

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 44:6–8

Sermon: “Build a god”

We’ve all heard of Build-A-Bear Workshops. Back in 1997, Maxine Clark opened the first Build-A-Bear at the Galleria Shopping Center. Today there are over four hundred workshops worldwide. First, you choose from over thirty models of bears. Next, you take your bear and stuff it, stitch it, fluff it, dress it, accessorize it, and name it. And the result is that you have your “berry own bear!” Finally, to prove it, you are given a customized birth certificate. This is your creation! Ta da!

Israel in Babylonian captivity wasn’t building bears; they were building gods. That’s why the Lord reminds them in our text from Isaiah that there is only one God, that the Lord is the King and Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, the First and the Last. But even today we are trying to make God in our image.

Just as Israel was slow to trust their God, we find ourselves in a similar plight. There is a part in all of us that delights in, shall we say, “creative craftsmanship.” We conceive it in our minds.

We build it with our hands. We choose how it looks. We personalize it with our preferences. It's just what we want in a god. It's a god who likes what I like, hates what I hate, and who shares my opinions. It's a god who increases my standard of living and happiness. This is a god who gives me what I want and stays out of my way the rest of the time. John Calvin states that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. Commenting on the First Commandment, Luther states in his Large Catechism, "Whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god" (LC I 3).

So, we all basically know that idols are anything or one that become more important to us than God, that distract us from our relationship with Him. But did you know that there are many words in the original hebrew that we translate to the word idol. In Isaiah 46:1 the word Isaiah uses for (*'atsabim*) idol means "pain."

That same word appears in Genesis 3:16 to describe Eve's pain at childbirth and again in Genesis 3:17 to denote Adam's pain at working the ground, now full of thorns and thistles. Idols bring the same misery, heartache, and pain experienced by our first parents.

Elsewhere, the word which we translate to idol (*epes*) (41:29) means "nothing." Isaiah maintains that those who follow idols believe in nothing of substance, care for nothing that matters, seek to know nothing of importance, find purpose in nothing that lasts, live for nothing that endures, and remain alive because when it comes to something to die for there is absolutely nothing!

In the verse immediately following our text (44:9), the prophet uses another word for idol (*tohu*). This Hebrew word first appears in Genesis 1:2 to describe the world before the Lord speaks creation into existence. Idols are embodiments of disorder and despair; they are formless and void. People addicted to them get lost in a sea of chaos, where God cannot be seen or heard.

Why do idols have such power? Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 10:20 that idol worship is worship “offered to demons.” Idols have such magnetizing power to imprison and rape us of our God-given humanity because Satan is the spiritual reality behind every addiction, every compulsion, every obsession. It is no wonder David writes in Psalm 16:4, *“The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply.”* So, what are some of the idols or gods you and I are building?

Who is God for you today? This question is different from the question “Who is God?” As J. I. Packer pointed out to us years ago, there is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Knowing about God is merely a matter of the head. It is knowing the right things to say about God. Knowing God is a matter of the heart. It is confessing him not only with the head but also with our body and life. It is fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. We hear in our text for this Sunday how God calls Israel back, away from its idols and false dreams, to a true knowledge of himself.

In this word to Israel, God calls us, too, away from the idols of our hearts, to the true knowledge of him. And he does it by speaking to us very directly, personally inviting us really to know him to know his power, to know how very different he is from all those idols of ours, but also to know him intimately, personally, as Savior, the way we can only know him in Jesus Christ, our Lord. He says to us in our text, I AM the One to know. “I AM”

Through the prophet, God speaks to his people using his covenant name, Yahweh, “the Lord.” This brings to mind the Lord speaking to Moses from the burning bush. When Moses asks for God’s name God tells Moses his name is I AM.

In our text, Yahweh, “the Lord,” I AM, begins by identifying himself with three powerful titles. I am the Lord, Yahweh, as King. Judah’s kings often led them astray (Uzziah usurping priestly authority, for example), and Israel’s kings were worse. Our leaders may also set less-than-godly direction. But I AM always rules. I AM the Lord, Yahweh, and Redeemer. Isaiah foresaw Judah being carried off to exile in Babylon.

Our sins deserve no better, in fact, eternal separation from God. But I AM is committed to delivering us. I AM the Lord, Yahweh, as Commander. Deliverance from Babylon or hell requires nothing less than the might of I AM of the heavenly hosts.

I AM *the one* (vs 6–7). Yahweh, I AM, is the one and only God: “I AM the first and I AM the last; besides me there is no god.” Yahweh, I AM, is Creator; nothing was before him, and Israel has nothing he has not given to them. He is the final authority as well; Israel’s future as well as ours is completely in his hands. Yahweh our Redeemer.

Jesus Christ is I AM himself, and he, too, is the Alpha and Omega. All we have and the eternity we will have is from him. ***“Who is like me? Let him proclaim it”*** (v 7). Israel often tried to hedge its bets by worshiping the Lord and the false gods of the Baals, the Canaanite gods or the gods of even defeated enemies like Syria. I AM challenges those gods! Put up or shut up!

Here we consider not only the idols to which Israel was attracted but also the idols of our time, the idols that remain in our own hearts. The Lord is in a battle, in contention with these idols for us. He is the only true GOD! Only in Him do we have salvation.

He tells us I AM the one *to know* (v 8). We cannot on our own know the One true God. That is why he sent his son into this world. So we can know Him and know His graciousness, mercy and love. So that we can know Him as our loving God. Luther struggled with this concept of God. But I AM comes to us and speaks to us because he wants an exclusive relationship with us. He wants us to know him! He invites us not to be afraid. He is the Rock, our Rock, strong, unassailable, by any enemy or any god.

This we know about God because he has revealed himself to us in Jesus. Jesus Christ the great I AM. In Christ we see that I AM wants to be with us, to be known by us, becoming one of us by taking on our own flesh, laying down his life, allowing those who could otherwise have no

power over him t nail Him to the cross in our place so that he could be with us and we can be with him forever.

This, Christ Jesus, is what we know about I AM and how we know I AM, the Lord, Yahweh. And to this, to him, we are witnesses.

Do not be afraid! As Christians, we are delivered from our past, our future is secure. We may live for God in the present. He is the one we know as our Rock.

Amen