



### **WEEKLY STUDY March 10-16, 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.**

#### **Our Scripture this week is:**

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” **John 10:14-18**

- 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 asked 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. In week two 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. Last week we had this statement: I AM the bread of life. We were reminded that we hunger both for the bread we eat that physically feeds us and for the bread God provides that spiritually feeds us. This week we explore what Jesus means when he says, "I AM the Good Shepherd."

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

- 2) In this week's sermon, Pastor Sam lifted up three attributes of what Jesus meant when he said "I AM the good shepherd. We will look at each of these. The first she talked about was, "A Good Shepherd seeks out the lost." She stated that through this image we know that God comes after us. God pursues us. God wants us in the fold. And Sam told us about pictures posted on social media by one of the families who attended sensory Easter. They posted a photo of their young son crouched down on the floor with the Easter bunny facing crouched down as well facing their son. The caption read "when the Easter Bunny meets you where you are." Sam reminded us that God meet us where we are. And the God who meets us where we are is loving, compassionate, welcoming. God wants to lead us to the green pastures, the abundant life.

**Question: Has this image of God been one you've held all your life or is this a new interpretation for you? In what ways do you see God as welcoming not just to you but to all people and all creation?**

- 3) The second image Pastor Sam brought to us was, "A Good Shepherd knows their sheep." She reminded us that part of the human condition is a desire to be deeply known. Sam explained that in the Book of John "knowledge" wasn't a cognitive category ,but one of relationship. God knows us through a relationship with God. This comes only by being vulnerable with one another and allowing ourselves to be seen as we are. That's a struggle many of us have – dropping pretense; stepping out of fear; claiming who we are. Sam reminded us, as she was reminded often by her friend, Mary Margaret, "Jesus knows our name." Being known by name is a deep knowing so we don't have to pretend with God.

**Question: Is the image of the good shepherd knowing your name – knowing you – important to you? Why or why not?**

- 4) The third image Pastor Sam shared with us was "A Good Shepherd tends their sheep." As a caregiver, my days are filled with caring for another in ways both large and small. It's exhausting. So for me, this was probably both the most comforting and the hardest image for me to embrace. While I believe this, it's hard to set aside my own caregiving role and sink into God's loving arms to be cared for myself. Sam's illustration was one of a time when she was lonely, and tired. She went into a quiet space at a conference she was attending and lay down on the floor under an image of Jesus holding a lamb. She then imagined herself as that lamb, being held by Jesus and allowed Jesus to comfort her. Sam reminded us that we may have hardwired into our image of God things we've been taught that are not who God is. We have been taught to think of God as separated from us – on a throne; high up in heaven; punishing. She said, "God is tender and loving. God wants to hold and to heal you." God tends to us as a good shepherd tends to the sheep.

**Question: What might you need to do to claim the truth that God is like a good shepherd holding you, carrying you, comforting you?**

**Prayer:** (This week for our prayer, we have Psalm 23. Pray this slowly and let the words settle into your spirit as a prayer of affirmation, comfort, praise, and trust)

“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want  
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside still waters;  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
For his name’s sake  
Even though I walk through darkest valley  
I will fear no evil;  
For you are with me;  
Your rod and your staff –  
They comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
In the presence of my enemies  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life,  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
My whole life long.

**Weekly Challenge: In this fourth 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? Write this down and place it where you will see it daily: “God calls me by name. God meets me where I am. God cares for me.”**

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