



Since the beginning of the year, we have been going through the Gospel of John. We have witnessed Jesus' amazing life and marvelous ministry of preaching, teaching, and manifesting the power of the kingdom followed by his death and resurrection.

The Gospel of John contains more post-resurrection encounters than any other Gospel. These encounters were important to those who had been with Jesus for three years. Though Jesus had tried to prepare his disciples for what was to come, their world had been turned upside down by the death of their teacher and friend. Even though Jesus was alive, he was still physically absent. His friendship, his teaching, his ministry had been the center of their lives for many years.

And things were now very different. Though Jesus had taught them and talked about the future, it was still an unknown experience for them. They had to let go of life and ministry as they had known it and even grieve what they no longer had so that they could transition to a new way of life. The disciples must let go of the incarnate Jesus in order to live out the resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit.

God was good to give 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension of Christ. Transitions take time. The followers of Jesus needed that time to get used to not having Jesus physically with them. And even more important, they needed the time to better understand their role in Jesus' ongoing ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The post-resurrection encounters with Jesus helped his disciples to understand their call to ministry as Jesus' agents in the world. Jesus commissions his disciples and us by these words: *"As the Father has sent*

me, so I send you.” Like the disciples then, we are those sent by Jesus to participate in his ongoing work in the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For the next 40 days, our church will be in a significant period as we launch our Ignite Initiative. We want God to spark hope and ignite a brighter future for our church as we pray and prepare for how he wants to use us to *love the Lord and love the people; serve the Lord and serve the people.*

Rather than reading an entire chapter of John each week, we will be lingering in the last chapters of John. Each week our preaching focus will look at these post-resurrection texts in John 20 and 21. In the daily devotions, we will explore the theme presented in the text for Sunday by reviewing previous passages in which Jesus taught about these themes: being sent, believing, loving, following, and so on. We hope and pray that the Lord will use our reading, reflections, and responses to deepen our sense of call as those sent by Jesus to bear witness of his love, grace, and power.

May it be so!

Glenda Simpkins Hoffman

SEND: Week of April 23, 2017

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Throughout the Gospel of John, we have read Jesus words explaining that he was sent from the Father. This was important for his followers to understand because it related to his identity and his mission. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus made the way for those who believe to have a relationship with God.

After the resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus appears repeatedly to his disciples. He assures them that he has completed his mission and that he is still indeed the living, reigning Lord; his work will continue through them.

In our passage for this Sunday, Jesus declares, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit.” This is the moment in John when Jesus fulfills his promise to send another. Jesus was limited by time and space while he lived on earth, but the Holy Spirit is everywhere and will fill and empower the body of Christ all over the globe enabling them “to do the greater works” Jesus described. The Holy Spirit will be the ongoing presence of Jesus giving them peace in trials and power to continue his work in the world.

This passage is John’s version of the Great Commission. Jesus sends his disciples in the power of the Spirit to be his presence and to manifest his power as they continue his work in the world. Those who follow Jesus

are now those sent to live in community and share ministry together bearing witness to Jesus and all he has done, is doing, and will continue to do through them.

Weekly Reflection Questions

*Please use the following questions daily to reflect on the **Send** theme.*

- What information (characters, places, actions, events, lines of argument and how all these relate to each other) does this passage convey?
- What does the passage say about the weekly theme of being sent? Who is being sent and for what purpose? Why is that important to know, and how is it important to me and all believers?
- What does this passage say about how I am being sent? What are some of my current obstacles to being sent? What do I need to ask of God to help me overcome these obstacles?
- How does God want to send me. How does my life reflect that I am living together in community and sharing ministry with other believers? How does God want to ignite me so that my life reflects that I am indeed one who is sent to “love the Lord and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people”?

Sunday— John 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Monday—John 5:36-38

“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.

Tuesday—John 14:25-27

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things

and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Wednesday—John 15:26-16:1

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.

Thursday—John 16:4-15

I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Friday—John 17:3

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Saturday—John 17:15-23

My prayer is not that you take them (disciples) out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May

they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

BELIEVE: Week of April 30, 2017

“That you may believe and have life in his name”

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has made it clear that the most fundamental issue of life is to believe in him—who he is as the Son of God and what he has done in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. To believe in Jesus is to let go of our own agenda and our self-effort to figure things out or make it on our own. We accept our humanness, our finiteness, our sinfulness, and our weakness. In essence, we accept that we are creatures completely dependent on God. If we are willing to take the risk of letting go and letting God, we discover that we have the life we were created for and long for—an abundant and eternal life.

As you review portions of John that emphasize the necessity of belief, reflect on your life and how it reflects or fails to reflect deep trust in Jesus. Coming to believe in Jesus is not a one-time decision. Our faith is meant to grow and mature. As our faith in Jesus deepens, our lives will reflect greater fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Our faith will never be perfect. Doubt and struggle will be a part of life. Even so, our growing faith will reflect a greater desire and willingness to put our faith into action as we serve, reach out to others, and give generously of all that Jesus has given to us.

Weekly Reflection Questions

*Please use the following questions daily to reflect on the **Believe** theme.*

- What information (characters, places, actions, events, lines of argument and how all these relate to each other) does this passage convey? What does it say about the weekly theme of believe?
- What does this passage say about how I am to believe and where I may doubt? What are some of my current obstacles to believing? What do I need to ask of God in order to overcome these obstacles?
- What do I believe about God? How can I make time to ask God what he wants me to know? Listen carefully to and meditate on what he says.

- How is God inviting me to arrange my life so that he can ignite my faith and transform my life even more? How am I experiencing more and more the abundant, eternal life he has given me in Jesus?
- How is God inviting me this week to “love the Lord and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people”?

Sunday—John 20:24-31

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Monday—John 1:10-13

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

Tuesday—John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Wednesday—John 6:27-35,40

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.... For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

Thursday—John 9:4-7, 35-38

As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing...Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

Friday—John 11:17-27

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Saturday—John 14:1-14

“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 back 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 in 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 for anything in my name, and I will do it.

IDENTITY OF JESUS: Week of May 7, 2017

Our Sunday passage this week is the seventh sign that Jesus performs in the Gospel of John, the only one that he does after his resurrection. The disciples are still not sure what to do, so they go back to what they know—fishing. But after a fruitless night of effort, Jesus appears, giving them direction and accomplishes for them what they could not accomplish on their own. Their remarkable catch of fish is another sign of Jesus’ amazing grace, generosity, and miraculous power.

In this resurrection appearance, Jesus wants his disciples to be assured that they will continue to enjoy his presence, peace, provision, and power even after he has returned to the Father. But this event is also to encourage them again to understand his purpose in their lives and ministry. As those who are sent, they have been commissioned to catch people rather than fish. Jesus will continue his work on earth through the Spirit filling and empowering the community of believers to manifest Jesus’ ongoing presence, peace, provision, and power. As they listen to his

direction, rely on his grace and power, he will use them in remarkable ways to catch people and help them to experience the joy of life in the kingdom of God.

This week we will review the seven signs or miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of John. All of them point to Jesus' identity and mission. Think about how these passages speak to you about who Jesus is and what he has done. Listen for how he is speaking to you as one sent in his name empowered by the Spirit to continue his purpose and mission in the world.

Weekly Reflection Questions

*Please use the following questions daily to reflect on the **Identity of Jesus** theme.*

- What information (characters, places, actions, events, lines of argument and how all these relate to each other) does this passage convey? What does it say about the weekly theme Jesus' identity, presence, provision, power and/or purpose?
- How do I see his grace and generosity expressed in these passage? How am I relying on my own human striving and self-effort or the grace of Jesus and the power of the Spirit? How is this reflected in what I say and do?
- What does this passage say about how Jesus' identity, presence, provision, power and/or purpose affects me and my life? What are some of my current obstacles to experiencing Jesus' provision, peace, power and/or purpose in my life? What do I need to ask of God to help me overcome these obstacles?
- Meditate on Jesus' identity, peace, provision, power and/or purpose.
- How might Jesus want to ignite my faith and love for him so that I can in turn share that with others as I love the Lord, and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people? Am I holding on to what I have or trusting Jesus and his grace and generously giving to others as Jesus has generously given to me?

Sunday—John 21:1-14

The Miraculous catch of fish

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said,

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Monday—John 2:1-11

Water into wine

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Tuesday—John 4:43-54

Healing

After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there. Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.

And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. “Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.” The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” “Go,” Jesus replied, “your son will live.” The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.” Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Wednesday—John 5:1-9

Healing of paralyzed man

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Thursday—John 6:1-14

Feeding of Five Thousand

Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five

thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Friday—John 9:1-7

Healing of Blind man

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Saturday—John 11:1-6, 17, 34-45

Raising of Lazarus

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days....

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.... “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. Then Jesus

looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

LOVE OTHERS: Week of May 14, 2017

“Do you love me? ...Feed my sheep.”

Last week we looked at Jesus’ seven signs and in particular his last one that occurred after his resurrection and involved a miraculous catch of fish. That passage serves as the backdrop for the words Jesus gives Peter this week. Jesus’ gifts in his miracles are only signs of his ultimate gift, the gift of his life in love, and Jesus calls Peter and us to share in that gift.

To love Jesus is to know Jesus. And to love Jesus is to shape one’s life according to Jesus’ life. Three times Peter denied Jesus. So three times Jesus asks him, “Do you love me.” Three times Peter answers yes. To each of these answers, Jesus responded by calling Peter to love others underscoring that *words* of love must be matched by a *life* of love. It is not what we say, but what we do that matters most. And what we are to do, is feed Jesus’ sheep. Peter’s love, and our love, will be evidence of our care for Christ’s flock, not apart from that care.

Our passages this week revisit several passages in John where Jesus makes clear it’s all about love—receiving his love and sharing his love with others. It is important to remember that we can only love and care for others as much as we have experienced Jesus love and care for us.

Weekly Reflection Questions

*Please use the following questions daily to reflect on how our faith and love for Jesus are expressed through our **Love of Others**.*

- What information (characters, places, actions, events, lines of argument and how all these relate to each other) does this passage convey? What does it say about the weekly theme of loving Jesus and loving others?
- What does this passage say about how my faith in and love for Jesus impacts my life? How is my love for Jesus evident in my actions—how I love and care for others? What are some of my current obstacles to experiencing Jesus love for me and expressing my love

for others? What do I need to ask of God to help me overcome these obstacles?

- Meditate on my faith and love for Jesus and how it changes how I see myself, how I live my life, and how I love others.
- How is Jesus speaking to me in the midst of my real, every day messy life, relationships, and circumstances? How might Jesus want to ignite my love for him? How might I arrange my life to cultivate a deeper experience of his love for me? How is he inviting me to concretely “love the Lord, and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people? What do I want to say to Jesus right now?

Sunday—John 21:15-19

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Monday—John 13:1; 12-17

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.... When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Tuesday—John 13:34-35

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Wednesday—John 14:21-24

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

Thursday—John 15:8-11

This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Friday—John 15:12-17

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

Saturday—John 17:23-26

I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

FOLLOW ME: Week of May 21, 2017

Throughout the gospels, Jesus has invited people to follow him. On Youth Sunday, we will have the joy of hearing some of our students share how they are following Jesus. As we read this week's devotions, we will review what Jesus has said and be challenged to consider what it means to follow Jesus. It is a high and holy calling that requires great commitment. Like the disciples we are human, weak, and sinful; we stumble and falter, but we can be confident that Jesus is working and wanting to transform us to make us the kind of people who can follow him each day of our lives.

In our last reading, we will see how Jesus calls Peter again to follow him. Peter is an inspiring example of someone who laid down his life in martyrdom. While most people are not called to that, we are called to lay down our lives as we "love the Lord and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people." For those committed to following Jesus, this will require absolute devotion and sacrifice for the glory of God and the welfare of his faith community and the world.

Weekly Reflection Questions

Please use the following questions daily to reflect on Jesus' invitation to "Follow me."

- What information (characters, places, actions, events, lines of argument and how all these relate to each other) does this passage convey? What does it say about the weekly theme of *Follow Me*?
- What does this passage say about Jesus' invitation to follow him? What are some of my current obstacles to following Jesus fully? What do I need to ask of God to help me overcome these obstacles?
- Meditate on Jesus's invitation to follow him. What are the real-life realities that I face in my family, relationships, work, and other life circumstances? Am I being intentional in seeking to follow Jesus by turning my attention to him to bring him glory in worship, listening to his voice by reading Scripture, talking with him about concerns and asking for direction in prayer? How might Jesus want to ignite a greater faith and commitment in me? How could I intentionally arrange my life to follow Jesus? What does it look like to "love the Lord, and love the people; serve the Lord and serve the people?"

Sunday—John 1:35-42

"Follow Me!" (Youth Sunday)

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi"

(which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

Monday—John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

Tuesday—John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Wednesday—John 10:22-30

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

Thursday—John 12:20-26

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Friday—John 13:36-38

Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

Saturday—John 21:19-25

Then he said to him, “Follow me!” Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

THE ASCENSION AND PENTECOST: Week of May 28, 2017

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...”

This week we celebrate Ascension Sunday, the day Jesus “returns to the Father.” And during this week we remember how the disciples waited for the coming of the Spirit. Waiting is a key element of faith development. We often want to get ahead of God, but we have to let go of

our compulsion to do things on our own and wait for God to do what only he can do in his time.

Jesus knew the disciples could not carry out his mission without the Holy Spirit. We can see the results. On the day of Pentecost when Jesus sent his Spirit to fill and empower his church, the disciples were changed people. They were no longer cowering in fear wondering what to do. They were able to teach, preach, witness, and manifest the power of the kingdom. They were caring for one another, sharing what they had, and fulfilling Jesus command “to love one another as I have loved you.” What a beautiful thing to behold.

Pentecost encourages us that we too can live lives of love, integrity, goodness, truth, sacrifice, and generosity because Jesus is in us and with us continuing his work through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Becoming like Christ together for the world is not a slogan; it is our mission. We are those sent by Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit to “love the Lord and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people.”

Weekly Reflection Questions

*Please use the following questions daily to reflect on **Jesus’ Ascension and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost?***

- What information (characters, places, actions, events, lines of argument and how all these relate to each other) does this passage convey? What do we learn about the Ascension and Pentecost?
- How are you at waiting on God to do what only God can do in his time? How do you see the Spirit of God at work in the community of believers? How do the words and actions of the disciples in this passage comfort, challenge, or convict you?
- Are you living a life that reflects the power of the Spirit? What obstacles do you face to living the life you think God wants you to live through his power?
- Meditate on what your life could look like if you lived that life.
- How might the Lord be inviting you to arrange your life to become more like Christ together for the world? As we conclude our Ignite Initiative, what concrete, practical steps can you take to “love the Lord and love the people, serve the Lord and serve the people”?

Ascension Sunday— Acts 1:1-14

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was

eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Monday—Acts 1:12-26

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.” (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms: “‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, “‘May another take his place of leadership.’ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living

among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Tuesday—Acts 2:1-13

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Wednesday—Acts 2:14-28

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

“‘I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest in hope,

because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,

you will not let your holy one see decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

Thursday—Acts 2:29-36

“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“‘The Lord said to my Lord:

“‘Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.’”

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Friday—Acts 2:37-42

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Saturday—Acts 2:43-47

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

