



WEEKLY STUDY September 17-23, 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 question, "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:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me anything in my name, and I will do it.'" **John 14:1-14**

1) The first question we considered in this series was, “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. Our second question we examined was, “Does prayer really work?” Sam reminded us that there are not always clear-cut answers to our questions, and that questions are good. Our third question is, “Is Jesus the Only Way to God?”

Question: Have you also wondered if Jesus is the only way to God? What questions for you are related to this one? What has shaped your beliefs around this question?

2) One of the things I appreciate about Pastor Sam’s sermons is that she is always teaching us something we might not have known or might have forgotten about scripture. She reminded us once more that to understand a passage in scripture it is important to understand both what comes before it and after it. It’s also important to understand the intention of the writer. Every book in scripture comes from a writer or writers living in a defined time and place. And Sunday she reminded us that the original manuscripts of scripture had no chapters or verses, so these writings flowed without breaks. And these breaks between stories sometimes have led us to misunderstandings about the context and the meaning of what was being said. What we learned on Sunday is that the passage we read on Sunday is part of what is known as a Farewell Discourse. It’s what might be today the experience of someone who has a terminal illness and gathers family to talk through everything they see as important before they lose the capability to do so.

Question: Re- read John 13:34 – 14:25. Thinking through the elements of a farewell or last wishes, consider these questions: Who is Jesus speaking to? What does he say about his approaching death? What words of comfort does Jesus include to those gathered with him? Does knowing these passage are much like a loved one gives a final testament to family members change in any way your view, in particular of John 14:6 and how it is commonly interpreted?

3) Pastor Sam stated during the sermon that we often read John 14:6 and ask, “Is Jesus the only way to God?” “Who goes to heaven?” “Who’s in and who’s out.” She then proposed questions that are more needed than those: “If we want to share the love of Jesus, how do we do so while respecting the humanity of others? (And this means, recognizing the wrong in practices like manifest destiny, extermination of native peoples, slavery, condemning Jews, or Muslims, or other faith traditions). She called out the culture of winners and losers. I had a staff member once who said, as part of a discussion on always seeking to win, that her father had taught her, “If you aren’t first, then you lose.” There were some gasps in the room and some nervous laughter, but also nods of recognition about how being first, being a winner drives us, and is counter to God’s kingdom that is cooperative, non-competitive, equitable. Pastor Sam asked us, instead of ‘Are you going to heaven’ – which makes God a means to an end – should we not be asking, “How do I spend every moment possible in God’s presence NOW.”

Question: What is your opinion of these different questions posed by Pastor Sam? What do you think our more important questions are to address at this time and in this place?

- 4) Regarding questions we might be posing to others (and judging them in the process), Pastor Sam said, “Maybe we really need to focus on our own faith, on our own transformation, on our own witness instead of trying to answer a question we can’t possibly know the answer to.” And she concluded by saying, “It seems to me that if we live our lives with so much love that others see God at home within us, they too, will want to make a home in God.”

Question: What do you want others (family, friends, acquaintances, strangers) to see in you through your actions and your words?

Prayer: (As we pray this week, we give thanks to new members: Mary Vaughn and Hugh Moffatt, Jan Miller, Kara & Bryan Miller, and the baptisms of Elli Miller and Gavin Miller.)

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”

Weekly Challenges: Consider your words and your actions this week. How do they display the evidence of God living within you?

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