



WEEKLY STUDY September 3-9, 2023

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

What in the Word: A Sermon Series on Questions

Our sermon series for September is: What in the Word: A Sermon Series on Questions. The Bible can be both wildly inspirational and completely puzzling. How can we understand it? What practical import does it have for our lives? In this series we will explore questions submitted by our church-goers. Did Jesus ever questions, "Why me?" Or say to God, "I'm not doing this?" Does prayer really work? Is Jesus the only path to God? Join us as we see to God and our neighbors by asking questions and seeking the Bible's wisdom.

Our scripture this week is:

"He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.' Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'"

Luke 22:39-46

- 1) For the first three weeks of September, we will be considering questions posed by members of our congregation about scripture that puzzles them. Pastor Sam began on Sunday reminding us that it is good to ask questions. She encouraged us all to think critically for ourselves and not simply accept what someone else's theology.
Question: What are some of your questions about God, and Jesus, scripture, beliefs and practices? Were you taught to believe having questions was good or bad? How has that influenced your faith today?
- 2) The first question we are considering in this series is, "Did Jesus ever question, 'Why me?' Or say to God, 'I'm not doing this?'" Pastor Sam chose Luke 22: 39-46 as a way for us to reflect and ponder this question. She commented in her sermon that while there is

nothing recorded in scripture that portrays Jesus saying, "I'm not doing this," we do read of Jesus, saying to God, "If you are willing, remove this cup from me." And this helps us see Jesus' struggle.

Question: In reading this passage of scripture, where do you find yourself in considering Jesus' humanity? Do you feel yourself comforted with thinking of Jesus with strong human feelings like struggling to do what he feels called by God to do? Do you find yourself rejecting that Jesus may have struggled?

- 3) In her sermon, Pastor Sam talked about the meanings of "the cup". She said many see "the cup" in this passage as an illustration of the cup of suffering Jesus would experience. She then reminded us that prior to praying in the Garden, Jesus had eaten with his disciples and there he had lifted a physical cup of wine and offers it to his disciples. Each time we take communion we take a cup with the reminder from Jesus, Take. Drink. Do this in remembrance of me. We have, then the cup of suffering and the cup of fellowship and kinship with Jesus. For Christians, the image of the cup triggers many of our memories of what Jesus said, as well as what Jesus did. As Jesus followers we share in humanity, and in desire to see God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Question: Consider the symbolism of the cup. What are you reminded of each time you take communion?

- 4) Pastor Sam reminded us that we will have to live out a thousand little deaths and big deaths in our life as we seek to live out God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. At the same time she reminded us we worship a God who gives us permission to be fully human, to question, to test, to embrace vulnerability and fear as emotions that grant us greater intimacy with the divine and one another.

Question: If you were asked by another, "What is God like?" how would you describe God? How would you describe humans in relation to God? What attributes of God allow you to feel accepted and loved even in the midst of the hard times of life?

Prayer: (Our prayer this week is from Sunday's service, the Affirmation of Faith)

Dear God, There are times when we don't want to do what we are called to do. Meet us in our resistance O God. There are times when we are afraid of what's next. Meet us in our fear, O God. There are times when we wonder if we have what it takes. Meet us in our hesitancy O God. There are times when we question where you are in all this. Meet us in your presence O God. Be for us an ever-present source of strength. Amen

Weekly Challenges: This week, when you are part of your group, or when you are alone, place a cup before you. Daily as you pray, think about what is in your cup. What are you called to do? What joys are carried for you in that cup? What hardships, grief, sorrow, illness do you see there? Imagine taking the cup as it has been passed to you from Jesus. What is your prayer this day?

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