



WEEKLY STUDY March 24-30, 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:

"When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'" John 11:17-27

"Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' The dead man came out, with his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' John 11:38-44

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'

His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!’” John 12:12-19

- 1) Holy Week – we, along with the Christian Church all around the world – observe in this one week: 1) Palm (also called Passion) Sunday where we recall Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. 2) Maundy Thursday (named from the Latin “Mandatum” meaning commandment and recalling Jesus saying, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you are to love one another as I have loved you.” We gather to recall the Last Supper and participate in the washing of one another’s feet reminding us of Jesus’ doing so for the disciples. 3) Good Friday where we recall Jesus’ crucifixion by hearing his last words from the cross. We arrive at Easter Sunday filled with remembering – knowing we don’t celebrate resurrection without all that has happened prior to Easter Sunday. This year in our community, in remembrance of the 2023 shootings at the Covenant school, we also have a day of prayer and of linked hands on Wednesday.

Question: For you, what are the observances of Holy Week that mean the most? Why is this so?

- 2) We conclude our consideration of the I am statements of Jesus with this week’s worship. Week One we examined the story of what God meant when Moses asked God 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. 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. Our first was, ‘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. Week three 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. Week four we explored what Jesus means with “I AM the Good Shepherd.” Through this image we see God as tender and loving – holding and healing us. Week five our focus was on “I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life.” In considering this, we explored the God who offers direction and discernment and a third way to live in our cultural extremes and polarities. This week, as we approach Easter we consider Jesus’ statement, “I AM the resurrection and the life.” In John 17-27 we have the account of Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead. Pastor Sam said Jesus’ I AM statement here shifts an “end of time” resurrection to a “here and now” resurrection. It moves us from a “By and by in the sky” faith to a day-by-day resurrection and life with God faith.

Question: Have you had resurrection moments in your life – when you experienced God-with-you and a renewal of the joy of life?

3) Our second passage of scripture on Sunday was the familiar passage we read every year on Palm Sunday – the triumphal entry of Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Pastor Sam, in leading us through this scripture asked us to see in our mind the playing out of two kingdoms at work through this event. The one is an empire revealing its might and moving forward where the death of Jesus is the outcome – keeping people in line and under control. The other is the kingdom of God occurring through the miracles of Jesus, a meal with friends, eating, laughing, serving. Sam reminded us that this is still true in our world. There are the plots and the oppression and the ego and the power. And at the same time there is goodness, and joy, and new life, and celebration.

Question: In what ways do you see two kingdoms in our daily lives? What encourages you individually and us as a community of faith to capture the honesty, beauty and hopefulness of resurrection life?

4) Our third passage of scripture (John 12: 12-19) is a reminder that there were those who saw, believed, and continued to testify about Jesus. And at the same time, others became more determined to stop Jesus' message. Pastor Sam reminded us that following Jesus can be hard because we are called upon to have a role in how we speak and how we act. She said – like those who stepped forward to free Lazarus' bonds of death – we step forward to unbind people entangled in cycles of poverty and violence, wrapped and confined by forces of death and destruction. Because we have experienced and are witnesses to the empathy and compassion of Jesus, we remember it is not for us alone but to be extended to all. And so we step forward as well.

Question: Consider what you may be called to do on behalf of others who wrapped in the bonds of hunger, abuse, exclusion, death.

Prayer:

Loving God, like Lazarus there are times in our life when we feel wrapped in the throes of death and unable to unbind ourselves. We give thanks for those who step forward and help us shed those things that bind us and blind us from life. There are times when we are the ones who see others caught in the bindings of violence, abuse, exclusion, hopelessness. Remind us of your enduring love and strengthen us in extending hope and life to others. Help us reject the motion picture of life that edits out goodness. Help us join hands together to say no to that which kills human spirit and drains away joy of living. Fill us with the images we've considered over these past few weeks: light to the world; bread of life; good shepherd, the way, the truth, the resurrection, the life. With thanksgiving for Jesus your Son and affirming as Martha did that Jesus is the messiah, we pray this day. Amen

Weekly Challenge: This week, whether you can attend services for Maundy Thursday in remembrance of Jesus' last supper and/or Good Friday in remembrance of Jesus' final words from the cross, find time to read the accounts of both events from the gospel of your choice.

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