

# WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## Sermon Series Devotional

3/6/2022-4/3/2022

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## Introduction

The season of Lent is one of the most important times in the church year and helps us remember the 40 days Jesus spent fasting and praying in the desert before he began teaching, preaching and healing in public. Lent a time of letting go and reorientation. Life throws us curve balls that force us to rethink many of our assumptions about life. A death takes a loved one. Divorce breaks up our family. An unexpected disease strikes. A religious mentor is disgraced. We lose a business or organization due to a pandemic. A church damages us with dysfunction.

What do we do when we find out that the faith and beliefs we were raised with or first adopted as an adult don't seem to have gone up in smoke? How do we rise? How does life get put back together? Interestingly enough, sometimes it is necessary for us to allow our beliefs to be challenged and go through an overhaul. If we didn't, we would be functioning in the world with a 5 year old view of life. This study is designed to help us look at some significant events in scripture that turned things upside down and challenged assumptions of the day... what they believed about God and who they thought Jesus was. Hopefully you'll find some help in faith emerging from the ashes of life.

## Why a sermon series devotional?

A deep faith and rich discipleship is not built on an hour a week in worship. No matter how good a sermon is, there is always more to pursue. These devotionals give you the opportunity to go deeper and wider in your understanding. Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one sitting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

*“So, the emerging church is about a re-imagining: re-imagining our preaching, our evangelism, and our worship services. A re-imagining of new types of churches and an opportunity to be re-thinking all we do because we recognize that the next generation is at stake if we don't.”*

*Dan Kimball*

## **Week One -From the Ashes**

There is a temptation to see some of Jesus's miracles as some kind of party tricks, a kind of "look what I can do" moments. While people debate whether they really happened or not, there are some important things that go unnoticed. You will notice with this particular one that there are assumptions that were challenged, provisions that were unexpected, and misunderstanding experienced all around. The real issue for us is whether we are operating with some of the same assumptions.

### **Reflection questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?

### **Read John 6:1-15, 22-71**

1. As you read this scripture, what did you notice that you haven't noticed before? (try reading the scripture 3 times.)
2. What do you know about the culture at the time that makes the acceptance of a child's offering of lunch unlikely? What do you think made the disciples accept it?
3. How do you think the disciples felt to be put on the spot to provide food for such a large crowd? Why do you think Jesus was testing them? What was the test?
4. What does this miracle reveal about how God feels about the average person? If they were all fed, did it make a difference whether some were more sinful/deserving than others?
5. How does this reveal God's willingness to do more than what is expected or needed?
6. What has your experience told you about what God provides? Is it usually just enough or an abundance like in the story? If it is just enough sometimes, how does that affect your trust in God?
7. How many times have you operated on the assumption that something was completely dependent upon you? Was the assumption true?

8. How many times do we make plans within church life based on the knowledge of just what we know we have resources to cover? How does this miracle challenge that?
9. What does this story say about a meager offering (ie. the boy's lunch)?
10. How often have you felt that what you have to offer isn't worth anything? What can we count on God doing with what we DO offer?
11. What does Jesus's perception of what the crowd was wanting to do say about how people react to being given something material? What was his response?
12. Can you blame the people for following Jesus to get more bread when most of them lived from day to day based on what the average family earned?
13. What are some of the problems or dangers associated with living life under those circumstances?
14. In what ways does "Living Bread" satisfy that daily bread doesn't?

**Read Matthew 6:25-34**

1. What are the anxieties Jesus identifies in this scripture?
2. What are other anxieties you've had that you'd add to this list?
3. What counsel did Jesus give about our anxiety?
4. What does this scripture say about our belief that being anxious can somehow solve our problems?
5. How can you rise from the ashes of anxiety?

## Week Two -When Bad Things Happen

What is the first thing you think when something goes wrong? What did I do wrong? What did I do to deserve this? Why me and not someone else? Or who is to blame for this? In this week's scripture, we find age-old assumptions being challenged and upended and the people who feel they have the right to stand in judgment end up with egg on their face. Our understanding of Jesus in this moment can reframe many of the experiences in our lives. It may not be comfortable, but it might be just what we need to understand life more fully.

### Reflection Questions:

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Did you find yourself in the story?
4. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?

### Read John 9

1. What key question from the disciples framed the entire episode with the blind man? What does the question say about the disciple's understanding?
2. What do you think were the assumptions of the time about why people suffered with a malady?
3. What did Jesus's response to the disciples' question indicate about his intent?
4. Did the man profess faith, answer specific faith questions, or do anything else to "deserve" healing?
5. What does this tell you about why sometimes people are healed and sometimes others are not?
6. If Jesus did not heal the man, would that have meant the man didn't deserve healing? What else could it mean?
7. What does this suggest to you about God's grace?
8. What does this suggest to you about your own life and the suffering you experience?

### **Read Luke 13:1-5**

1. There is a familiar question we hear when something bad happens to someone: why does a Good God allow bad things to happen? Jesus offers reasons in this scripture. How many do you count? What are they?
2. The first reason is described in verse 1. What did Pilate do? So who was responsible for the suffering?
3. Jesus names the second reason in verse 4. What is it? Who was responsible for the tower falling?
4. The third reason may be harder to discern. What phrase does Jesus use twice? What do you think Jesus means by “unless you repent?”
5. At the time of Jesus, people assumed if someone suffered they were responsible for bringing it upon themselves. How does Jesus’ answer flip that?
6. How does it affect your perception of life to realize there are multiple reasons for suffering, some of which you have no control over?

## **Week Three - Are We There Yet?**

Who do you want Jesus to be... for you? There is a reason that such a man as Jesus... a healer, a teacher, a holy man, would wind up being killed in a humiliating way on a cross. He didn't meet people's expectations. People either thought he was something else or they wanted him to be something else. If you look at the religious landscape today, you see this same dynamic playing out, even within the Church: Jesus is portrayed as a heavenly vending machine, a healer, our best friend, holy and above everything, a political ally, a revolutionary, etc. But who is he? In this week's scripture, Peter comes face to face with Jesus's destiny and who he really is.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. If someone who was unchurched asked you to tell who Jesus is to you, what would you tell them?

### **Read Matthew 16:13-26**

1. After Jesus asked the question, what possibilities did the disciples offer? What did each of them represent?
2. How does Peter's response to Jesus's question reveal what his expectation of Jesus was?
3. What does Jesus's forecast of what will happen to him say about his own self image?
4. Is it possible to give the right answer but have the wrong interpretation?
5. Is Jesus actually calling Peter Satan or is it something else?
6. Is it possible that some of the most well meaning people in our lives can try to tempt us to do something against God's will?

### **Read Matthew 27: 11-14**

1. What was the crowd saying about Jesus?

2. What did Pilate say about Jesus?
3. What does Pilate's question to Jesus say about what he was thinking (or was afraid of)?
4. How did Jesus answer? Why do you think he answered in that way?
5. Are there occasions when it is best to just say nothing when it is clear we are just misunderstood?



## **Week 4- Fear Factor**

Have you ever had the experience of running into someone in a different setting and not recognizing them? Was it because of different clothing (not in a uniform, etc.) or just the different setting? Sometimes we might be expecting a previous behavior but the person has changed and we aren't aware. Perhaps they have a confidence that was lacking before, or have matured in some way. Now, what happens when we try to recognize the presence of Christ but are looking for something else? What if Jesus wants to enter our life in a way we're not prepared for? If that happens to be the case for you, then you are in good company...you're in the boat with the disciples.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. Have you ever been surprised by something you believe God did?

### **Read John 6:16-21**

1. What were the disciples leaving (what had just happened)?
2. What did they do when Jesus didn't show up?
3. What could make a group of experienced fishermen, who know the territory and its risks, leave in the dark when a wind was blowing (there is no absolute answer, it's just interesting that they chose to go out when they did...could there be a reason?)
4. Why do you think the disciples didn't recognize Jesus at first?
5. What was their first response?
6. Why would they react like that if they already knew him?
7. What kind of reassurance did he give them?
8. When was a time in your life when you were initially terrified, only to be reassured?

### **Read Matthew 14:22-33**

1. What are the differences and similarities between the two versions of this story?

2. What did the disciples assume Jesus was?
3. Peter asked to come to him IF he was really Jesus. What was Jesus's response?
4. Does Peter walk on the water too?
5. What contributed to Peter starting to sink? How did Jesus respond? Who displayed the most faith...Peter or those who stayed in the boat?
6. How many of our faithful moments are combined with fear?
7. Does fear negate faith we have shown? Is it something to feel ashamed of?

## Week 5–If Only

How much of our lives is framed with the phrase “if only?” If only I had acted sooner. If only I had gotten the promotion. If only I hadn’t tried to drive when I was drunk. If only we hadn’t had children, etc. Whenever we have regrets, this is the game we tend to play. We assume we know what a better path would have been or what the outcome would have been if we had made a different choice. And sometimes, we’re right. But sometimes our “if only” is off the mark. In this story the people make a discovery about the power of God that they had never seen before.

### Reflection Questions:

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. What are some regrets you have in your life? Have you thought through alternative scenarios of what might have happened?

### Read John 11:1-44

1. What was Jesus’s relationship with this family? Did they know him well enough to have some expectancy?
2. Why did Jesus wait 4 days before he went? Doesn’t this seem callous?
3. Why were the disciples confused? What did Jesus tell the disciples about his reason for waiting?
4. Mary and Martha have different responses. What were they? How does this compare to their personalities in another story? (Luke 10:38-42)
5. What did their responses reveal about how they felt about Jesus waiting to come?
6. What do Jesus’s tears say about his feelings for this family?
7. When the sisters complain that there will be an odor because of how long their brother has been in the tomb, what is Jesus’s response?
8. How easy is it to focus on the worst case scenario and miss something much bigger?

9. This miracle happened two weeks before Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. What do you think was the likely response in the city (which was only about 7 miles away) when the news spread of what Jesus had done?
10. What kind of expectancy do you think it created in the minds of everyone who heard about what happened?

**Read Matthew 20:1-16**

1. What was the agreement made between the landowner and the workers at the beginning of the day?
2. What was the agreement between the landowner and the additional workers he hired throughout the day?
3. Why were the ones hired earlier in the day angry when they saw what the later arrivals received? Was this warranted?
4. How would we feel about this current hiring approach in our current society?
5. How many times do we place a limitation on what we think God is willing or able to do in our lives?
6. Do we also compare our life to others and miss the blessing because we focus on what doesn't seem fair?