

## ***Remaining in Christ: Jesus' "I AM" Statements in the Gospel of John***

### **Session III**

#### **Notes on the Teaching: John 6:1-59**

##### **I AM the Bread of Life**

- In this passage we encounter three more “I AM” sayings in our study. The Greek words *egō eimi* that lie behind the translation of “I AM” are theologically meaningful. The phrase constitutes the divine name revealed by God to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15). Jews understand the divine name as sacred, and the name is not to be spoken by humans. That makes these words on the lips of Jesus even more significant. As the divine *logos* made flesh, Jesus boldly uses the phrase to make the unseen God known to the world through specific, rich images associated with daily life. They are images that illustrate the relationship between Jesus and his followers.
- **The first “I AM” saying in this passage** takes place when the disciples are terrified in the middle of a storm on the sea (vv. 18-20). Walking toward them on the water, Jesus tells them “I AM; do not be afraid.” This translation of the Greek text highlights this use of the divine name *egō eimi* in John. The NRSV translation of *egō eimi* (“It is I; do not be afraid”) obscures the divine name. Notice here that no object follows “I AM,” unlike we find in vv. 35, 48 (“I am the bread of life”). Here, the mere presence of God in the midst of the storm abates the disciples’ fears.
- **Two kinds of “bread.”** Chapter 6 starts with Jesus feeding five thousand people with only five loaves and two fish. The image provokes memories of Israelites wandering in the wilderness, where they were fed daily by manna from heaven. Though their physical hunger was satisfied, they still died (v. 58). Jesus pointedly tells the people not to work for the “food that perishes” (like the manna in the wilderness) but to seek the “food that endures for eternal life,” food he will provide to them (v. 27). This food is the “true bread” that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (vv. 32-33). This distinction between physical food and “true bread” echoes what Jesus told his disciples in 4:34: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.” The “true bread” that sustains us eternally is doing the will of God!
- **The true bread, the bread of life, is Jesus, the living Word and Wisdom of God.** When the people ask Jesus for this true bread that gives life to the world (v. 34), he responds: “I AM the bread of life” (v. 35). Jesus promises that people who come to him to eat this bread will never be hungry again and those who believe in him will never thirst again (v. 35). In v. 48 he reiterates: “I am the bread of life,” the “living bread that comes down from heaven” for eternal life (vv. 50-51). True bread is the “flesh” of Jesus (v. 51) – his living example of doing the will of God.

- **In Jewish scriptures “bread” is associated with God’s Word and Wisdom, with teaching and revelation.** Jesus makes all these statements while *teaching* in the synagogue in Capernaum (v. 59). As the embodiment of divine Word and Wisdom, he came down from heaven as the divine *teacher* who reveals God’s will for human life. To “eat” his “flesh” (which is the “living bread” from heaven) means doing God’s will and experiencing eternal life in relationship with God.
- **What about the Lord’s Supper?** There were different interpretations of John 6 in the early church’s Eucharistic meal ritual. Justin Martyr saw participation in the meal as a mark of true believers. Clement of Alexandria and Origen saw the commitment to eat Jesus’ “flesh” and “drink” his blood as metaphors for gaining nourishment from the teachings of Jesus.