



### **WEEKLY STUDY February 25-March 2, 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:**

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of light.'" **John 8:12**

"As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him' He kept saying, 'I am he.' But they kept asking him, 'The how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight.'" **John 9:1-11**

- 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? Last week 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. This 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 start with, 'I AM the light of the world.'

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

- 2) As we've mentioned before, when we select a particular scripture, there is always a "but before this" and an "and after that". Our chapters and verses were inserted long after a particular book in the Bible was written so are artificial but helpful to us in reading today. However sometimes we have to look at what has happened before to have a better understanding. This is what Pastor Sam did on Sunday when she led us through examining the story of Jesus and the woman accused of adultery, found in John 8:1-11. At the heart here is Jesus saying to the women, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." And right after this, Jesus turns and says to the people, "I am the light of the world."

**Question: Consider the connection between Jesus' actions and his refusal to condemn the woman to his statement of I am the light of the world." What message do you hear in that connection for yourself, for our faith, for our interactions in the world?**

- 3) Our second scripture (where Jesus repeats the phrase, "I am the light of the world" follows in our second story from Sunday - the healing of the man who was blind from birth. As she considered what we might need to take from this story, Pastor Sam had these thoughts. "Perhaps Jesus was trying to help the Pharisees and the disciples see differently (shine light on) how old rules and order might be hindering our ability to take action and allow God's actions to break through. She also recalled that from creation we learn two things: we are made in God's image AND we are created from dust. Thus we carry with us the human and the divine - as does all of God's creation. In addition Sam also helped us remember from last week that God seeks our involvement with God's plans.

**Question: What are some of the things you see happening in our community now where we need to stop, provide different ways of seeing, and carry forward God's light in the world?**

- 4) Pastor Sam talked about the difference between feeling building and feeling shame. She quoted Lewis Swedes in his book *Shame and Grace* who defines the difference this way: Guilt = "I did something bad." Noticing, acknowledging and stating this allows us to change.

Shame = "I am bad." This creates a feeling within us that we do not deserve God's love and we cannot move forward. We then think, talk, and act out of this unspoken and unresolved sense of shame in various ways: Guilt Spreaders; The Overly Responsible; Obsessive Moralizers; The Never-Deserving; People Condemned by Bad Memories; Those Who Dwell in the Shadow of their Fathers; Approval Addicts; Compulsive Comparers. (It is worth going back to either listen again to this portion of Sam's sermon

or find a summary of Swedes' book) the point here is if we dwell in one of these shame personas, we cut ourselves off from the light. When we can resolve and move from shame, we can accept our worth, our blessed beloved news as a creation of God.

**Question: Sam said to us, "If you look in the mirror, who do you see? Do you see one of the images created by shame? How can you let in the light to eradicate the shadow of shame?"**

**Prayer:** (Our prayer is based on Sunday's affirmation of faith)

"O God. A new week is before us and we give you thanks. We confess that we do not always know what to say and how to act in order to be light shining in the midst of our world. Show us the way O Lord. We do seek to follow your light, but often we stand in our own way. We hold on to judgement and condemnation of ourselves and of others, and for that we repent. We offer ourselves to you this day. Root out the injustice and harm we create when we get too focused on protecting ourselves at all costs. Today we place before you the burdens we carry and seek healing. We claim your promise that what you promise you will not forget. We claim your promise of love that is always surrounding us. We claim your promise of light to carry us forward on your paths. And we claim your vision that your light is not just for us but for all the world. In Jesus name we pray, Amen."

**Weekly Challenge: This week give thanks for James Daniel and Benton Ann Sivley who were baptized at the 8:30 service on Sunday. And for their parents, Hadley and Chris who were welcomed into membership at Belle Meade UMC. In this second 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. How will you release shame from your life in order to be a light-bearer?**

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