



WEEKLY STUDY March 3-9, 2024

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

Our sermon series for Lent is: The Way, The Truth, The Life. The I Am Statements of Jesus. Lent is a sacred season in the church when we walk closely with Jesus through his ministry, death, and resurrection. Over the next 40 days, we will discover who God is through the I AM statements of Jesus found in the book of John. These statements reveal the heart and character of God and invite us into God's love and care.

Two scripture passages were read in worship this Sunday:

"I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." **John 6:48-51**

- 1) Lent is the time of year when we intentionally slow down, commit ourselves to practices that nurture our faith, and seek God. Through scripture, liturgy, song, and prayer we seek to walk closely with Jesus through his ministry, death and resurrection. With this year's theme for Lent we are looking deeply at these questions: Who is God? Week One we examined the story of what God meant when Moses for God's name and God said, "I AM who I Am." Pastor Sam reminded us that through this statement God was reminding Moses (who then would remind the people), "I am who I have always been and I'm not going to change." God is faithful to the promises God has made. God makes a way when we see no way. Last week Sam told us we now look at the I am sayings of Jesus, knowing that Jesus is going to build on and expand for us images of God. We started with, 'I AM the light of the world.' In this statement Sam said we are reminded that God is who helps us illumine our sin, not to shame us but to help find transformation. This week we have this statement: I AM the bread of life.

Question: When you hear the phrase from Jesus, "I AM the bread of life?", what images appear to you. What attributes do you see in Jesus (and thus in God) through the use of this image?

- 2) Throughout the Bible we are assured that God is a God concerned with all people physically having enough to eat. Pastor Sam on Sunday pushed us to consider what it

means to have enough “food” for our spiritual lives. She introduced us to the Hunger Scale (which was introduced to her and others in the class last fall led by Kara Miller.) She then used that scale to ask us to reflect on our own spiritual hunger. Sam asked us to consider the first position on the scale as “Spiritually Empty” where our faith may feel shallow and we have a hunger for a spiritual awakening. She then moved to midway up the scale to ask if we felt “Spiritually Sound” where we do have regular practices for spiritual growth and we feel sustained by faith. Sam then moved to the top of the scale where we would be at a “Spiritual High.” Our faith feels deep and it overflows into service to others.

Question: Consider the scale of a 1 being low and a 10 being overflowing. Where might you place yourself on the scale? Are you in need of spiritual practices? Do you have those that are helping you in your growth? Are you at a point where you feel filled to overflowing and eager for service? What practices might you add to your life?

- 3) Pastor Sam also asked us to consider if we were “consuming” or filling our time with practices that kept us from having time to feed our spiritual needs. She talked about how her daughter Madeline was using a phone to play with while Sam was trying to keep her attention on their bedtime routine. Sam illustrated the way Madeline was holding the phone close to her own face and blocking out Sam with it. And Sam said this made her wonder if Madeline has seen Sam doing the same when an email or a text catches her attention. She reflected on how her phone while not bad in itself might be dominating her life to the detriment of other activities that would fill her spiritually. And this led Sam to the next question for us to consider.

Question: What are you consuming that you need to stop or limit in order to have time to fill yourself spiritually?

- 4) Every week in the 8:30 service, Holy Communion is served. At the 10:30 service, Holy Communion is offered only on the first Sunday of each month. It seemed particularly fitting that this past Sunday when we were considering the statement, I AM the Bread of Life” that we had communion at both services. Pastor Sam talked about the ordinary elements of life that Jesus has used in our first two “I AM” statements – light last week; bread this week. Both are reminders that God is in the ordinary, the necessary, elements of daily life. This brings us around to something Sam has said to us numerous times. Sometimes we look over the ordinary in seeing God because we are looking only for the spectacular.

Question: In what ordinary, necessary things of life have you stopped and seen the presence of God?

Prayer: (Our prayer is an adaptation of the prayer we prayed together on Sunday as part of Holy Communion)

“Almighty God, you have called us to one table, but we have sought to create one of our own making where we seek too often to exclude parts of your creation. You have promised us the abundance of all creation, but our greed and our envy have created a world where many go without. You have promised us the bread of life but in our pride and in our arrogance, the

world goes hungry. You have promised us the waters of peace and justice, but in our violence and in our discord the world goes thirsty. And now we are famished. Have mercy on us. Forgive us. Let the message, "This is YOUR table" echo in our minds. Transform us at your table and for your table. Remind us that your table is one that is always widening, always welcoming one more, always supplying enough. Feed us once more and send us from your table as servants of your righteousness, by the power of your Son. Amen."

Weekly Challenge: In this third week of Lent we remember it is a time to deepen our faith; to spend time listening for God's guidance; to give witness to God through our actions and practices. What daily practices are helping you deepen your faith this week. What practices do you need to limit or stop in order for faith building to be done? What spiritual bread will you consume to fuel the growth of your spiritual life?

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