



WEEKLY STUDY August 27-September 2, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Be Well – Week 4

Our sermon series for August is: Be Well. A series on physical, spiritual, mental and communal wellness. We are constantly inundated with cultural messages about wellness, but what does Scripture have to say? In this four week August series, we will explore stories in the book of Luke that help us see how Jesus cared for people in their full humanity – mind, body, and spirit. Join us as we seek to take care of ourselves and thus, our communities, so that we can all be well.

Our scripture this week is:

“Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He said to them, ‘Take nothing for your journey; no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.” **Luke 9:1-6**

- 1)** We are now in Week 4 of our “Be Well” theme. Week one we focused on Physical Wellness. Pastor Sam reminded us that bodies matter to God. Week two we looked at Spiritual wellness. Sam reminded here that there is a connection between faith and being well. In Week 3 we focused on Mental Wellness. The state of our mind contributes to our wellness. Sam stated that for people of faith, this is keeping God’s word and God’s promises foremost in our mind. This week we focused on how our individual wellness affects our communities – positively or negatively. At the beginning of the sermon, Sam asked us these two questions:

Question: How do we have wellness in our church community? How do we as a church contribute to the wellness of the communities outside our doors?

- 2) Re-read this Sunday's scripture. Pastor Sam said this passage was the first of 4 times where Jesus – after gathering with his disciples – sends them out into the world. Luke 9 sends them out to preach and heal (there is a necessary connection to the two). Luke 10 sends them out in pairs (illustrating strength in numbers). Luke 22 is the Last Supper when Jesus prepares the disciples for going out after his death with the power of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24, the resurrected Jesus commissions the disciples as witnesses to be sent with the Holy Spirit. In congregations where acolytes are used, Sunday after Sunday we see this gathering in Jesus name and scattering in Jesus name enacted. The light (representing Jesus as the light of the world) comes into our sanctuary to all of us gathered as a people of God. At the end of the service the light is carried out representing the fact that we are all commissioned as witnesses to go out into the world, spreading God's light and love to all. Recalling also that – as people of faith, our homes are an extension of the worshipping community – when we leave our homes each day, we take the light of Jesus into the world to share through our words and actions. When we return to our homes, the actions we take there help us renew our spirits, and rekindle the light of Jesus in ourselves so we are renewed for returning to the world and our communities with light the next day.

Question: In what ways do you renew your faith daily in your home? In what ways do you intentionally engage with others in the world to be witnesses to God's love and care?

- 3) In the sermon on Sunday, Pastor Sam asked about a New York Times article written by Surgeon General Vivek Murthy about the loneliness epidemic in America. The article stated that 1 out of 2 Americans are experiencing measurable levels of loneliness. Just think about the world starting in 2020 regarding one of the causes of loveless. From a world where we spent a chunk of time in community, we went to a world where we spent a chunk of time in isolation. No social gatherings. No dinners in restaurants. No trips. No family celebrations together. Just like any habit we do for awhile, the habit of isolation is hard to break. And at the same time we are living at a time when particular populations are deliberately isolated. Loneliness and isolation hurt whole communities. And if the church is one that contributes through words and action to people feeling isolated, marginalized, unwelcome, then it contributes to the illnesses of our society instead of being the place of God's love and care. In the Surgeon General's report, he outlined steps three steps to rebuild community. 1) Take steps in our personal lives to rebuild our connection to one another. A daily act of reaching out to another in person, by mail, by phone helps build connections. 2) Renegotiate our relationship with technology – setting aside our devices to be more present with one another. 3) Strengthen community programs that bring people together.

Question: Which of these strategies do you feel you need to do to help decrease loneliness and isolation. Which ones do you feel the church needs to do and how?

- 4) So many in the Belle Meade UMC church community were saddened by the death this past week of Betty Lassing. At age 92, she was still one of the most active members in our congregation. Her grandchildren spoke about the way she would show up for them.

They spoke about family dinners where she paid attention to their likes and dislikes preparing food she knew they would love. I heard a person in our congregation speak of how when we have had community meals, while many contributed, came, and enjoyed the fellowship, Betty took that next step and rolled up her sleeves and washed the dishes afterward. When I was on congregational care and we talked about who we had visited, Betty would have visited 5 people for every 1 person the rest of us had visited. When there was a worship service, a class, a prayer vigil, Betty was there. She kept her mind and her body busy in service, in actions of love, in all the wellness habits we've talked about in these past weeks. And Pastor Sam talked about the number of people who expressed the wish that they could be like Betty. In fact, Sam told us Rev. Wells, in his homily at Betty's service last Thursday brought up this very point. How can we be like Betty? We show up like she did – you our church – and create a community where we treat one another with respect and dignity, even when we disagree. We speak with kindness. We listen. We seek to understand. We nurture a community where wellness is experienced, celebrated, and encouraged.

Question: In what ways do you seek to be like Betty. Who are the saints in your life who inspire you to live facing outward, welcoming all, providing love and acceptance?

Prayer: (The prayer is an adaptation of the lyrics of the song "Welcome" written by Laurie Zelmer and Mark A. Miller)

Gracious God. Once again we find ourselves reminded of your expansive love. As we consider our individual wellness and the wellness of our faith community we pray for your guidance to help us offer inclusion, hope, love, peace. Help us walk together to build a world where love can grow and hope can enter in. Help us be the hands of healing and the planters of the seeds of peace. Guide as we talk together, as we commune at the table together, as we work together extending the table to those who are lonely and yearning for a community where their gifts and graces are embraced and included. Guide us as we dream together of the day when earth and heaven are one, where the world is your city built of love and light, where our mourning turns to dancing, and every creature lifts its voice. Help us to embody the knowledge that we are worthy and welcome. And keep us ever mindful that this knowledge is not for us alone, but for all of your creation. All are worthy. All are welcome. All are embraced. Praying, ever mindful of the witness of your son Jesus. Amen

Weekly Challenges: In addition to following the suggestions on the Be Wellness calendar for this week, light a candle daily. Do this for a time of meditation and centering. Sit with the candle light and visualize God's love surrounding you and strengthening you and renewing your faith. Say a prayer. At the end of the time, remember to extinguish the candle, but carry within you the power of the light.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)