



WEEKLY STUDY May 7-May 13, 2023

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

As we continue in the liturgical season of Easter, we begin a new sermon series for May called "God of the **MOVEMENT**." The play on words is intentional. We believe in a God of movement – calling us forth, sending us out; the ebb and flow of discipleship. And we believe in a God of the moment. We believe in a God who speaks to us here and now, all day long, through other people, Scripture, nature, signs and wonders – in moments both large and small.

Our scripture is: Matthew 28:16-20

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" (NRSVue)

- 1) While we continue in the season of Easter which ends with Pentecost Sunday on May 28), we move into a new theme for our May worship: God of the **MOVEMENT**. Pastor Sam explained our theme this way. God is on the move. We worship a creative God and creation is always changing, always moving, always going forward. And at the same time, God is with us in this moment – speaking to us, leading us. In listening to Sam I was struck about how often we might be seduced to want to "go back" to what might be construed as an easier time, or construed as a more "holy" time. But the words movement and moment propel us forward. We are in this moment to ask "what is the movement of God" (remembering God's purpose is to always move us forward to living more into God's kingdom.)

Question: Take a moment to ponder what it means to believe God is on the move and to believe God is speaking to us in this particular moment? How would you describe both of these things?

- 2) Our scripture read on Sunday was from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue). It has one change from the NRSV and the Common English Bible (and

others as well). NRSVue says, “When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted.” Other translations read, “When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted.” This puzzled me so I had to try to figure out why the change. In doing more reading, the Greek does not contain the word “some.” NRSVue is a newer translation – published in 2022. Some translators insert the word “some” following prior translations. NRSVue chose not to. I found it encouraging because I know there are times when I’m both a believer and a doubter. Whether believers or doubters (or sometimes believers and sometimes doubters), all are given what we call “the Great Commission” in this scripture with the promise that Jesus is with us always.

Question: Are there times when you find yourself to be a believer and sometimes to be a doubter? Or are there times when you feel both belief and doubt at the same time? What does this say to you about God’s relationship to us?

- 3) Through the sermon, Pastor Sam invited us to consider the transfer of authority from Jesus to the disciples. She reminded us that Jesus’ mission is to be continued by each of us. She stated, “We aren’t here only to talk about Jesus. We go. We make. We move.” And as always we are reminded this isn’t a one day of the week or a one season of the year. In thinking about my own life, and particularly about the words from the church, I do think there were periods where it seemed as if the church was simply saying, “listen to our words.” But the actions of judgment, exclusion, name-calling and blaming have stood in the way of reaching others. Pastor Sam is reminding us that even if we speak of what Jesus taught, if our actions don’t match, then why should others believe?

Question: Thinking about Jesus’ commission to the disciples (and to us), where do you see yourself, and our congregation living in a way where the teachings of Jesus are seen and believed through our actions? Where do we need to keep working to make it so?

- 4) This Sunday, we celebrated the high school graduates in our congregation. We blessed them and sent them forth to continue to be children of God. Pastor Sam reminded the graduates that as they move forward in life, their parents are saying to them, “I am with you always.” Our church is saying to them, “I am with you always.” And in today’s scripture, Jesus is say to us, as he said to the disciples gathered with him, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Question: What helps you hold on to the knowledge that Jesus is with us always? Who, like the graduates, might you thank today who has helped you grasp the knowledge that God is with us in the movement and in the moment?

Prayer: (Since this is the season of graduations, and we celebrated our high school graduates on Sunday, use this week this prayer from The United Methodist Book of Worship for graduates. You may pray simply using “graduates” or pray my name those who are close to you and who are graduating at this time.)

“God of truth and knowledge, by your wisdom we are taught the way and the truth.
Bless those graduating as they now finish their course of study.

We thank you for those who taught and worked beside them, and all who supported them along the way.

Walk with these graduates as they move forward in life.

Take away their anxiety and confusion of purpose.

Strengthen their many talents and skills, instill in them a confidence in the future you plan, where energies may be gathered up and used for the good of all people; for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen”

(written by Andy Langford; #536, The United Methodist Book of Worship)

Weekly Challenge: In the Christian Church, we celebrate the season of Easter until Pentecost Sunday. This year, make Easter more than a day. Start each day by saying “Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed” to yourself or to others. Daily look for God in the moment, being open to where the movement of God may lead you.

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