



WEEKLY STUDY May 6-12, 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:

"After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.' His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he means.' Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, 'What you are about to do, do quickly.' But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." John 13:21-30

"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.' 'What is that to us?' They replied. 'That's your responsibility.' So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself." Matthew 27:3-5

- 1) In this season of Easter, we move to our fourth week on the Disciples. With each of these studies we are invited to see ourselves in these disciples – to recognize our strengths as leaders, and to move forward in carrying out Jesus' mission. This Sunday**

Pastor Grace spoke on Judas. She reminded us what we do know about Judas. We know he was one of the twelve apostles and held a position of power, serving as treasurer for their community. We know he was given the same powers as all of the apostles when Jesus sent them out two-by-two. She also reminded us that there is much we do not know about Judas. We don't have any details of his life prior to his becoming an apostle. We don't have a call story for him recorded in scripture. And probably the most important thing that many of us would like to know – we don't have a clear answer of why he betrayed Jesus. However, Pastor Gracie told us in the sermon that the “why” of Jesus' betrayal doesn't matter. And she invited us to consider Judas and the scripture we do have through the lens of compassion.

Question: Based on what you know from scripture about Judas, what have you imagined about him? Reread this Sunday's scripture, using the lens of compassion. Does this change in any way your thoughts or feelings about Judas?

- 2) This Sunday (as is every first Sunday in the month) included our celebration of Communion. Much of what Pastor Gracie talked about was centered on communion as the welcome table. Gracie referred to the table as a place for restoration and reconciliation. She reminded us that Jesus included Judas at the table. She reminded us that the father welcomed the son back with a banquet – fellowship at the table – in the story of the Prodigal Son. She reminded us that Jesus welcomed Peter back at the breakfast table on the beach after Peter had denied 3 times. She reminded us of Saul's experience where, once Ananias restored his sight, he ate. She reminded us that we all make mistakes. And yet we are always welcome at the table.

Question: What does it mean to have a “welcome table” as a congregation? In what ways would those not part of our faith community see and know that they are welcome here?

- 3) At the beginning of the sermon, Pastor Gracie told us we don't really know what the name “Iscaariot” means. As she moved through the sermon, Gracie told us that the name “Judas” means man of Judah or Jewish man. She warned us about seeing Judas as a representative of the Jewish people – a thought that has been source of anti-Semitism in the Christian church through the years. She led us to think instead in terms of Judas being an “every man (or every person).” She asked us to consider ourselves as Judas and said, “He is us.” She went on to say, “Judas is us in the moment when we feel like we have no other options and all hope is lost.” And then she reminded us: “there is nothing we can do that negates our worth as children of God.”

Question: In what ways are you able to claim for yourself the believe that nothing negates your worth as a child of God? What stands in the way of you claiming this promise of God?

- 4) Sunday was also our time to celebrate those in our congregation who will be graduating (or have just graduated) from high school. Pastor Gracie spoke directly to the graduates with a prayer for them. She said to them, “Nothing will ever make you unwelcome in this place or unwelcome at God's table. You are always welcome in this family. Your

identity as beloved and chosen children of God is not because of what you have done or will do. Your identity and worth is because you are made and loved by Jesus.” I felt like this was a wonderful word for these young adults to hear as they move from high school to their next steps in education and work.

Question: Are there those you know who need to hear this affirmation? How can you be the bearer of this good news to them?

Prayer: (Our prayer this week comes from Gracie’s final words. She noted that these had been shared with her by a friend.)

Gracious God. Once more we gather to ponder your word and your message to us as your beloved children. On this day in particular help us remember that in YOUR story O God, there is grace for the process, mercy for changed minds, sustenance for the journey, space for neighbor and enemy, enough bread to go around, forgiveness for getting it wrong, a song reaching the summit, company for the grieving, company for the celebration and a table that is always open. And as always – we are reminded that these promises are not just for us or for the ones we deem worthy. These promises are for all your children, O God and indeed, for all of creation.
AMEN

Weekly Challenge: Pray or send a card or note to our 2024 high school graduates: Elizabeth Barnes; Sarah Deweese; Jaelynn Simmons; Emily Stokes; Adam Streams. Continue to include in your prayers these words of hope for the Easter season: “Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen Indeed.”

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