



WEEKLY STUDY April 14-21, 2024

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

Our sermon series is: The Disciples: Leading Like Jesus. In this ten-week series, we will get to know the Disciples Jesus appointed to follow him, lead like him, and then take over his mission after his resurrection and ascension. We will learn together what Thomas, John, Peter, Judas, Matthias, Thaddeus, Matthew, Andrew, and James have to teach us about ourselves and what it means to lead like Jesus.

Our Scripture this week is:

"Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' but he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" John 20:24-29

- 1)** In this season of Easter, as we begin our new series on the Disciples, it's fitting that we start with the story of Thomas. In the Easter season (the 50 days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost), the church studies stories in scripture about the sightings of Jesus after the resurrection. Pastor Sam addressed the fact that many of us think of those appearances in terms of a phrase or description that has been used over and over in the church. (Consider "doubting Thomas") But she also helps us unpack the richness of the scripture with all of its nuance. It reminds us that Easter isn't a "one and done" Sunday. The stories of Jesus' appearing to the disciples are rich with meaning and importance. Carefully read again the scripture from Sunday. Put a "?" by what puzzles you. Put an "!" by what surprises you. Underline what you feel is important for you to remember.

Question: *What puzzled you in the scripture? What surprised you? What do you want to remember? In what ways does reading it again help you see much more than the one phrase we often use to remember Thomas?*

- 2) On Sunday, Pastor Sam led us through several passages of scripture about Thomas, leading us to these conclusions about him. 1) Thomas was inquisitive – not afraid to ask questions. 2) Thomas was utterly human – asking for no more than many of us ask: “I won’t believe it until I can see it.” 3) Thomas was courageous. Remember that he led the disciples in staying by Jesus’ side when Jesus wanted to go to Lazarus. Each characteristic is valuable in being a witness -asking questions; owning our humanity; being willing to follow Jesus.

Question: *Where do you see yourself in Thomas?*

- 3) Pastor Sam also introduced us to the Thomas we hear and read about beyond what is contained in the scripture. She told us that in the text “*Acta Thomas*”, The Acts of Thomas, we read that Thomas was assigned to go to India to spread the gospel. But, as with so many in scripture and through the years, he was reluctant to take that assignment. Listen to Sunday’s sermon to hear the whole story. He did end up serving in India and Sam told us that all Christians in India – regardless of their denomination – look to Thomas as their patron saint. I remember as a preteen, we had a missionary visit our church. I was compelled by his stories. But I also remember from that time forward praying, “God, please do not make me be a missionary.” You see, my vision of how to serve was strictly in terms of foreign missions. The reality is we are called in many ways to witness to God’s love and justice. And each way is important for God’s kingdom on earth. Our call is much more often to be in one place and live as a disciple in that place at this time.

Question: *In what ways have you experienced God’s call in your life and how have you answered that call to be a witness like the disciples?*

- 4) Last Sunday was “Worship Without Walls.” This is our third year in practicing worship without walls. It serves as a visual and actual response to the great in-gathering of Easter Sunday where – once we have heard the message of the resurrection – we are propelled outside of the walls of the church to proclaim the message of Jesus through action. Pastor Sam told us that this year we had 220 people working on 13 different projects for a morning of service. While not all of us were able to be present and involved last Sunday morning, as part of the congregation, we become part of the crowd of witnesses through these actions. But just as the stories of the Disciples do not end with one act, we continue to act. Sam said on Sunday, “with whatever witness you have within you, speak, embrace, sit with, ask, share, write, draw, dance, pray. Proclaim the Good News!”

Question: *Consider your daily actions. In what ways will you continue to act out of a belief in a life of hope, of mercy and justice, of God’s love surrounding all?*

Prayer: (This prayer is found in the book *Openings: A Daybook of Saints, Psalms, and Prayers* by Larry James Peacock, page 110.)

“God of openness and new life, in this Easter season,
Remove me from the tombs of doubt and despair,
Turn me from dead ends and shattered dreams,
And lead me to new hope and a bright tomorrow.
Walk with me down uncharted roads and ordinary paths,
Always leading me to a deeper trust and more faithful service.
I open my heart to your Easter joy. Amen”

Weekly Challenge: As you pray this week, give thanks for the baptism of Henry James and Blair Aster, children of Carly and Zach Wheeler. Pray, too for Julia Baltz; Robin Parker and Will Dean; Tate and Will Parrott; Kim and Matt Sneed; and Jonathan and Megan Williams who joined our church family on Sunday. Daily, look for ways to mirror the example of Jesus in your life. Include also in your da prayers these words of hope for the Easter season: “Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen Indeed. Thanks Be To God.”

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