



WEEKLY STUDY May 21-May 27, 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: Acts 1:1-11

"In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, 'Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John was baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?' He replied, 'The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. 'Men of Galilee', they said, 'why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!'" (NLT)

- 1) While we continue in the season of Easter (which ends with Pentecost Sunday on May 28), we continue our theme for our May worship: God of the **MOVEMENT**. Rachael began the sermon on Sunday reminding us of attributes of God. Among the traits she listed, this one stood out to me: "Our God is active, not some stiff statue in the sky, not some immovable figure, not an antiquated figure. Our God is present, always." In many

ways this reminded me of some of the Psalms – praising God and listing all that God is, has done, and is doing.

Question: What are the attributes you would list for God? What are the attributes you would reject that others might say God is. What is your Psalm of praise?

- 2) The scripture we used on Sunday was most likely the one being heard and preached on in many Christian Churches. The Sunday before Pentecost is referred to as Ascension Sunday and this passage from Acts reminds us that even as Jesus was preparing to leave, the disciples still were looking for a different kind of Messiah. Rachael pointed this out in her sermon saying, “Bless them, but they were still a little misguided.” (To be truly Southern, we would say, “Bless their hearts!”) It made me ponder the fact that whenever we are presented with something that doesn’t meet our expectations of what should be it takes numerous repetitions before the message gets through. We cling to our preconceptions and are slow to embrace something new. This is particularly true related to religious beliefs. So we are often standing there with the disciples, still pushing toward the old vision of a Messiah rather than the reality of Jesus.

Question: Where in your faith journey do you feel you have – or are still – clung to beliefs that are counter to what God is revealing now?

- 3) Last week in her sermon, Pastor Sam introduced (or re-introduced) us to what we call The Wesley Quadrilateral. It’s a way of thinking theologically, taking into account scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Sam pushed us on using our minds – our reason when we think about God, and what actions we are called to in living our faith. Rachael continued our consideration of the quadrilateral, inviting us to look this week at experience. When we consider “experience” we take time to think about our own experiences and what that says to us about God. And, we are to think too about our corporate experiences – those we’ve had as part of this worshipping community – and what they says to us about faith as well. For many, some of the most formative experiences to faith have occurred when we have been involved in mission and outreach. Rachael told of reading this definition of witness: a witness sees something, says something, and suffers something.

Question: What are some of your faith-forming experiences – both individually and as part of a group? What was your witness in those experiences?

- 4) This Sunday, in the 10:30 worship we celebrated Confirmation Sunday. Five of our youth were confirmed in faith. They, along with three adults, joined Belle Meade UMC. And we as a congregation we once more joined them in affirming our vow to support the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. In Confirmation we talk with the youth how our prayers, presence, gifts, and service BECOME our witness. This is what people see and hear from us. And through those actions, we witness individually and as a faith community to love of God and love of neighbor.

Question: Consider these vows: prayers, presence, gifts, service. In what ways are you bearing witness through each of these vows?

Prayer: (One of the most beautiful prayers hymns is, "Open My Eyes", text and music by Clara H. Scott. It's #454 in The United Methodist Hymnal. I am using selected lyrics for this prayer):
Gracious God, Sometimes I feel I do not know how to witness to your amazing love. I feel I do not know how to be brave in a witness to your truths. I join voice with others who have been touched by the words written by Clara H. Scott:

***"Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth thou hast for me
Open my ears that I may hear
Voices of truth thou sendest clear
Open my mouth and let me bear
Tidings of mercy everywhere
Open my heart and let me prepare
Love with thy children thus to share"
Open me to seeing truth , hearing truth, speaking mercy, and sharing love. Amen.***

Weekly Challenge: Daily look for God's movement in life around you and ask God to lead you in this moment for ways to join God's movement.

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