

February 25, 2024 2nd Sunday in Lent
St. John Lutheran Church “What’s My Line?”

What's My Line? was a panel game show that originally ran in the United States, between 1950 and 1967, on CBS. The game show started in black and white and later in color, with subsequent U.S. revivals. The game used celebrity panelists to question contestants in order to determine their occupation. Most of the contestants were from the general public, but there was one weekly celebrity "mystery guest" for which the panelists were blindfolded. It is on the list of longest-running U.S. primetime network television game-shows. The show was initially called *Occupation Unknown* before deciding on the name *What's My Line?* It was reprised in 2021 but did not catch on.

Now how and why did that show come up in my memory? As I studied our readings for today, the theme of who am I to the world around me comes up often. For example, Abram was 99 years old when he became Abraham...the father of many. And Sarai, his wife, became Sarah, princess, because from her would come King David and of course, our Savior Jesus.

And in the 1st verse, YHWH—Jehovah, God—tells us that He is God Almighty. Not just a god but THEE God over all the earth and all peoples. There was not another god on the earth then or even now, whose line was “I am El-Shaddai—the Almighty God! This is one of the 35 times in Scripture that God and Jesus use the I Am phrase to fully explain who and what they are...what their line is to those who listen and more importantly, what they are to those who believe.

Why is it so important to know who we are and what we do? Paul, in his letter to the Romans, states that we are justified by faith, that’s who Christians are to non-believers. That gift of God’s grace does not mean that our day of reckoning for our sins has been set aside but that, if we believe with our heart and soul, our sins are truly erased and we have peace in our status, in who we are and what we are to the world around us. Again, our line is that we are Christians.

Mark’s Gospel shows how people, even in those days, needed to understand—to know—who you were and what it is that you do, or perhaps why and what are you that I should think of you as being important to me. Jesus line is answered by Peter, “You are the Christ.”

Jesus used that phrase I am a number of times. In fact, we are studying these I am phrases beginning on Ash Wednesday and through the five Wednesday services. Listen to these words and let's see if you can guess His line from what He said: Jesus answered, "**I am**. And in the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the Powerful One, and coming on clouds in the sky." Mark 14:62

Then Jesus said, "**I am** He [the Messiah]—I, the one talking to you." John 4:26

"**I am** the bread that gives life." John 6:48

"**I am** the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life." John 8:12

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, **I am!**" John 8:58

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." John 10:11

Jesus said to her, "**I am** the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. John 11:25

Jesus answered, "**I am** the way, and the truth, and the life. The only way to the Father is through me." John 14:6

Believe me when I say that **I am** in the Father and the Father is in me. Or believe because of the miracles I have done." John 14:11

Well, did you get it? Did you recognize who Jesus is from all that He said... especially emphasizing it by saying I AM!

And as I shared Wednesday afternoon, whenever I read what Jehovah said, I am who I am, I remember someone who said "I yam what I yam". Yes, Popeye the sailor man!

Why is it so important for us...for those who get to know us...for those who just met us...for those who see us...why is it so important that we know who you are and what you do...and of course in St. Louis, what high school did you attend?

And we know that sometimes we don't have an answer to these questions, especially as we older, retire from work or all of the other changes that you and I have experienced in our lives that made us wonder who we would be next.

A 2019 interview focusing on the acclaimed British actress Emma Thompson's 60th birthday was titled "Emma Thompson Gets a Shock at 60." The article's author stated,

If anyone did not expect to have a midlife crisis, it was Emma Thompson. Being quite sure about things has been a central organizing principle of her life. It has informed most every character she has played ... All her life, she knew who she was. Now the roles she has embraced—mother, wife, performer—have her asking, “Am I any of those things? And if I’m not, who am I?”

Game of Thrones actress Sophie Turner, despite having a stellar career and a celebrity husband, also struggles with identity. At the age of 23 she confessed, “I don’t actually know who I am.”

And then there’s the fictional character played by the actor Matt Damon in the *Bourne* movie series. Jason Bourne is a riddle to himself, saying, “I know the best place to look for a gun in the cab of the gray truck outside, and at this altitude, I can run flat out for half a mile before my hands start shaking. How can I know that and not know who I am?” **Source:** *Brian Rosner, How to Find Yourself (Crossway, 2022), pp. 32-33*

Not know who I am...how many of you wake up and say who am I today? What is expected of me today by those who know me? What should I be doing, saying? What should I be listening to or watching? And then the day comes and you do things you know you needed to do, can do, and will do them again soon...yet, we still have an uneasy sense that today, is that all there is now at this time in my life?

It’s certainly not like growing up when you first thought you would be a cowboy or cowgirl, a fireman, a policeman...or you would do just what mom or dad did for a living including being a father, mother, housewife. To all the kids here today, you will be asked who you want to be, not who you are, because who you are is still being formed by you as you go to school, do the kid things you like to do and as you do, you start becoming the person you will be.

Jesus obviously knew who He was and who He had to be because He was and is God. Yet, we don’t know what He experienced during the years we don’t know about from his age 12 until He began his ministry and walk to the cross at age 30. We know he questioned God the Father when He asked him to take this task...death on the cross...from me. Yet, he persevered and did what He knew He been destined to do... experience pain and suffering on the cross and then die, giving up his humanity, descending into hell to let Satan know that He was going back to the garden around His tomb, in His human form—resurrected—which had never been done by humans before but also as God the Savior and God the Holy Spirit. He knew who He was... **“I am the**

resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die.” Even if we die, which we all will but as Christians, we know that our life will continue but with Jesus in heaven. And all because He listened to the pain and anguish of our lives and did the unthinkable for everyone.

In his autobiographical novel, *Everything Sad is Untrue*, Daniel Nayeri describes fleeing from Iran as a boy to escape persecution for his Christian faith. At one point, he asks the reader a question:

Would you rather have a God who listens or a god who speaks? Be careful of the answer ... There are gods all over the world who just want you to express yourself. At their worst, the people who want a god who listens are self-centered. They just want to live in the land of “do as you please.” And the ones who want a god who speaks are cruel. They just want law and justice to crush everything Love is empty without justice. Justice is cruel without love. Oh, and in case it wasn’t obvious the answer is both. God should be both.

Time and again, Jesus proves to be a God who listens. People seek him out by the thousands—but he never refuses a conversation. The only time Jesus ever silences anyone, saying, quite literally, “Be quiet!” it’s a demon (Luke 4:35). Other than that, he’s willing to give anyone the time of day. Blind Bartimaeus shouts to him on a crowded road. While others scold him to keep quiet, Jesus beckons him over and gives Bartimaeus the floor. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asks Whatever the blind man had to say, Jesus was all ears.

He’s not just a sounding board, though. Jesus has something to say. Words are the very tools Jesus uses to bring forth his plans When his friend is dead and lying in his tomb and Jesus says, “Lazarus, come out!” and the dead man comes out In other words, when Jesus speaks things happen.

Jesus is a God who listens and a God who speaks, a God who simply enjoys talking with people. He doesn’t mind being inconvenienced. He’s willing to seek out those who differ with him because he is a God who knows, a God to whom all hearts are open and no secrets hid.

The fact that Jesus is the kind of God who wants to be in a personal relationship with us is remarkable compared to the false gods who either speak from on high or listen to us with blank stares The Christian faith reveals that we have more than just

words, but the Word made flesh. *Source: Sam Bush, "A God Who Listens and a God Who Speaks," Mockingbird (3-23-23)*

The Word made flesh. "**I am** the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life."

As you leave today, be strong in knowing who you are – what your line is - by saying boldly, "I AM CHRIST'S! Every day in every way, no matter what high school I attended or where I grew up. I am who I am for Jesus! Amen.