



## WEEKLY STUDY August 6-12, 2023

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

### Be Well – Week 1

**Our sermon series for August is: Be Well. A series on physical, spiritual, mental and communal wellness. We are constantly inundated with cultural messages about wellness, but what does Scripture have to say? In this four week August series, we will explore stories in the book of Luke that help us see how Jesus cared for people in their full humanity – mind, body, and spirit. Join us as we seek to take care of ourselves and thus, our communities, so that we can all be well.**

#### Our scripture this week is:

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ Jesus answered him, ‘it is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” **Luke 4:1-4**

- 1) Sometimes I find it difficult to switch from one sermon series that I've really enjoyed to a new one. The same thing happens to me if I've read a book that is really good, then am reluctant to start a new one worrying that it won't be as good. I find it helpful to think about all I learned, questioned or was touched by in the previous series before putting it aside. And then turning to consider what the new series will offer. In our August study, we will be reading from the Gospel of Luke to see how Jesus cares for people in their full humanity – mind, body, and spirit – as we explore physical, spiritual, mental, and communal wellness.

**Question: What will you remember or try to continue doing from our study on the beatitudes? What excites you about our upcoming study on wellness?**

- 2) Pastor Gracie helped all of us through her children's time to turn our thoughts toward physical wellness. In Children's time she reminded us that Jesus considered people's bodies and fed them and healed them. She reminded us that God cares about our

bodies. God created us and said it is very good. Loving our own bodies is not easy – particularly since culturally we are taught that to have a body that we love it needs to be thin or pretty or handsome or athletic. Listening to NPR this past week, there was an interview with an author who talked about how she was trying to change the way she talked to her daughters about their bodies. She mentioned taking them for school clothes and noticing that when they would try on something she was prone to say, “Don’t you look pretty?” Now there is nothing wrong with being pretty, but she said with those words she was subconsciously steering them into thinking about that instead of the health of their bodies. She said she now tried to say, “Tell me how that fabric feels against your skin.” Or “Can you move easily in that article of clothing?” She felt that even these small efforts would help her daughters care about their body in a healthier way.

**Question: What do you see in our culture that makes it hard for us to accept our bodies? What stands in the way of us honoring God by seeing that our bodies are part of God’s good creation?**

- 3) I confess, I was surprised by Sunday’s scripture when I first read it. It seemed to me to be an odd one for our theme. To be honest, when I think of physical wellness, my mind always jumps to Psalm 139 and the verse, “You are fearfully and wonderfully made.” And in thinking of Sunday’s scripture, it provides the “and” to that. If we are fearfully and wonderfully made, then we must care for this body – this creation of God. And in deep hunger, we need food. Jesus illustrated for us and it’s important to recall that Jesus – just like all who are human – would have been truly hungry after a 40 day fast. Rev. Hollis reminded us that scripture is filled with Jesus on his way to a meal and at a meal and leaving a meal. And who Jesus eats with is a big issue. Judgements are made on the basis of when Jesus eats and with whom he eats.

**Question: What is your approach to food? To eating with others? In what ways do you address your own needs when you are hungry – and the needs of others for food, acceptance and fellowship?**

- 4) Rev. Hollis said something in Sunday’s sermon that really caught my attention. He said we’ve never been told anything about how Jesus’ body looked. None of our images of Jesus are based on descriptions from scripture. Now, I knew that on one level, but on another, it just wasn’t something I had considered. So we have the works of Jesus – which are judged on many levels. But there is no body judging related to Jesus’ appearance. Think of the many paintings or artistic renderings of Jesus that you have seen. Those are based on perhaps some clues from where he was born and general characteristics of people who would have been born and lived in that time. But in most cases it’s more on the artist’s background or assumptions about looks. It wasn’t important to the writers of scripture. Wow! Think how often when we talk about ourselves or another person, we talk not of attributes but of physical appearance. Perhaps that’s why it’s so difficult for us to accept what Rev. Hollis stated as he concluded his sermon. As I remember it, he said before we can do much else about physical wellness, we have to say, “This is my body. This is what I got. I didn’t have much

to do with it. What I can do is celebrate this body. Be thankful for this body. Do all I can to bless God and others.”

**Question: In what ways do you need to embrace physical wellness in order to love yourself, love God, and love others?**

**Prayer: (This prayer is based on the August prayer found in the book, “Openings” by Rev. Larry J. Peacock)** “Warming God, as the fruit and grain ripen in your sunshine and showers, so may we grow in love and compassion. Ripen our sense of justice for all people, especially those who are hungry this day. Deepen our gratitude for our church community where we are taught to love ourselves, to love God and to love others. Fill us with the joy of being fully alive to your miracles all around us and within us. Amen”

**Weekly Challenge: In addition to following the Be Well wellness calendar, I would invite you do the exercise suggested by Rev. Hollis. Each day, stand before your mirror and look at your self. Remind yourself that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Pray these words, “I want to see me as God sees me. I want to see others as God sees others.”**

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