



## On your marks

Many Christians are familiar with the 'I am' sayings of Jesus. The seven statements as they appear in John's Gospel help readers begin to understand just who Jesus is and how they can relate to him as his followers; but there are other important 'I am' statements that appear in the New Testament. Each of these also helps us put our trust in the resurrected Jesus. The following outline for an idea is part of a series of three to use with your children's group or in an all-age worship setting. Each focuses on one of these other 'I am' sayings and as such is perhaps particularly suited for sessions in the weeks following Easter.

## Get set

You will need: Some symbols for the seven 'I am' statements of Jesus as found in John's Gospel (see below); some people outlines or selected figures from a magazine

The Barnabas Children's Bible or a version of Matthew 28.

[Messy Church](#) has sessions linking to this outline.

## Go!

1. Play a game with your group of 20 questions, in which everyone has to guess who one person is by asking questions that can only be answered 'yes' or 'no'. Have ready a suggested list of famous names from history or celebrities from the present day.
2. Explore how many answers any individual in the group can give to the question, 'Who are you?' For example, they could say, 'I am...' followed by their name; or, 'I am...' followed by the words, 'a pupil at a *St John's* school' and so on; or, 'I am...' followed by a description of their relationship to others, such as, 'my brother's sister' and so on. Go around the circle of the group and see how many times they can keep coming up with a new description of themselves starting with, 'I am...'
3. It seems that when Jesus introduced himself to those who came to meet him, he did not give his name ('I am Jesus') or even, as some of his enemies referred to him, 'I am Jesus the Carpenter' or 'I am Jesus of Nazareth'. Instead, John records in his Gospel a series of statements in which he describes himself by saying that he is like certain things or other sorts of occupations.

Collect together the following symbols/pictures to illustrate the seven different 'I am' sayings from John's Gospel:

A sheep; a bread roll; a door from a doll's house or gate from a animal enclosure; some grapes; a tea light; a map; a picture of the empty tomb.

As you lay out the different visuals in front of the children ask them to remember in what ways Jesus



described himself:

**I am the bread of life.**

**I am the light of the world.**

**I am the good shepherd and I am the door of the sheep.**

**I am the way, the truth and the life.**

**I am the true vine.**

**I am the resurrection and the life.**

*Which of the description(s) do they like best?*

*Which description(s) that he gives puzzles them?*

*Which one do they think is the most important?*

*What other descriptions do they imagine Jesus might have used?*

4. After Jesus came back from the dead, he kept appearing to his friends over a 40-day period. Before he left them to go back to heaven, he promised that he would come again in a new form, the Holy Spirit, and he added one extra 'I am' statement, which became very precious to the Christians then and still is for his followers today.

**'I am with you always'** (Matthew 28:20, RSV).

This was Jesus' promise.

5. It must have seemed a strange 'I am' promise because Jesus was leaving them at that moment. Ask the group to imagine that they are his first disciples hearing this and wondering what he meant.

*How could Jesus' be with them for ever?*

*Where was he going?*

*How would Jesus come back to be with them always?*

*How were they going to remember that Jesus was still with them even though they could no longer see him?*

6. Ask the group for suggestions as to how they might remember that someone important to them was always going to be near them.



*Will they carry a photo? Will they keep his/her number easily available on their mobile? Would they carry a memento of the person? Might it be useful to have something in their pocket that they could secretly touch to help them not forget that person?*

What other things can the group suggest?

In fact, Jesus was going to keep the promise in a way that they could never have imagined. By his Holy Spirit he was going to come and live right inside their heart, making available a deep reassuring presence and inner sense of peace that he is with them... and us... whenever we turn to God.

As a group, create a montage of people outlines or selected images from magazines. Then decide together how you are going to add in the words 'I am always with you' discretely into each of the pictures/outlines, so that it is not glaringly obvious but it is nevertheless definitely part of each person portrayed.

7. In a prayer time together, use the different symbols from the session used to remember the 'I am' statements from John's Gospel. Invite the children in turn to pick up one when they want to pray for someone or something in which this particular symbol is a sign of the help that is needed.