him for his invitation. As a matter of fact, all you do, is to look right past him; so much so that you never even shoot one glance in his direction! You offer him no personal greeting, not even once, throughout the whole evening; nor do you ever speak even one word to him. You don't even bother to thank him for his having invited you and your family members to take part in this great honor bestowed upon you and them!

Nevertheless, let's further pretend that a newspaper reporter would also walk into the Green Room that evening! What if he came up to you and ask you: "Do you believe in the existence of the President of the United States?"

You would reply, "Of course! Yes, I believe in the existence of the President!"

You know, friends, isn't this the way it is with so many millions of people, living in the United States today? They say that they believe in God, but they never take time to worship him, or to read the Bible, or even to pray to him, thankfully, for all the immense blessings that He has poured out on them throughout their lives!

To many people God, who may even claim that they believe in the existence of God; the **Triune God is no longer any more important to them than the hydrogen that is included in the air we breathe;** because although hydrogen is included in the air we breathe, its component part is only **MINUSCULE AT BEST—ONLY OUT OF 2,000,000 MOLECULES OF THE AIR WE BREATHE IS HYDROGEN, WHICH IS A GOOD THING BECAUSE HYDROGEN IS HIGHLY FLAMMABLE AND WOULD BE DETRIMENTAL IF YOU WERE EXPOSED TO IT IN MUCH TOO BIG OF A QUANTITY!**

If asked: "Do you believe hydrogen exist?" You might say, "Of course, hydrogen exists," then you **WOULD return** to all those other things **IN THIS LIFE** that really matter to you!

Contained in God's answer to Moses, about his name, God replies: **"I AM WHO I AM."**

God is teaching us that not only does he exist, but for those who will stop long enough from simply pursuing their own glory and their own private pleasures, in life, to consider that he **is right here next to us**, as close as our very breath, that recognition, and that belief, can make all the difference for you AND ME in the world! **But this is precisely the reason we want God the Holy Spirit – to sanctify us to such a degree – that there are indeed those times when we proclaim from the top of our lungs: "MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE LORD, ALL THE EARTH! SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS! COME INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH SINGING! KNOW THAT THE LORD, HE IS GOD! IT IS, HE WHO HAS MADE US, AND WE ARE HIS; WE ARE HIS PEOPLE AND THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE! ENTER HIS GATES WITH THANKSGIVING, AND HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE! GIVE THANKS TO HIM; BLESS HIS NAME! FOR THE LORD IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER AND HIS FAITHFULNESS TO ALL GENERATIONS"** (Psalm 100)!

MOREOVER, OUR GOD IS A GOD WHO DOES NOT CHANGE!

In **Malachi 3:6**, God says: **"I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed."** Within the name **LORD, or JEHOVAH, OR YAHWEH,** is the affirmation: **"I AM WHO I AM."** In **James 1:7**, we read: **"With him there is no variation or shadow due to change."** And in **Hebrews 13:8**, we read: **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!"**

But if we who are by nature Gentiles, and not Jews, were ever to come to know him, we could only come to know, we profess again this on this **Trinity Sunday, because this God WHO REVEALS HIMSELF TO US AS "I AM WHO I AM," HAS NOW DRAWN ABSOLUTELY NEAR TO US IN THE GIFT OF HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST!**

And you know the complete scoop behind this mysterious revelation: ***“When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem all of us who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as children, whereby we also call out to him – “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:4-7)!***

Because he has conquered sin, death and the power of the evil one, he who also exists and always existed as the **Eternally Begotten Son of God, long before the time of his Incarnation**, when he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, he can reveal himself to us by the same name today: **“The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”**

In our Gospel lesson today, **in John 8:56-58, Jesus is answering the criticism of the Jewish leaders, who were mocking him because he dared to say: “If anyone keeps my words, he will never see death!”**

When these critics ask our Lord, **“Are you greater than Abraham,”** even without batting an eye, Jesus says, **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it and was glad!”** And when they next reminded our Savior that he was still about 17 years shy of being 50 years old, Jesus said to them, even more challenging word: **“Before Abraham was I am,”** the title Jesus as the Holy Son of God is also claiming for himself is that of his also being the **GREAT I AM.**

Because of our Savior’s perfect life, death and resurrection, because he has come into this world to pay the price for our rebellion and sins, and was raised again on the third day, pouring out the HOLY SPIRIT upon us that we might fully become with him now partakers in his divine nature: Then we can say with St. Paul despite all our sins of past, present and future: ***“By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain” (I Cor. 15:9-10)!***

But in closing, I want to ask you some rather personal question: **Does this close relationship you now enjoy with God, actually change the way you are living out your life in this world, not only in your coming faithfully to the LORD’s House every time God grants you that opportunity, especially, so long as you have the health and the wherewithal to do so?**

Does this close relationship you and I now enjoy with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, reflect itself in **our faithful stewardship of first fruits giving?**

Does this close relationship you now enjoy with our Heavenly Father through his Son Jesus Christ, **make you and me more devout in our prayer life?**

You may have heard about that retired country preacher who decided to skip worship service, one Sunday morning, since he no longer absolutely had to be there in the pulpit to deliver God’s Word to his people every Sunday!

He decided instead to do something he had never, ever done before on the Christian Sabbath—Sunday! He decided to spend that whole Sunday hiking in the wilderness of Montana, where he was living, instead.

Rounding a sharp bend in the trail, he suddenly saw off in the distance a gigantic bear, who had spotted him and who was quickly coming down a steep grade towards him.

With the ferocious bear charging at him from a distance, the preacher prayed, **“O Lord, I’m so sorry for skipping the worship service this morning! Please forgive me and grant me just one prayer request—make a Christian out of that bear that’s coming toward me!”**

At that very instant, the retired pastor could not believe his eyes. Suddenly that bear stops immediately, and the bear falls on its knees!

Now that retired pastor believed everything was going his way, when suddenly the bear himself, now a Christian, opened his mouth and began to speak!

What were the words of that bear’s prayer? Well, it went like this: ***“Dear God, for this thy bounty that I am about to receive, I give thee thanks!” Amen***