**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“I Am”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

June 15, 2025

*John 8:48-59*

In our reading for today, we are dropped into the middle of a conflict. Jesus has been arguing with the Pharisees for quite a while, and they have been lobbing accusations at each other. Of course, Jesus, being the Son of God, makes His accusations more like descriptions. The phrase “if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all” doesn’t seem to apply to Jesus because He has just finished telling the Pharisees that they are children of the devil.

The Pharisees’ response is the first verse of our text today; they call Him a Samaritan (meaning a heretic) and accuse Him of being possessed. Jesus is not concerned with any kind of conflict resolution here. He amps the conflict up and makes three claims about Himself. He claims to be glorified by the Father, to have seen Abraham, and finally, He claims to be God.

The conflict then reaches its climax. The Pharisees have had and heard enough; they have everything that they need to kill Him right there on the spot. They pick up stones with which to kill Him, but before they are able to do it, Jesus disappears from their sight, and they are left standing in their anger.

Jesus’ relationship with the Pharisees is interesting; they keep showing up throughout the Gospels. They seem to constantly send groups to Jesus to see what He is all about. The Pharisees understand Jesus. In fact, a lot of the time they seem to understand Jesus better than His disciples. They understand what Jesus is claiming and who He is claiming to be.

When Jesus says that He is the “I Am” in our text for today, the Pharisees knew exactly what He was saying. Jesus was saying that He is Yahweh; He is the great I Am. Jesus is the Lord of the Old Testament. He is, was, and always will be the God who created the universe, who redeemed it from sin by His death, and who sustains it. Jesus is the Lord.

Jesus is God; He is the Son, and along with the Holy Spirit and the Father, He is God. Together, they are God. Three distinct persons, but one God.

We just got done saying the Athanasian Creed together. Yes, I understand that it is long, and I am very proud of all of you for making it through. The Athanasian Creed is truly the fullest explanation of the Doctrine of the Trinity that we have. It is one of the three Ecumenical Creeds that pastors and church workers pledge their faithfulness to.

There is a general distaste for doctrine in our culture today. As Americans and individuals, we don’t like anyone telling us what to believe. We would like to figure that out on our own and come up with our own system of belief. This idea has made its way into many church bodies, especially non-creedal churches like Baptists, Assemblies of God, and many non-denominational churches tend to stay away from doctrine. Most contemporary Christian music that you hear on the radio has no doctrinal content at all.

So, why do we waste our time? Why do we spend 5 minutes in church to say the Creed? Why do we use a hymnal full of old hymns when there are plenty of new ones?

Doctrine doesn’t matter much in our world today, but there were times in the history of Christianity when doctrine *did* matter. There were times when your doctrine, the specifics of what you believe, could mean death. Wars have been fought, empires have crumbled, church bodies have split, and people have lost their lives and their homes for doctrine, for the sake of the truth. The fact that Good Shepherd even exists is a result of the importance of doctrine.

Our hymnody, our liturgy, the Creeds, the Lutheran Confessions, all of it shapes our doctrine and our understanding of God. When we lose or neglect part of it, our conception of who God is starts to slip. I get frustrated in class here when kids only ever refer to God as God. I know that sounds kind of silly to say, but we need to be clear whenever we can when we talk about God.

Our society is filled with people who say that they believe in God, but unfortunately what they mean when they say God may not mean the Triune God of the Bible. There are religions who claim to believe in God that do not worship the same God as us. Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hindu’s and more all claim to believe in God, but all worship a false god of their own creation, not the Trinity.

Doctrine matters because doctrine shows us the truth of who God is. Our sinful nature often leads us to twist our concept of who God is. Doctrine gives us borders; it checks our sinful nature and helps us to remain in the truth of God’s Word. We are people of the truth. That is why we confess the Creeds, why we preserve the liturgy, and why we spend so much time making sure our people understand the doctrine of God. Doctrine keeps us in the truth, and it keeps lies out.

Something is either true or false, it is either fact or fiction. In a world where truth is becoming harder and harder to find, there is more and more conflict over what is actually true or false. That’s why doctrine is so important today. People are searching for truth; they are looking for something real. It’s tempting to water down the truth, to make it easier to swallow, but that would be giving people a weak foundation.

Jesus doesn’t water down the truth of who He is so that the Pharisees would follow Him. Jesus proclaims the truth of who He is, the truth of the Holy Trinity. He tells them that He is God. We must do the same, proclaim to the world and to our children the whole truth of God’s Word as expressed through doctrine. The truth that God the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world. The Son took on flesh, became a man, and died on the cross to pay for our sins. When He ascended into heaven, He and the Father sent His followers the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit nourished and strengthened their faith, and He does the same for you today in the waters of Holy Baptism.

The Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has claimed you. You were baptized into the name of the Trinity, and your sins were washed away, and your future was secured. The God who is, was, and always will be, holds you in His arms. One day, the Triune God who created the world will remake the world, and the conflict of this world will be over, and we will live with the Trinity forever.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.