



### **WEEKLY STUDY February 18-24, 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: Exodus 3:1-14**

“Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.’ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Mose hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ He said, ‘I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’

But Mose said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘**I am Who I am.**’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘**I am** sent me to you.’”

1) Lent is the time of year when we intentionally slow down, commit ourselves to practices that nurture our faith, and seek God. Sometimes “seeking God” can seem overwhelming. We are looking for the spectacular. Pastor Gracie helped the children – and all of us – consider today’s scripture when Moses sees the burning bush and hears from God. During Children’s Time Gracie told the children that through the stories about Moses, we learn how everywhere Moses goes, he see’s God. In this Sunday’s scripture, he sees God in the burning bush. He sees God in the very ground he stands on. In other stories, Moses sees God in water. Moses sees God on the mountain. Moses sees God around him in ordinary things. The ordinary becomes spectacular in our eyes when we see God’s presence. As we move through Lent, we too are invited to see God in the every day – in the ordinary things of the world that surround us.

***Question: As you enter the season of Lent, in what ways do you plan to stop and consider the ordinary - and notice the presence of God?***

2) One of the things Pastor Sam talked about in Sunday’s sermon was what happened to the Israelites as they sought to flee Egypt. Despite Moses having the assurance from God that what they were doing was what they needed to do. Despite Moses having the assurance the God was with them in what they were doing. The Israelites found themselves stuck between the water and the advancing army. Staying stuck was not really an option. They had to trust that God through Moses would be with them to move forward or surrender. And I’m sure in the moment neither option looked appealing. Sam told us the Midrash story of the need for someone in the Israelite group to take the first step forward and move into the water. That person, according to tradition was Nahshon. He walked into the water and was up to his neck in water before it parted. In our mind when we here of someone being stuck, we may think of the movement forward as the exact time all obstacles disappear. But from what Sam told us on Sunday, the messiness doesn’t necessarily disappear with a decision. We have to walk forward into the messiness before the path begins to open.

***Question: When have you found yourself stuck between an advancing army and a deep sea of water? What enabled you to move forward even though you still couldn’t see the path that was there?***

3) Pastor Sam also talked about a podcast she listened to: “The Next Right Thing” by Emily P. Freeman. Freeman listed several questions to ask yourself when you feel stuck. They included: “What do you want?” “What is bothering you?” “What if there isn’t a story?” “What if the answer is ‘both’.” “What if you could trust yourself” “What if you tried something new?” As Sam moved us through each question, the one that resonated most with me on Sunday was, “What if there isn’t a story?” She went on to say, “Maybe it just is what it is and we become unstuck through acceptance.” To throw in another podcast that I listen to: “The Hidden Brain”, I once listened to an episode that made the argument that our brains like logic. Our brains want tidy and neat. Our brains want an ending. And yet life isn’t that tidy. There are many things that don’t have endings. We might then find ourselves quick to say, “Well God must not have been present for me.”

However, the power that comes in accepting that there may not be a tidy ending or solution is realizing God is also with us in the mess – not just in the neat, tidy solutions that we envisioned. And knowing God is with us no matter can give us peace.

**Question: Which of the questions Sam talked about were ones that at this particular time were most important to you? Why?**

- 4) Pastor Sam asked us this question on Sunday, “Could God do everything God asked Moses to do by Godself?” And she answered the question For us: “Yes!” But God desires the divine/human relationship. She went on to say that just as God wanted Moses help, God wants our help. God seeks communion with us. God seeks our help, our cooperation, our active role so that we work side by side God. We have the invitation to be in relationship with God for the purpose of extending God’s kingdom day by day.

**Question: Was thinking of God seeking our partnership a new thought for you? How does being with God in partnership make you feel? Are there actions you feel emboldened to take with God as your partner?**

**Prayer:** O God, as we walk with you through this season of Lent, open our eyes to the ordinary. Just as Moses was reminded that the ground is holy, remind us today that the earth we walk on is holy. Just as Moses stopped to notice the glory of the burning bush, help us to stop and notice your glory in the world around us. Just as Moses questioned what you called him to do, help us be bold enough to question you about our call. Just as Moses listened to the answers you provided him, help us to stop and consider the answers you provide to us. And just as Moses moved forward in partnership with you O God, help us move forward in partnership with you as well, living lives of love and justice day by day. Amen

**Weekly Challenge:** This week give thanks for Brielle Adeline Boer who was baptized at the 8:30 service on Sunday. And for Brielle’s parents, Alyssa and Brandon who were welcomed into membership at Belle Meade UMC. Sunday was the first Sunday of Lent. In the church 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 practices will you add to your life during this season of Lent to deepen your faith.

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