

## Bennochy church 22nd April 2018

It is a deliberate ploy. There is no coincidence in the fact that the writer of John's gospel, no less than seven times, puts into the mouth of Jesus, the phrase, "*I am*". The point is not to create a nice series of statements. These two words are the crux of what John wants to convey to his readers. In no uncertain terms, he is clearly stating who he believes Jesus to be.

To understand this, you need to know the story. It is an ancient story, going back deep into the history of the formative years of the people of Israel. They had not yet entered the Promised land and the only existence that they knew, was as a slave people in Egypt. Central to the story is a man named Moses. Former Prince of Egypt, taken from the Nile as a child by Pharaoh's daughter, and brought up in the Royal court, and treated as a son of one of the most powerful men in the world.

The sequence of events leading to his survival is a great story in its own right. He survived as a child due to the quick thinking of his mother and his sister. To reduce Hebrew numbers, Pharaoh decided to kill all new born Hebrew male children. They were centre of his economy, but he felt threatened by their growing numbers. So Moses is first hidden, and when that became too dangerous, he is placed in a basket in the river Nile, where he would be discovered, and it is Moses own sister who arranges for Moses mother, to look after him at court.

Unfortunately, Moses past catches up with him. He witnesses the cruel treatment of his people. After all, he is a Hebrew himself. Pharaoh then finds out he has killed an Egyptian, who was mistreating one of the Hebrew slaves. The order goes out for him to be killed and Moses has to escape, and heads for the land of Midian.

We find Moses looking after the sheep of a man named Jethro. Jethro was the priest of Midian and also his father in law, after Moses married his daughter Zipporah. Notice how events in the bible come back to certain places. We are back at Mount Sinai, where God would reveal himself, in cloud, fire and law, as the people of God made their way to the promised land.

In this holy place, God makes himself known to Moses and gives him the unenviable task of being the person who would lead his people out of Egypt. He would utter the words, 'let my people go!' 'I'm nobody', cry's Moses. That is not strictly true, in the past, he was Prince of Egypt. Think of the irony of the task given to Moses, and how much more challenging it will be. Moses will have to face up to his past life, the blood on his hands and back to the place where a death sentence hung over him.

Let's not forget that Moses is a man of two identities, and in this command of God, is there a sense some divided loyalties.

Prince of Egypt and born a Hebrew slave. You can't forget, who you once were.

While this is all swilling around in his mind, he asks, what might seem to us a strange question, if the people ask, who will I say sent me? Underneath his response, is a sense of fear. The people are not going trust me! Former prince of Egypt, will I be accepted as one of my own people? I need a 'calling card' to place in their hands.

In ancient times, names were very important. They said something of who you were and in a strange way, if you knew someone's name, you had some power, or hold over them. In this story, clearly that is not the case. If God is saying something here about himself, its meaning lies in the future. To be revealed in a man, that the apostle Paul would call the second Moses.

Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep.*" (John 10: 11) There is no doubt that the image of the Good shepherd is a good Easter picture. Only the Good Shepherd, and not the hired man, is willing to lay down their life for their sheep. '*I am*'. If that is the name of God, as revealed to Moses, then John is saying to his readers, Jesus ...is ... God. No explanation was required. They knew the story. It was deeply embedded as part of their identity.

If you change the emphasis in the sentence, God is revealed. 'I am... the Good Shepherd'. All those centuries before, the Good Shepherd had appeared to Moses and John says, God is revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

I am. God is always. In him there is no past, present or future. He is simply, now.

I am. In God, no time has elapsed, between a burning bush, an empty tomb and today. His time is eternity and forever will be.

I am. The words of Jesus, the Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.