



WEEKLY STUDY June 11 -June 17, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's worship.) We continue the theme into June: "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 4:13-20

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. They said, 'What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.' So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" (NRSV)

- 1) Our Sunday scripture showed us one piece of the story taking place with Peter and John. Pastor Sam reminded us what happened just before this reading. Peter and John encountered a man in need of healing asking for money. She told us this is an act of charity (or in John Wesley's terms – mercy). Peter and John had no money to offer but they offered instead physical healing. Pastor Sam reminded us that this was an act of justice. This reminded me that as those who are part of the Methodist movement begun by John and Charles Wesley, we are encouraged to practice what John Wesley called "means of grace"(also referred to as spiritual disciplines) all through our life. Wesley divided these means of grace into two categories. One category is called "piety" where we nurture our relationship with God, both alone and with a group of believers. This includes scripture, prayer, the Lord's supper. The other category is called "mercy and justice." These include exactly what was illustrated by Peter and John. Mercy (charity) is the giving of our means or our talents to help those with immediate needs. Justice is

acting so that there is a bigger change making quality of life, good will, inclusion available to all.

Question: In a given week, how do you practice the means of grace? What actions of piety do you take? What actions of mercy and justice do you embrace? What do you feel you need to start or continue these means of grace?

- 2) As Pastor Gracie talked with the children on Sunday, she talked about what we mean by church. She helped the children and the congregation sing a song in our hymnal written by Richard K. Avery and Donald S. Marsh. I love this hymn. I was lucky to be a student at Scarritt College when Avery & Marsh did a workshop for us and taught us this song. The chorus reminds us that the people are the church. And we sang that chorus together on Sunday. I love all the verses, but the following two verses are always good reminders to me of what the church is to be about:

"We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces, all colors and all ages, too, from all times and places"

"Sometimes the church is marching, sometimes it's bravely burning, sometimes it's riding, sometimes hiding, always it's learning."

Question: Consider these two verses. What do you think we at Belle Meade UMC are practicing that reflects in these two verses? What would you want to see us doing more of?

- 3) In the sermon Pastor Sam talked about a book she is currently reading: *"Listening for the Soul"* by Jean Stairs. The author talks of the importance of embracing the soul's rhythm of death and resurrection. She refers to this as a lifelong spiritual rhythm. Death (or some might say change) is constantly happening. And new birth is always following these little and big deaths. She said, "In the context of our story today, we might say that embracing the soul's rhythm of death and resurrection allows us to stand, to walk and jump and leap and praise God for God's healing hand."

Question: What's your reflection on the need to embrace the soul's rhythm of death and resurrection?

- 4) Pastor Sam actually created a bridge for us in Sunday's service from what we've been studying for the past few weeks – the stories of the early church – to what we will be experiencing the next two weeks – the stories told by two of our church members about their faith and witness. She ended the sermon saying: "May we be bold and courageous enough to tell our stories believing that the message of Jesus cannot be stopped." This reminded me of Psalm 78: 4 "....we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."

Question: What stories of the glorious deeds of God will you tell to one another?

Prayer (This week's prayer is one for the month of June found on page 159 in the book *"Openings"* by Rev. Larry J. Peacock.)

"Summer God, you dance in on golden sunbeams.

Like soil that must be plowed or turned over,

**So must I prepare to receive your warmth and the planting of your message in my heart.
Open me to receiving the seed of hope and the promise of growth.
Plant your permit deep within me and make my life fruitful and bountiful. Amen”**

Weekly Challenge: Pastor Sam told of doing this activity. It’s a good one for all of us. Find a large enough rock to write on. On one side, write down something that you hope. On the other side write down something you believe that never wavers, no matter what you face. Place this in your space you use for prayer and meditation. Reflect on both your hop and your belief each day.

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