**“The Powerless ‘I Am’”**

# 

John 18:1-11

Ash Wednesday Lenten Midweek

This Lenten season, we will consider closely the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ as its recorded in the Gospel of John. We will hear from John 18-19, Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, Jesus facing Annas and Caiaphas, Jesus before Pilate, Jesus delivered, Jesus crucified, and Jesus death and burial. We’ll especially consider the **divine majesty and glory of Jesus that's hidden under his suffering and death**. We pray that God the Holy Spirit would, by this meditation, **imprint the image of Christ crucified in our minds and hearts and on our consciences, that we may never forget our worth to God and His gift to us of salvation**.

**4**

Tonight, we are **in a garden**. The passion begins and ends **in gardens … differing gardens**. The night after tonight’s remembrance, Jesus will be brought to a garden on the other side of Jerusalem, with a new tomb in that one. But tonight, Jesus and His disciples are in the Garden of Gethsemane, an olive grove on the west-facing slope of the Mount of Olives, just east of the city.

Jesus has washed the disciples’ feet and He has instituted the Supper and fed them of what He was about to sacrifice in His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. He warned of all that was about to happen. And when all was finished **there**, **He took** the disciples from an Upper Room out of the city east and down through the Kidron Valley, and into this garden. Jesus asked the disciples to pray with Him but **they slept while He was in agony: “Father, if possible” (He’d there ask) “let this cup pass from Me. But not My will. Your will be done.”** Three times He prayed sweating with great drops of blood.

**The Father’s answer?** “There is **no other way**”. Jesus **would** drink the cup of suffering that had been planned before even the world took shape and **this became needed**. **This cup of the righteous anger of God over sinful rebellion and unfaithfulness had to be satisfied in blood**. Angels comforted Jesus. He rose from prayer and went to find the eleven.

Judas, who had left earlier to arrange the finality of the betrayal, came to the place where **He knew he’d find Jesus**, bringing soldiers and officials from the Sanhedrin. He indicated to that band that they’d know the Man to arrest by his greeting of Him with a kiss. Then and there, Jesus addressed the soldiers and their questions. **The conversation** we’ll note this evening.

**3**

It is often remarked-about that John accentuates seven **“I Am” statements that Jesus makes of Himself: “I am the bread of life”, “I am the light of the world”, “I am the door”, “I am the good shepherd”, “I am the resurrection and the life”, “I am the way, the truth, and the life”, and “I am the true vine”**. John’s Gospel accentuated this so as to **call out how key they are to understanding who Jesus is and what He’d come to do**. Most importantly, reminding of the continuity of Moses’ conversation with the very same Lord through a burning bush naming Himself there “I AM WHO I AM”. **JESUS IS** the one-in-the-same Lord who **IS** God of God, Light of Light, very God of Very God … the rest is **WHAT HE DOES**.

Missed some in all the other times where John’s Gospel records Jesus saying “I am” something or other” are the times when He just says “**I** **AM**”. Scripture’s English translations of Scripture often make it appropriately noticeable when translating that “I am He” … **it stands on its own awesomeness**. “Before Abraham was, **I AM**”, “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that **I AM**”.

**2**

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says all of this (**in its awesomeness**) … twice. And two very different things happen … because He allows it. The **reactions to who He is, and what He is doing and allowing … tells the story**.

Jesus asked the soldiers when they arrived, “Whom do you seek?” and they said, “Jesus of Nazareth”. Jesus said (here for the first of the two times): “**I AM**” …

… and with that … just that … Jesus revealed (there at the beginning of His Passion recorded by St. John) **WHO** He is, noting by Name the power of His Divinity, which (in this first case) “drew the whole band of soldiers and Sanhedrin back, all falling back onto the ground”. Hit only by the **self-identification of the Divine Name**, visualize lanterns being dropped and swords and spears flying and men falling all of over one another like bowling pins to a well guided ball. Just God’s Name in Christ Jesus scattered men …

… but did not destroy them. Jesus **allowed** them to recover and stand up and dust off the dirt and reclaim weapons. Dazed but still available for duty, soldiers looked at Jesus who asked: “Who do you seek?” And perhaps more tentative this time, they said, “Jesus of Nazareth”. … And Jesus repeated: “**I AM**” … but granted a **different reaction**.

He **permitted them to take Him**. The first self-identification sent everyone to the ground. The second were let to fall upon ears with bodies **sanctioned to follow their appointed tasks**.

With the first “I AM” it was clear Who men were arresting in God’s Son Jesus **in the flesh**. The second “I AM” showed the same Lord abandoning His ability to protect Himself to quietly allow **His** **flesh** led to slaughter like a lamb.

The first “I AM” says that Jesus **could have** avoided the cross. The second “I AM” shows that He **wouldn’t**.

The first “I AM” is the revelation of God’s **majesty and power**. The second “I AM” the miracle of God’s **willing weakness** **(the greater miracle and revelation and wonder … and gift)**.

**1**

The Creator of all (the One who spoke and the sun, moon, and stars jumped into their places) is **in a garden**. The One who spoke and everything came to be, **submitted to arrest**. He spoke just His Name and soldiers fell back and down. He spoke it again and soldiers were left to stand and do what they’d come for.

They approached Jesus … **He did not resist**.

They touched Jesus … **nothing to prevent them happened**.

They grabbed Jesus and bound Him. **He did not lift a finger nor speak a Word to oppose it**. They led Him away to Annas and then to Caiaphas. They struck Him in His face and spit on Him. The pulled His beard and hair and stripped Him and whipped Him and dragged Him, ultimately, to Golgotha (the death place). They crucified Him, laid Him on His back upon wood and nailed Him to it, yet nails were only allowed to hold Him. **His will held Him**. It was **weakness in the Divine**. It was **His willing** **weakness so that you and I could gain strength**.

These “I AMs” portray **the miracle of the weakness of God**! **BEHOLD the WONDER OF HUMILITY FOR THE LOVE OF US!** **BEHOLD THE SUFFERING OF GOD FOR SINNERS!** **BEHOLD HIS COMPASSION FOR ALL OF US (NO MATTER “WHO” THE “US” ALL ARE)**.

This, after all, is **why Jesus came**, **why God took upon Himself flesh and blood … and all of humanity: so that there’s a BACK TO WHIP AND A BROW TO CROWN AND HANDS AND FEET FOR NAILS TO PIERCE, MAKING BLOOD SPILL OUT, TO CARRY OUR SIN AND SORROWS, AND BE THE KING OF OUR SALVATION!**

**JESUS SHOWED HIS LOVE FOR US**

**AS THE “I AM” WHO WILLINGLY AND PURPOSEFULLY**

**DOESN’T KNOCK THE SOLDIERS OVER IN THE END.**

Saints (made to be that by His sacrifice and our baptism into it), “Whom is it that”, tonight, “you’ve come to seek?” Our answer might assume the form of a question: “Jesus of Nazareth, but are **you the Savior, the One who can and will save me? And He says “I AM” … which we hear**.

Jesus, are You a **friend of sinners? “I AM” He said by Words and actions**.

Jesus, are You **our Light and Hope?** Jesus, are You **for me and for my eternal benefit? And He says by everything He speaks and does: “I AM”**.

That is His Promise. Amen.