

Pastor's Message – 3/30/25  
John: Selected verses

With your indulgence, I'm going to pick on the women for a bit this morning.

Women: raise your hand if you are a daughter. I know, trick question.

Raise your hand, or keep it raised, if you are a sister.

Raise your hand, or keep it raised, if you are a mother.

Raise your hand, or keep it raised, if you are an aunt.

There are still a few hands raised. How can you be all those things at the same time?

One of the favorite books I have in my library explores each of the four gospels: how they are similar and how they are different. As you study the Bible, you will begin to notice that three of them, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are very similar to each other but very different from the gospel of John. The question is: why the differences?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the most similar and they are called the "Synoptic" Gospels from a Greek word meaning "to see together." They share similar vocabulary, chronology, and content because, though they have different emphases, they all see Jesus as proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching people how to live in it. Furthermore, they seem to have had a common source from which they drew – called "Q." They tell many of the same stories, contain many of the same words of Jesus, and follow a similar storyline.

However, they still have their own individual purposes and focus. Matthew, for example, and my favorite, is most concerned about how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and shows the continuing thread of God's revelation from the Old Testament through the New Testament.

Luke focuses primarily on how, in Jesus, the Kingdom of God has come near and how the new community of God should reflect and show the Kingdom of God among us. Mark is in a hurry. His Gospel is the shortest and eliminates some of what Matthew and Luke write. You'll notice that there are no records of Jesus' birth; he starts his Gospel with John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism at the hands of John. Mark's Gospel has three different endings, but the first ending stops when the women discover the empty tomb and has nothing about what happened after that. Mark is in

a hurry to tell his story. His favorite word, repeated many times is “immediately.”

John’s Gospel, however, offers a dramatically different perspective on Jesus. While much of the Synoptics tell us who God is, much of Jesus’s teaching in John, and John’s own reflections on Jesus, is aimed at telling his hearers who Jesus is, and how faith in him impacts the lives of those who believe in him. Jesus asks his disciples at one point in Matthew 16, Mark 8, and Luke 9, “Who do people say that I am?” He asks the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” In John’s Gospel, Jesus answers those questions himself.

For several years now, I’ve introduced you to Greek words, and Latin words, and Hebrew words, the history of Judeo-Christian faith. I even taught you a Hebrew phrase a few weeks ago: “Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu Melek ha’olam.” In English it means: “Blessed are you, LORD God, king of the universe.” It’s not just me, there is a song in our hymnal which we sang today – more Hebrew – “El Shaddai.” There are a number of names for God in the hymn and the translation of the words is at the bottom of the page in the hymnal.

The most common name for God in the Old Testament (Hebrew Scripture) is YHWH or Yahweh, usually pronounced in English as “Yah-way.” Jewish people, out of reverence, will usually not speak God’s name aloud. When reading Scripture aloud, “they will instead say, *ha Shem*—‘the Name.’ Or they may substitute the Hebrew word *Adonai*—Lord—for YHWH.” English Bibles often follow this practice, substituting “LORD” in all capital letters for YHWH.

Trying to understand who God is, trying to pigeonhole God, goes way back. In the Book of Exodus, Moses encounters a burning bush on the mountain which is not consumed, and God speaks to him from that bush. Moses receives his commission to go to Egypt to free God’s people from slavery. Moses protests, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?” God replies, “I Am Who Am” or, more simply, “I am.”

We had several verses from the Gospel of John today and you’re probably remembering them and the lightbulb is going on in your head. They all began, “I am ...”

I am:

The gate for the sheep.  
 The good shepherd.  
 The resurrection and the life.  
 The way, the truth, and the life.  
 The light of the world.  
 The bread of life.  
 The true grape vine.

One or another of these images may resonate most with you. The one that is the most fleshed out in John's Gospel is Jesus' statement: "I am the bread of life." I was tempted to offer Communion today and to have a loaf of bread baking in the Sanctuary today, but decided not to, because all of the other "I am" statements are appropriate as well.

Jesus illuminates our darkness—our times of grief and loss, of turning away from God, or of being lost—but also call all followers of Jesus and reminds us that we ARE the light of the world as we reflect God's light and love.

Jesus "is the gate by which we enter God's pasture and protection. He protects us from the 'thief'—the evil one who would harm us by drawing us away from God—whose greatest desire is that none would be lost, but in and through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have the hope, the promise, and the guarantee of salvation for all who believe and accept that gift of saving grace. in the death and resurrection of Jesus which we will celebrate again in just a few weeks, Jesus promises that those who die with him also rise with him.

"Jesus is the Good Shepherd who strengthens the weak, heals the sick, binds up the injured, brings back the strays, and searches for the lost." Healthy spiritual lives depend upon remaining connected to Christ. Christ is the vine and we are the branches.

This canvas had been hidden in the attic for several years, but when the Sanctuary was remodeled, recarpeted and repainted, there was, all of a sudden, I thought, a place to bring it out as a reminder that "Jesus is not a way, or a truth, or one possible path of life. He is *the way, the truth, and the life.*" There may be wisdom in other faith statements and practices, but it is only in and through Jesus that the Kingdom of God comes into full reality.

Next Sunday, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month, we will again celebrate the grace given at the Lord's Table. I've been keeping a recipe for

Communion bread that I've had for 30 years or so and it's a good recipe. I made enough a while back that we still have some in the freezer and hopefully, we can enjoy that next week. It's more than tasty, more than physical, but is a reminder to me of a life of faith and presence of God's Spirit in my life. It is a reminder of all the ways that God has been with me and directing me and inviting me back time and time again when I get discouraged.

Bread is more than just a platform for the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that I eat when I'm traveling over lunchtime; the bread that Jesus gives offers life. Although all four Gospels narrate Jesus's miraculous feeding of a multitude, 5,000 men in one story and 4,000 men in another (women and children were not even counted), only in John does Jesus have a lengthy dialogue after the event. In this dialogue, Jesus refers to himself as bread several times, including as "the bread of life."

I mentioned a couple weeks ago how the only words of Jesus that Paul records are in his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians as he reminds us of Jesus' words of institution at Communion. "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it."

Every month I have the privilege of breaking bread and drinking from the cup with home-bound members of our Church and, of course, every 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month here. It is a special gift, an important tradition in the history of every Church.

Jesus is "the bread of life, and our faith in him and our participation in the Eucharist nourish our souls. And, as his followers, we're meant to offer bread to others, literal food as he did to the five thousand who were hungry, but also offering the bread we find in Jesus to a world that is spiritually malnourished."

Jesus is, at the same time, many things for many people and that may change for you as you live your lives, but that is the beauty of Jesus, that whenever we need Jesus, he is there for us in just the way we need him. He is, for the world, just what we need to find peace that the Kingdom of God may come fully, and heaven and earth may become one.