

Theme: Three Words of Truth: "I AM HE."

- I. He who is in the face of those who aren't
- II. He who does for those who don't

So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

The little girl screams in terror. "Mom!" she yells. "There's a bug in my room!" No matter how much mom tries to comfort her daughter, the girl refuses to return to her room as long as that bug might be there. Mom is none too thrilled herself. She arms herself with bug spray and a flyswatter. She knows her daughter is counting on her to help her.

What do you do in the face of danger? Do you, like the girl, flee in terror? Or do you, like the mom, arm yourself for battle? However you handle disaster, our Lord remains constant. He doesn't flee. He doesn't fight. He doesn't change, but resolutely answers the call to suffer and die. He answers evil: I AM HE.

Jesus' enemies came to him in the garden armed to the tooth. Convinced he was their enemy, they came to eliminate him like a bug. Jesus had been creating a commotion among the people. His own understanding of the Scriptures had taken the people away from them. Now people were listening to him instead of them. Driven by jealousy, fear, and rage, the Jewish authorities and soldiers brought lamps, torches, and weapons. They had a plan to end the problems Jesus posed.

And Judas led them. Judas knew Jesus posed no threat. Instead, greed motivated him. 30 pieces of silver was enough for him to turn in his teacher. Satan entered Judas. When Judas entered the garden, he brought evil with him.

The other Eleven were there, too. Were they shocked to see Judas, one of their own, leading the charge? Were they terrified by the hundred-plus armed soldiers? Some tried to defend Jesus—poorly—answering violence with violence. All turned tail and fled. The evil there proved too much for them.

Where do you stand when confronted by evil? Are you like the soldiers, charging in to face what isn't evil at all? Do you react like the Pharisees and Jewish officials—jealous when anyone outshines you, eager to put an end to their light? Are you like Judas, eager to make a profit from evil, seeking to manipulate it? Do you, like the disciples, try to usurp God's role in combatting evil? Or do you, like those same disciples, flee in terror? Truth be told, depending on the situation, we have done all these things. We change. And we bring evil into the equation. We are not constant when faced with evil.

But not Jesus. He takes evil head-on. When soldiers and Jewish officials come with weapons, Jesus approaches them first. He even helps them in their task. He asks them who they are looking for. He cooperates. He is unintimidated. Instead, he is the one they're looking for. He is.

When Judas betrays him, Jesus doesn't curse the evil he has done. He doesn't turn away in shock. Instead, he remains constant. He loves. He is love. He is.

Unlike the disciples, who will brandish their swords to stop this, Jesus shows he has the power to stop it. He tells them his name. "I am." And they fall back. If Jesus wanted, they would not be able to take him. He is God. But he willingly goes into their evil, to take on our evil. He must fulfill the Scriptures. He is their fulfillment. He is.

When an angry mob comes to arrest him, Jesus is still looking out for others. He asks that his disciples go free. Who, when they are under arrest, looks out for everyone else in the situation, ignores his own needs? Yet Jesus needs to fulfill his own words. And in the face of evil, Jesus remains constant. He is love. He is.

With three words, Jesus conveys great truth. They are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He answers, "I am he." Yes, he is Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher and prophet who had taught for three years. Yes, he is Jesus of Nazareth, who had gained few friends among the Jewish officials, instead preaching repentance to both those who appear good and those who appear evil. He is the man they're looking for. But not for the reasons they should have been.

"I am he," he says. He is the LORD who called Abraham out of the nations to be his chosen nation. He is the LORD who blessed the patriarchs. He is the LORD who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, who delivered his people from Egypt. He is the LORD who remained constant with his people, showing love to thousands and forgiving wickedness and sin. He is the LORD who punished his people when they went astray. He is the LORD who sent them to Babylon and brought them back.

And he came to vanquish evil. He came to take it head-on. In the garden, he willingly went with them because he is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He didn't change. He is. He didn't use to be. He isn't going to be. He *is*. He is the answer to our prayers, the promised Savior.

As we trek through Lent, we see the evil Jesus faced. In the garden, they captured him. They will mock and flog him, call for his death. And they will crucify him. Yet even then, he remains constant in evil. He goes to the cross to save you. He delivers you from your sins of jealousy, usurping God's role, from all your evil—deliberate and unintentional—on the cross. He is your Savior. He loves to the end. And he lives, even after death. He *is*. Death could not stop him from saving you.

So repent. Cast your evil on Jesus. He remains constant. He saves you from it. And put your trust in him. Only Jesus saves. He cares for you. Avoid the evil of the crowd that came to arrest Jesus. Don't bring evil against Jesus. And when you do, repent. Trust in him who cares for you. Avoid the evil of the disciples, turning in terror when faced with evil. Trust in Jesus. And when you fail, repent. Jesus gave his life for you. He *is* your Savior. He is.

The little girl flees in terror from a bug. Mom comes to save the day. But one day, that little girl will grow up. Some day she will be the mom, armed for battle against a bug she is afraid to fight. We change. Our reaction to evil changes, too. But Jesus never changes. He is. When evil comes your way, go to him. Jesus is still with you through trial and temptation, through hardship and suffering. He delivers you through it. You need not flee in terror or arm yourself for battle. Arm yourself with Jesus. He defeats evil for you. He is the Savior we need. Amen.