

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

August 30, 2026
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 16:21-28
Jeremiah 15:15-21
Psalm 26:1-8
Romans 12:9-21

I am because we are.

This is one of my favorite quotes and it's one that I want us to carry with us throughout our time together today.

"I am because we are" was one of the clarion calls of Bishop Desmond Tutu. In his work for unity, peace, and reconciliation, he saw these words not as a feel-good statement but as central to the well-being of humanity.

At its heart is the African philosophy of "ubuntu". A philosophy that places our individual well-being in direct correlation to the wellbeing of the greater community. No one can be well unless all are well.

Kenyan literary scholar James Ogude describes ubuntu as the counterweight to the rise of individualism in society. Individualism that comes at the expense of wholeness for the greater good. Ubuntu is relational. It believes in common bonds. It works through division and seeks consensus. It upholds one's moral obligation to take care of others.

Ogude says that these ideals are meant to be practiced...every day. It comes through our sense of belonging, our sense of service, our sense of commitment to helping one another. It affirms life. All life.

And Bishop Tutu expanded this idea to include, not just the philosophy of ubuntu but the reason why it matters. Tutu affirmed that ubuntu is made possible because it is ultimately grounded in the knowledge that we are all made in the image of God. ¹

I am because we are.

I think today is an ubuntu kind of day. A day built upon shared community. A day built upon the love of God. A day built upon hope and joy and the belief that together we can grow into a deeply vibrant life-giving community of faith.

And so, let's take a look at Paul's letter in Romans this morning to enliven this teaching for us. Paul describes this community-oriented practice in this way...

¹ <https://chcinenetwork.org/ideas/i-am-because-you-are-an-interview-with-james-ogude>

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection. Extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

That’s ubuntu. That’s the heart of ***“I am because we are.”***

We are a product of our unity. We are a product of our love.

Another way we can think of it as our shared *ekklesia*, our God-called, God-empowered community of faith. This is a good Greek theological term for you all to know. As my friend John Van de Laar wrote one way to think about our *ekklesia*, our church community is this:

“It doesn’t take planning, or strategy, or money, or massive effort to participate in building Jesus’ ekklesia....we simply need to practice...creating goodness, beauty, and truth, fairness, generosity, and love in our relationships, while binding or resisting unfairness, selfishness, falsehood, destructiveness, and evil. Every small act of creation or kindness helps to manifest God’s reign in our corner of the world.”

Folks...this is our corner of the world. We are taking a beautiful step today in expanding our *ekklesia*, our body of Christ. Because we belong to one another. And together, we create moments where God’s kingdom breaks through and where love prevails.

The James River Area Ministry is built upon this vision. It’s the unity we build, the care we cultivate, the hope we embody to become a deeply loving, life-giving community of faith. It’s a journey we embark upon together because God is not held in these four walls. God is held in our hearts and in our hands. God is the extension of our love out into the world.

And that’s when we can say with confidence, ***I am because we are.***