



## WEEKLY STUDY April 29-May 5, 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: Matthew 16:13-20**

**"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah."**

- 1)** In this season of Easter, we move to our third 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 Marshall Brown, our Lay Leader, spoke on Peter. Marshall told us at the start of his sermon that he would be talking about what we learn of Peter in scripture, and in Christian tradition. And he did so with a splash of imagination thrown in to help us capture how Peter might have looked, conversations that might have happened, feelings that might have been expressed, and inspiration that was passed on.

***Question: Based on what you know from scripture about Peter, how do you envision Peter? What makes Peter memorable in scripture and through Church history?***

2) Marshall talked about the names “Simon” and “Peter.” We often refer to the disciple by both names “Simon Peter”. Simon is the name when this man meets Jesus. Marshall told us one of the meanings of the name “Simon” is reed. He reminded us that a reed sways easily with the wind. And we do in fact have stories in scripture that help us see Simon declaring something vehemently, then acting differently. Perhaps our greatest example is Simon insisting he would always be there with Jesus, then denying Jesus three times when Jesus was arrested and killed. And yet Jesus saw something different in Simon and named him “Peter” saying ‘on this rock I will build my church.’ We then have the witness of scripture of Peter’s leadership at Pentecost and in the forming of the early church. From swaying reed to solid rock, scripture and history records the story of the man first called Simon who became Peter.

**Question: Consider that each of us take on a new name in faith – the name of Christian. How does this word define you? In what ways has thinking of yourself as Christian influences how you spoke and how you acted?**

3) Marshall brought us back to one of the major considerations for us in this theme: “How then shall we lead if we are to lead like Jesus?” Last week our scripture pointed us toward the command to lead as a servant. This week, Marshall reminded us of what Jesus said to Peter in an encounter after the resurrection. We remember Peter denied Jesus 3 times prior to his death. This week we remember Jesus asking Peter 3 times: “Do you love me? If so, tend my sheep.” With each yes, Jesus led Peter deeper into a servant leadership role.

**Question: Peter was obviously a strong leader. How do you see servanthood in his leadership?**

4) Marshall also gave us a list of the many ways Peter worked for and formed the early church. He preached the pivotal sermon at Pentecost that opened up so many to consider God in a new way. Through his encounter with Cornelius, Peter was led to see that the dietary laws were not the definition of how to serve God. In debate with Paul at the Jerusalem conference Peter saw the wisdom of Paul’s plea to throw open the church without need of circumcision for those who declared belief. As I listened to Marshall recount Peter’s contributions to the early church, honestly I came back to those two names. Simon – meaning reed and Peter – meaning rock. And I thought, “I believe Peter gave us the example of both.” There is something reed-like to be able to listen and bend toward the new. And there is definitely something rock-like in being able to proclaim faith in such a way that we hold tight to a loving God. Both benefitted the early church and us today.

**Question: What will you take from the story of Peter as a guide for you in your faith?**

**Prayer:** With praise and gratitude we come before you once more O God. We come as people who seek to claim the name “Christian” and live into the servant leadership you have called us to. Walk with us God. Surround us with your love and strength. Guide us God. Help us see those who are hurting, who are alone, who are bowed with sorrow, who are ostracized simply

because of the way you have created them. Help us step into bold leadership to make this world one with your kingdom. AMEN

**Weekly Challenge:** This week is the closing week of our United Methodist General Conference. Representatives from United Methodist churches all over the world have been gathered in Charlotte, NC for worship, for community building, for working through legislation and petitions to move us forward as a denomination. Continue praying daily for this gathering of leaders that they may be led by hope, may make decisions that reflect scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Pray in particular for those from our faith community who continue working this week on behalf of all of us: Pastor Sam as a delegate from our annual conference and Brian Sigmon heading the editorial team for the 2024 Book of Discipline. And as the conference dismisses on Friday, pray for travel mercies as these gathered delegates disperse again to their homes all around the world. Give thanks as well for the re-appointments of Pastor Sam and Pastor Gracie to continue their ministries at Belle Meade UMC. 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)*