

# Biblical Work: The Gospel of John

## Jesus, the "I Am," calls us and proclaims "We Are" the Body of Christ

The Gospel of John is striking in its difference from the other canonical Gospels. It starts with Logos, the Word, who is with and is God; source of all that is, made flesh and dwelling among us. This is not a series of stories just relating Jesus life, but extraordinary encounters with eternal incarnate God. The Gospel of John is encounter after encounter, not just revealing who this Jesus is but also revealing who and whose we are. Throughout this Gospel are the "I am" declarations of Jesus, e.g. Bread of Life, Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Vine etc. As we can see from the beginning, Jesus is not bragging about who he is. There is no need for this for this One is God. Jesus is clear from the start who and what he is. The "I am" declarations are proclamation events about who Jesus is and in Him, who we are and who God the Father calls us to be.

The Gospel of John has a unique way of speaking to different folks. Conversations with individuals take on an intimacy that speak to that person's deepest secrets and thoughts. Jesus speaks differently if it is directed at the disciples, the crowd, or the Jews (i.e. Jewish authorities). Yet, there are times when the text shifts not to those in the stories but to the one hearing or reading. Almost as if Jesus or the writer turns away from what is happening to speak directly to us. *1:16-17 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

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This study-reflection-action process is designed to help congregations and leaders come to understand who God is calling them to be and what they are to do in this world. This study can be by a congregation council for the biblical work to inform and move the council to act as God has called us to do. It can be an adult formation resource for the making and renewing of disciples for the work of the Kingdom of God. Just as encounters with Jesus require a response--sometimes yes and sometimes no-- so does this work.

First and Last Step in doing Biblical Work: PRAY. Take the time. Pause, slow down from your day. Breathe, exhale deeply and slowing take a breath (the Hebrew word for the Spirit is "ruah" which can mean both breath and mighty wind). Acknowledge that Jesus Christ is already present with you. Invite the group to identify any pressing concerns or prayer requests to be offered. Invite the Spirit to open up your hearts and minds to God's Word.

### Session

I	Logos, Life, Light and Lamb	John 1:1-34
II	I am...God's Love sent into the World	3:1-21
III	I am...the Anointed of God--Messiah/Christ	4:1-42
IV	I am the Bread of Life	6:35
V	I am the Light of the World	9:5
VI	I am the Good Shepherd	10:7
VII	I am the Resurrection and the Life	11:25
VIII	I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life	14:6
IX	I am the Vine, you are the Branches	15:1,5
X	I am sending you	20:21

## Session I Logos, Life, Light, and Lamb

## John 1:1-18

Pray

Take the Time...Pause...Breathe...Acknowledge Christ...Surface concerns

Hymn

ELW 661 I Love to Tell the Story

Read John 1:1-18

Logos, "the Word" What is this Word? What has it already done?

Compare this opening with Genesis 1:1-5 "God said ..."

The Word is the source of all things...all life? What does this tell us about scope of the Word's action in Creation, the "cosmos"?

Why is the image of Light so important? To whom is the light given?

*v. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* What promise does this proclaim to those for whom the light was given?

Logos

God and instrument of God (e.g. through him all things came into being)

Logos--life & light; light of all people 1:4, true light, which enlightens everyone 1:9

Logos-Life-Light/"He" in the world...became flesh and lived among us: "set up tent"

Logos/Father's only son full of grace and truth; grace and truth through Jesus Christ

World

Came into being through the Logos-Life-Light-Christ; darkness persists...the world did not know its source, even the religious leaders did not recognize him

Lamb

Testimony "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Passover Lamb (Exodus) God passes over homes of Israelites, defining act of salvation

Lamb sacrifice (Leviticus) Laying on your hands as a sign of laying your sins upon it

Lamb of God Note it is not the "sins" but "sin" of the world? What does this say about what Jesus Christ will accomplish in his sacrifice?

Is there a connection to darkness? Not knowing or recognizing Jesus, the Son?

Does this change your understanding of sin? From individual acts (e.g. stealing, swearing) to continuing to live in the darkness and not acknowledging who Jesus is.

### What is discovered about who WE ARE as disciples following Jesus Christ?...

We who believe in his name are children born of God v12

In Christ, you were made. God already acts in Jesus Christ, life/light for me and every person v4

In the fullness of Christ, you all have received grace upon grace v16; blessing upon blessing

In Christ, the sin of the world is taken away; your darkness, unknowing, blindness...all our sin

How are you changed knowing who we are? How does/could this inform your discipleship?

What is revealed about the scope of God's work thru Jesus Christ? Who or what is included?

How does this inform the work of church? See John the Baptist statement as one who now knows

If we believed this, how would the ministry of our congregation change?

Worship

Discipling

Relationships

Witness

## Session II I am...God's Love Sent into the World

John 3:1-21

Pray Review Session I who is Jesus Christ, who we are and what we are called to do.

Hymn ELW 631 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Read 3:1-21

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. How does this tie back to the chapter 1?

Does he come just for himself? Who were the Pharisees?

What does he seek from Jesus? Clue: He calls Jesus "rabbi" and a teacher who is from God

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus comes as one who has lived his life in strict observance of the Torah, the Mosaic Law. He desires a new interpretation or teaching of how one can enter into eternal life and see the Kingdom of God in the resurrection from the dead.

What is the new teaching that Jesus offers? You must be born again/born from above...born of water and the Spirit. Spirit comes and goes without our knowing where it came from or where it is going. Those born of the Spirit do not know where it came from (and had no control over it) nor do they know where it takes them. Those born from above and of the Spirit are not in control of the present let alone the future, nor can they determine if and how they will see and enter the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus does signs as one in the presence of God, yet those signs have not lead them to believe that Jesus not the signs are most important. Like the staff of the serpent lifted by Moses in the desert for the healing of Israel, so must the Son of Man, who has descend from heaven, be lifted up for the healing/saving of the nations.

Read John 3:13-21

How do verses 13-15 change the context for understanding John 3:16? Remember that Jesus is speaking to one who already lives the Law and believes in the resurrection from the dead?

What does God love? Why is this important to accept? How does this connect back to John 1?

Given who Jesus is speaking to, why is acknowledging God as the One saving critical?

How do verses 17-18 clarify John 3:16? What does it mean to be condemned already? Does this judgment come from God?

Is it our sin that condemns us? Or is it our arrogance in not letting God save us from our sin?

### **What is discovered about who WE ARE as disciples-followers of Jesus Christ?...**

- +We acknowledge that we cannot by our will, beliefs or actions see or entry the Kingdom of God.
- +In Jesus Christ is true healing of the nations, for we are perishing and condemned already not from God but because we are a people who sit in deep darkness and we need God's healing power.
- +God's desire is to save the whole world and all people because God loves all Creation.
- +We are born of Spirit, born from above. And just as the Israelites in the desert had to rely on God for healing and life so must we rely on God and go where the Spirit leads us.

How could/does this "saving and perishing" change our preaching and teaching as a Church?

Ministry of our congregation: Worship      Discipling      Relationships      Witness

## Session III I am...the Anointed of God--*Messiah (Hebrew) Christos (Greek)*. John 4:1-26

Pray & Review

Hymn ELW 650 In Christ there is no East or West

Background: Samaria is the land associated with the Northern Kingdom Israel. This area was conquered repeatedly throughout its history. Samaritans are of mixed religious traditions holding to a pre-Babylonian emphasis on the Patriarchs (e.g. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), the ritual sites tied to the early kings period, and foreign influences from other peoples brought in by Assyria and Babylon. For this reason, the Jews (which solidified their religious identity in Babylon) saw the Samaritans as corrupters of the Torah traditions. Jews traveling to the north or south would often cross the Jordan to avoid even touching the soil of Samaritan territory. Those having to travel through would often bring their own food and drink as to avoid being unclean as they went to offer sacrifice at the temple.

Read 4:1-26

Much has been written about or projected onto the woman at the well, what do we actually know about her and Jesus' interaction?

Jesus' statements What is the gift of God? What is this living water? v10

*"The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."* For whom is this spring gushing?

Interesting Twist from Tony (Armenian Christian from East Jerusalem): The word for "husband, lord or master" is also the same word used by Samaritans (and sometimes Jews) for a "god" = ba'al. For Jesus, this seems to be a dialogue about worshipping the true God. So when Jesus asks Go call your "ba'al", it could be a question asking the Samaritan woman "Go call upon your god" to which she answers I have no "ba'al"--I have no god now.

How would this change how we have interpreted this text? Is it more consistent with text?

What does worshipping God in spirit and truth mean for us? What gods do we worship?

Reminder: we worship that in which we place our trust.

Disciples--"Eat something"

*Look around you and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting....Gathering fruit for eternal life.*

*Sent to reap what you did not labor...and you entered into their labor.*

As the living waters have touched/transformed the women, she has become a spring gushing up to eternal life for others. They too receive this gift and gush forth in their witness to the Messiah Jesus.

**What is discovered about who WE ARE as disciples-followers of Jesus Christ?...**

+The water that Jesus gives...will become in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. If we already have this water of eternal life, then this gushing spring is not for us but for others.

+The fruits produced from God's eternal life in us are always for others. Just as we benefit from the laborers before us, we are to sow for others.

` How does this impact the mission outreach of our congregations? This requires a different attitude from "getting them to come in" versus going out to meet them where they are at.

`What would happen if our members were gushing forth with the witness of God's great gift in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World? See how this ties back to Chapters 1 and 3.

`Ministry of our congregation: Worship Discipling Relationships Witness

How are these changed by having a witnessing, evangelical spirit?

## Session IV I am...the Bread of Life John 6:26-66

Pray & Review

Hymn ELW 542 O Living Bread from Heaven

Background: The Gospel of John reflects a different order of events than the other Gospels. The cleansing of the Temple happens at the beginning (chapter 2:13-24). As this encounter unfolds we learn that Passover is near (This is the second Passover in John). Passover--sharing of unleavened bread, the rescue from Pharaoh, Manna in the desert--this is the defining event of Israel's salvation.

Review these stories; identify the Moses connection

~ Feeding of the multitude with five loaves and two fish...twelve baskets remaining 6:1-14

~ Walking on the water and calming the storm 6:18-23

Read 6:26-40

The crowd says it wants to believe but they want a sign, or more signs (they were just fed yesterday). As a sign, their ancestors were fed manna in the desert.

*My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven....Bread comes down from heaven and gives life for the world. I am the bread of life, whoever that comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

Jesus is to do the work and will of the Father...sent to the world that all will be saved and lose no one, and raise them up on the last day. (vs 38-40)

What is the work that we must do?

*Believe on (KJV) him who is sent by the Father.* Is this belief in a set a doctrines about Jesus? Is this a creed that they have to confess? What does it mean to "believe on/in Jesus?"

If Jesus is the Bread from Heaven--already given to those who hunger and thirst, who is to save all and not lose one of us--what then is our work? Is it belief? Or belief lived out for the life of the world? How would our belief on Jesus--trust in Jesus--be lived out in the world?

Read 6:52-66

Just as Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman take Jesus literally, so do the Jews listening. They have a problem with "eating Jesus' flesh?" This was also a charge against the early Christians that they were "cannibals."

Do we ever take the scriptures too literally? Many say we do not take them literally enough. How does a Christian community take the Bible very seriously in understanding and interpreting scripture without the literalism?

How does the Bible inform the work we are to do as the Bread of Life for the sake of the world?

**Holy Communion is an encounter with Jesus Christ; we share in the Body and Blood of Christ as we become the Body and Blood, Hands and Voice, Heart and Compassion of Christ in the World. In Christ, we are the Bread of Life in the world.**

What does this tell us about who we are as a church? How would we act differently if we believed that by our unity and transformation in Christ, we are the Bread of Life for the world? Does this impact the mission outreach of our congregations?

Ministry of our congregation:      Worship      Discipling      Relationships      Witness

Name some specific things that could be different.

## Session V I am...the Light of the World John 9:1-41

Pray & Review

Hymn ELW 561 Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory

Background: In Jesus' day, the common theology was that sickness, poverty, demonic possession, physical or mental disability were caused by personal or corporate sin. This was believed because if God is just and in charge, then these "punishments" must be deserved. If one has good things--health, wealth and wisdom--then he/she must be good and righteous; if the person was sick, poor, or slow--they must be bad or sinful.

There are Christian teachers and churches that still preach this message today. Have you heard this before? What does this say to people who are healthy, wealthy and wise? What does it say to people who are sick, poor or slow?

How does this distort the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Read 9:1-23

Jesus challenges the theology of this day. What reason does Jesus give for this man to be born blind? What has the man done to deserve this healing?

Jesus states I am the Light of the World. How does this tie back to chapter 1? What does light do? *We have almost a comedy unfolding...everyone questioning, no one admitting anything.*

Read 9:24-34

The Pharisees question the man, the friends, the parents, and the man again. Look at the man's answers, what is he saying about Jesus? How does this proclaim a different theology than that of the Pharisees? What does this man see that the Pharisees do not?

Read 9:35-41

The man has been cast out, and Jesus seeks him out. He does not recognize or "see" Jesus, he has only heard his voice that once. Jesus asks *Do you believe in the Son of God?* I am he. The man worships Jesus. This is a radical turning event--metanoia--Jesus proclaims he is the Son of God and therefore he is worthy to be worshipped (Jews only worship God).

What are the Pharisees blind to? In part, it is that Jesus is the Son of God and they cannot see it. Yet equally important they are blind to the oppression and harm their theology and teaching does to both the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick.

Again Jesus talks about the work he is to do (v 4). What is the work of Jesus ...toward the blind man, the witnesses, the religious leaders, and the disciples who asked the question? What work is Jesus doing inside of us?

### **What is most important as disciples of Jesus and the church as the Body of Christ?**

The religious leaders are concerned about healing on the Sabbath rather than the fact that a blind man can see. How does our congregation focus on the less important things while leaving the Gospel work undone? If we focused on Gospel work, how would our priorities change?

Jesus Christ...is the Light of the world. What message does the world need proclaimed? How does our theology change our message? Does our theology invite others or does it exclude others?

Ministry of our congregation:      Worship      Discipling      Relationships      Witness  
How are we changed by God's welcome, healing, and light shining in our lives?

## Session VI I am...the Good Shepherd

John 9:40-10:18

Pray & Review Hymn

ELW 502 The King of Love my Shepherd is

Background: The encounter with the man born blind (Chapter 9) continues with the teaching directed at the Pharisees who Jesus has just told are blind to God's workings. There is no break, as we move into the teaching about sheep, gates, and shepherds, so the proclamation about sin, seeing, believing and blindness needs to be carried forward in this reading.

Read 9:40-10:10

The Pharisees were a righteousness movement within the 1st century Jewish community. Most often they were lay men who committed to living the Torah law as completely as possible. They adhere to the Torah as well as the historic and prophetic traditions, e.g. believing in the resurrection of the righteous. Jesus speaks truly, not about sheep or the people, but about leading the people. Note: This is not how most commentators discuss this chapter.

Jesus announces that the true shepherd of the sheep enters by the sheep gate, not try to find some other way in, no short cuts, no climbing over the fence. The shepherd enters through that gate, calls his sheep, leads them out, takes the lead and the sheep follow his voice to good pasture. They will not follow someone else for they know his voice, his teaching, his word, his promise. Jesus is both the shepherd and the gate.

What is the gate that leaders must enter through? What are the short cuts that must be avoided? Leaders are faced with a temptation to think ministry is about them, that they have the answer to life's questions. The gate is God, through whom we must enter into the good pasture of life. If leaders try some other way to get in or out, try to make the ministry about them and not about God, they will always fail or even worse they will mislead.

What is Jesus the gate to? Where does Jesus lead us? Is this gate excluding or including? Does it make a difference that Jesus is talking about leaders and less so about the sheep?

Jesus says "I am the door by me all who enter in shall be saved." Jesus leads where we can have life right now, and have it more abundantly.

Read 10:11-18

Jesus is the good shepherd who leads us always back to the Father who knows Jesus, who knows us. This is no thief who steals from God the glory. This is not one who kills with rules and impossible burdens. This is one who gives his life for the sheep, because the Father has declared them his own.

V 16 I have other sheep, that do not belong to this fold, them also I must bring them also and they shall to listen my voice, so there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

This is a controversial verse: Is this other flock only refer to Gentile Christians of the 1st Century? Mormons claim this verse as there own. Does it refer to later Christians? Or does it refer to people who are outside the current Christian community? Those who believe in the Father, the Father knows them; those who believe in the Word/Logos of God yet do not know Christ Jesus; those who by the faith of their heart and life in the Spirit follow the shepherd.

### How do disciples lead as Jesus leads?

+Leaders always bring people to the Father, always to the Good News and the promise of God.  
+They lead people to faith, repentance, metanoia--change of heart, into the Word, and toward the world. What do our leaders need for this to be achieved in our congregation? How is preaching, teaching and discipling changed in our congregation?  
`How is our ministry impacted if only those in the Church can be saved? How is it changed if we believe that the Word and the Spirit are already at work in people before we show up?

## Session VII I am...the Resurrection and the Life

John 11: 1-45

Pray & Review

Hymn ELW 860 I'm so Glad Jesus Lifted me

Background: Death is so final. Or is it? This was a serious question for the religious community of 1st Century Israel. The Sadducees and other traditionalists believed that death ended in Sheol, in darkness and nothingness. The liberals, the Pharisees and some of the scribes, believed the prophetic promises of the resurrection. Yet, even here this afterlife was a combination of apocalyptic visions and unclarified promise. When a person died, mourners would pray and utter loud cries for days on end (this is why if the family could afford, it they would often be paid).

Read 11 1-19

What is relationship of Jesus to Lazarus and his family? What is the term repeated several times? How does this relate to the fact that Jesus delays going to Lazarus?

What reason does Jesus give for Lazarus' death? Where did we hear this before ? (Hint: Chapter 9)

Read 11: 18-37

Folks are wondering why Jesus was delayed and his lack of action. "If you had been here..." or "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind, have kept this man from dying. Martha says(v 21), "Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died." Mary states (v 32) "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." This is the question asked of God more than all others, "God, where were you when...my child died...my mother got cancer...during my divorce...in this time of war?" Where is God in these most difficult of times? Jesus reminds us that these events are not about God's punishment or God not caring. Jesus proclaims, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Jesus is on the way to Calvary, the way to the Cross. Our God does not abandon us in times of pain and suffering. In these times, Christ walks with us (Road to Emmaus), calms our fears (the Storm at sea), heals our blindness and harden hearts. Jesus is not just talking about Resurrection later, he is proclaiming resurrection right now.

Why does God allow pain or suffering? Why does God allow natural disasters like earthquakes that kill people? Why? Why? Why? Can we answer these "Why" questions?

What if we were to ask instead "How is God present even in the pain and suffering?" What difference does this make? Reminder: Laments in Psalms, Jeremiah, Hosea; Elijah & Elisha,

How is Jesus resurrecting our lives right now? How can those who have lost so much have life in God?

Read 11:38-45

The words of Jesus

*Take away the stone*

*If you believed, we would see the glory of God Father, I thank you for you have heard me...*

*Lazarus come out*

*Unbind him and let him go*

What are the stones that need to be taken away in your life? What holds you back from receiving new life in Jesus Christ? Can you see the glory of God or does our pain and sorrow blind us? Can we thank and praise God even in the tough times? Why should we? From what is Jesus call you out? Can we hear this invitation to new life? What is your prayer to God about freeing you, unbinding you?

### **How will our congregation do this Resurrection and New life work?**

Every congregation needs new life and resurrection. What need do you see here? What might that new life look like in our ministry life? What are the stones that are in the way? What binds us to the past that will not let us move into God's future? What is God call us to be and do?



## Session VIII

## I am...the Way, the Truth and the Life

John 14:1-29

Pray & Review

Hymn

ELW 325 I want Jesus to walk with me

Background: With Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the stage is now set for his passion and death. The people, the Pharisees, Greek believers...all are seeking Jesus out, wonder what it all means. With his coming death proclaimed and the promise of the Father lifting him up again, Jesus shares Passover with the disciples. Here he gets up from the table, removes his robe, and washes their feet, giving them example of what they must do. He commands them to love one another, as he has loved them. All of this is so that God is glorified.

Read 14 1-6

Jesus continues the "Final Discourse" with the disciples. He tells them not to let their hearts be troubled. Believe me, believe in me, as you believe in God. Many mansions, lots of room, lots of grace lots of space... his promise is to them and to us. I go to prepare a place for you. Show us the way! they cry out.

*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.* This verse is often confusing or misleading. It is NOT I will show you the Way. It is NOT I will teach you the Truth. It is NOT I will tell you about this Life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The person of Jesus not the teaching about Jesus. This is the embodied Truth and Life of God. To be in Jesus is to be in the Way already. God has incorporated us into him. Relationship in, through and with Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Often we add to Jesus. We want to add that there is a specific way we are to live our lives: a moral, spiritual, law code that we must follow to be saved. We add that there are specific truths we must believe, confess, or do something to affirm that we now have the truth is us. We add that this Christian life declares some are in and others are out. Yet, the Good News is nothing is needed. Nothing can be added. Jesus is enough, more than enough to accomplish God's salvation.

Do you find yourself adding some thing to Jesus Christ and him crucified? Is it hard to let go of these extra things we think are needed to be saved?

How would you live differently is you actually believed Jesus, believed in Jesus, believe Jesus is enough?

Read 14:7-25

Jesus is asked *Show us the Father.* It is through Jesus that we see the Father, we come to the Father, we know the Father, we are known by the Father, we are in the Father, we are loved by the Father.

Jesus tells the disciples--them and us--that if we cannot believe in the words believe in the works. But he goes on to tell us that the Father will do even greater works in and through us.

How is it possible for us to complete greater works than Jesus? (see vs 12-17; see Ephesians 3:20)

Who is accomplishing this work? How does Jesus, love and the Comforter fit into this work?

Read 14:26-29

What will the Comforter, the Holy Spirit do? What do we still need to learn from the Spirit?

**How is our congregation changed if this whole thing is about relationship in and with Jesus?**

We joke that the answer to most children's sermon questions is Jesus. What if it is true for all our questions about being the Church? How would worship, service, teaching, planning, praying, and hospitality be different if always seen through Jesus?

What role is the Holy Spirit playing in your congregation's life? Can you really see this work? Do you really believe that the Holy Spirit is working here?

## Session IX I am...the Vine and You are the Branches

John 15:1-27

Pray & Review

Hymn ELW 629 Abide with Me

Background: Jesus and the disciples have ended the Passover Meal. They walk from the upper room past the Temple, through the gate outside the walls of the Jerusalem, to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This is a short walk but a very long journey for Jesus.

Read 15 1-14

*I am the vine, my Father is the vine grower.*

Are you one who bears the fruit of God or One who does not bear that fruit? Note that both those that bear fruit and those that do not are pruned or taken away. What would it mean that both must abide in Christ and Christ in us?

*Abide in me, as I abide in you.* We have to stay connected, stay connected to Jesus. Yet, to abide in Jesus is to stay connected to Jesus, we must also be "pruned," to die to something, to let go of something. Because if you try to do this on our own, if we are a branch cut off from the source we will just wither. Cut off from Christ, we are just firewood. When we abide in Christ, God's word abides in us. We are in relationship with God and we can ask anything and it will be done.

So what does love got to do with it? Why does abiding in Jesus leads us to keep the commandment to love?

How does abiding in Jesus and loving one another bring us to what God wants for us and from us?

No greater love...no greater love than what Jesus did for us...no greater love than what the Father has done for us in Jesus Christ...no greater love than to lay down one's life. How are we called to lay down our life for God? For each other? For the world?

How does this change what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ?

Read 15:15-27

Jesus calls his disciples not servants (see 13:3-15) but friends. Why the shift? As followers of Jesus, as people who abide in Jesus and abide in the Word, we know what Jesus is doing. We know what the Father is doing. 3:16-17, 12:46-47, saving the world, not condemning the world. We know THE commandment is to love God, love one another. We know it is all about relationship in and with Jesus...abiding, believing, trusting.

What do we have to look forward to as "friends of Jesus"? (Hint vs 18-23)

What will it mean to bear witness to Jesus?

### **How do we disciples abide in Christ?**

Is it automatic or something learned? Abiding in Christ takes us beyond being servants, to ones who know who Jesus is and what Jesus is about.

How can our congregation show people how to abide in Christ? How should our formation or teaching change so we are making disciples not just members?

When one has cut themselves off from Christ, can we get reconnected?

## Session X I am...Go where I am sending You.

John 19:40-20:31

Pray & Review

Hymn ELW 720 We Are Called

Background: Jesus is dead. The religious authorities have conspired to have Jesus arrested, charged with blasphemy, taken to Pilate and turned over for crucifixion. Pilate tries to get out of it, yet as his dialogue with Jesus continues, it is clear Jesus claims to be a King. This is the charge above his head, the reason Jesus is crucified by the Romans. Three women are the witnesses: all others have left him. Joseph of Arimathea negotiates for the release of his body and Nicodemus prepares the body for burial and ritual wrapping.

Read 19 40-20:10 *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...*

Here we have come full circle to the opening chapter of the gospel of John. What do we know about the dark? What do we know about the light?

If darkness cannot overcome the light, then death, sin, suffering, or brokenness can not overcome the One who is light and life and truth...the Word of God. This is truly the Good News.

Mary Magdalene was a witness of his death and the first witness to the empty tomb. She knows he is dead. Unlike the other Gospels, she is not here to prepare the body (already done). She is here to grieve. The Tomb is open, she runs to the disciples who are only a short journey away. Peter and the Beloved disciple come running, see the empty tomb and still do not understand (v 9) so they go home. No one understands yet, Mary is confronted by the gardener. She is still looking for a dead body.

How is it that Mary recognizes the Lord? What does Jesus do to reveal himself? Has Jesus revealed himself to you in such a way? Does this revealing of the Living Lord Jesus Christ is still occur today? How so in your life?

Why does Jesus-the Risen Savior-appear? Who are the Resurrection appearances for? Certainly not Jesus. Then who?

*Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. And Mary went and announced to the disciples 'I have seen the Lord.'* The command of Risen Lord is to Go and Tell. This is true in Luke and Matthew, and, negatively, a challenge in Mark (the abrupt ending). The connection between Resurrection--New Life and Go--Tell is clear and essential as *disciples become apostles*. *Apostle* means "one sent."

*When it was evening on that day...*

The disciples have already heard the first report of the Risen Lord, they have seen the empty tomb. Yet, they remain locked in the upper room for fear of the Jews. It is as if nothing has happened. Maybe it is just one Jew that they fear. This upper room is filled with disciples of every age and time. It is us--afraid to go out, afraid to tell what Jesus has accomplished. We are still in that same darkness that was present in chapter 1.

Jesus overcomes our darkness and our fear. He comes to us with "Peace" and send us out with the *ruah*, the Breath/Spirit of God. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. Comment: Is this a promise of authority (as it is most often interpreted) or something else? What if this is to be understood in the same way it is in the Lord's prayer? Forgiveness is a essential dimension for the disciple/apostle's life. If we do not forgive each other and ourselves we will never leave the darkness. To forgive another frees us, not them. To hold on to the hurt and brokenness just continues to damage us and does not allow healing. What if this is authority and power over our own brokenness and hurt not authority to free or bind others. In the Risen Lord, we receive peace, the Spirit, the power to heal ourselves and the freedom to heal a broken world.

**How do apostles Go and Tell, Go and Serve as Christ has shown us?**

How can our congregation become a place of forgiveness and healing? Is this something others would value? As Mary come to recognize the Risen Lord when he calls her name, when has Christ called our name? Baptism and Communion for sure. But when else or to what has Christ called us? Is Peace, Spirit, forgiveness, healing and freedom enough for apostles today? If so, what do we do?

## **Biblical Work:**

### How to lead this time of prayer, reflection, conversation and action

Preparation for leading the Biblical Work sessions:

**Pray** Take the time to pray. Set aside ten minutes to open yourself to God. Hold the silence for a while, read or sing the hymn suggested. Listen for God's voice, see how God is present in your life. Ask God to be more visibly present in those places you cannot see God.

**Listen** Read the text aloud. Listen for the word or phrase that moves in you. Listen to what God is saying in the text and in your life. Listen for the questions you have about the story or encounter with Jesus.

**Gather** Gather your thoughts and feelings about the text. Gather more information about this encounter in study bibles, commentaries, and conversation with others. Gather stories or personal experiences that connect to the text.

**Engage** Engage the biblical work the group will do. Biblical work is more than study, it is prayer, reflection, conversation and should always lead to action. It should inform our lives and move us into deeper relationship with God through and in Jesus Christ.

## **Lead**

### **Pray-Listen-Gather**

The sessions require a leader to guide the conversation. Some of the reflections or comments just reflect the text. Others give more information or a different interpretation than we may have experienced before. The text boxes hold questions that tie the text to the experience of the participants or the congregation. This allows the text to go deeper into us, and calls forth more than just commentary on a specific text. The final box--with bold outline--specifically ties the text to the life of the congregation and what difference such ideas and challenges could make in our life together. This is where it is more than a bible study. This is where the Holy Spirit is working the text into our lives and hopes for our congregation.

## **Fun**

Are you having fun? If not, start now. The Word of God shared in scripture is a joy and a gift. Have fun with the Word, let it work its wonder and joy in you!

**Resources:** These may be around the congregation with the pastor or church library.

+(New) Interpreter's Bible

+The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962)

+Opening the Book of Faith: Lutheran Insights for Bible Study (2008)

+Hailey's Bible Handbook (multiple years)

+Who Do You Say That I Am edited by Powell & Bauer Chapter 5 (1990)

+Gospel of John (Two Volumes) by Raymond Brown

Many other New Testament commentaries can be helpful.