



The Book of Signs - Week 5

Week 5, Day 1

John 6:24-35, 41-51

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am

the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Understanding the Text:

This week, we are going to study five of the seven instances of Jesus referring to himself with a predicate nominative in the Gospel of John. In each of these, he says, "I am..." and equates himself with an everyday item as a metaphor for his divine attributes.

- I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35)
- I am the Light of the World (John 8:12)
- I am the Gate (John 10:9)
- I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14)
- I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)

There are two other instances in which Jesus refers to himself with an "I Am" statement, which occur in the Book of Glory (the second part of John):

- I am the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6)
- I am the True Vine (John 15:1,5)

It's been a few weeks since we have been in John 6, so let's look at the context for this passage. Immediately before this, Jesus has fed the five thousand with five small barley loaves and two small fish. He multiplies the food and ends up with twelve baskets of leftovers. An incredible sign! And yet...

Just one day later the people are back hoping for another sign. They wake up the next morning looking for Jesus and can't figure out how he got to the other side of the lake (they don't know that he walked across to the disciples' boat). Jesus cuts to the chase and says, "you're only curious about where I've been because I fed you yesterday and you're hungry again."

Like guests at a fabulous dinner party who hope for a return invitation, the people's interest in Jesus was short-sighted and self-serving. They didn't go looking for a relationship that would satisfy them – they were just aiming to fill their bellies again.

The crowd asked Jesus for a sign (verse 30), as if they had not just seen the sign of the feeding of five thousand. They share the same temptation that many of us struggle with: asking God, "What have you done for me lately?" Think about the last time you had a great meal and then dessert came out really quickly after the main course. Did you wait a minute to see if you were really hungry before digging in? Or did you just continue to eat? Similarly, the disciples didn't wait a minute to evaluate what Jesus had just done; they immediately looked for more.

Jesus tells them that he has so much more to offer than literal relief from hunger. He draws a parallel to the manna that God provided the Israelites in the wilderness. That manna, which they could not keep for more than a day, required that they trusted God would continue to provide. In the same way, Jesus wants the people to trust in him for abundant life.

This abundant life is not a preview of eternal heavens but is something that happens here and now. In verse 33, Jesus says the bread gives life *to the world*. In verse 47, Jesus says that whoever believes *has* eternal life. Jesus came to bring abundant life to people *in the present*.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Can you think of a time when you have asked God, “what have you done for me lately?” Try to remember what was happening in your life at the time and reframe your question into a prayer of thanksgiving for the things God was doing for you even though it didn’t look exactly like what you wanted.
2. How can we practice waiting a minute to see if we are content rather than always looking for more?
3. What does it mean to you to have abundant life here and now?

Week 5, Day 2

John 8:12-20

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” ¹⁴ Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” ¹⁹ Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰ He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

Understanding the Text:

The Feast of the Tabernacles was an annual festival celebrating both the fall harvest as well as recalling Israel’s time in the wilderness after the Exodus. During that time, God went in front of them as a pillar of flame to guide the people by night (Exodus 13:21-22). In commemoration of this, enormous lampstands symbolizing the presence of God are erected at the festival. Each evening during the festival, there is an “Illumination of the Temple” in which the lamps are lit. The light was so bright that it illumined the whole city.

It is in this setting that Jesus spoke the words, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.” Imagine the impact of his statement in that venue. He was, once again, equating himself to God by linking himself to the pillars of fire. Further, the people do not believe him because he is testifying on his own behalf (v. 13), which is a direct contradiction to Deuteronomy 19:15: A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” But Jesus doesn’t need other witnesses because he is not judged by human standards.

The desire to judge by the standards of the world – what we can understand – often makes it hard for us to recognize the divine light. When we look for guidance, we look to what makes sense to us or satisfies our need for control. We want to see the destination and not be limited to what is immediately before us. Instead, Jesus wants us to let him be the light that guides our steps, even if that means we only see one step ahead at a time. Psalm 119:105 reminds us that we have a lamp that guides our path, but we have to trust in God.

When we do really lean into that trust, we fulfill what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: that we are the light of the world as well (Matthew 5:14). The more we experience Jesus as our light, the more it becomes a part of us, and we shine God’s love and mercy on to other people.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Has your faith provided light in a time of darkness?
2. Can you think of a time in which God led you step by step even though you didn't know the destination?
3. What does it mean for you to be a light in the world?

Week 5, Day 3

John 10:1-10

¹Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Understanding the Text:

The gate of a sheepfold (which we often refer to as a pen) offered security and protection for the sheep in a multitude of ways. During Jesus' time, these pens were bound by rocks piled on top of each other to create walls and would have only one entrance and exit. There was a risk of animal predators coming into an unsecured pen to attack the sheep as well as of thieves who would steal the valuable livestock. Thus, that opening would be secured with a gate to keep danger out.

It also offered security as the place where the sheep were checked to make sure they were healthy. The sheep would graze and roam in areas outside of the pen, but would return to the pen to rest. As they went through the gate one by one, the shepherd would inspect them for injuries or pests so that he could tend to them as needed.

A common temptation of Christ followers is to feel like they are locked into a sheepfold – a pen, a prison – of rules and restrictions. But that is to totally misunderstand the freedom of Christ. The gate isn't meant to keep the sheep bound to one place forever. It is to give them security and to be a doorway to pastures of pleasure and joy.

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, W. Phillip Keller recounts his time on a sheep ranch in Africa. He says that because sheep are restless creatures and struggle with settling down, there are four conditions that must be met: the sheep must be free from (1) fear, (2) friction with others in the flock, (3) parasites and pests, and (4) hunger. Along these same lines, the theologian Neal Plantinga observed that most kids go to bed without fretting about ice on the shingles or whether the bills can be paid or if someone at the IRS will decide to conduct an audit. Instead, they wriggle drowsily in their beds "awash in the knowledge that someone else was in charge... and with literally no cares to make their minds too busy to sleep." The security of the gate calms the flock's fear and

allows them to truly rest. The security of parents provide comfort to their sleepy children. And the security of Jesus gives us refuge and sanctuary in the midst of a broken world.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When you feel restless and unable to settle, how does it help to think of Jesus as the gate between you and the troubles of the world?
2. What are the characteristics of the gatekeeper in verses 3-5? How do these compare to the characteristics that you experience of God's?
3. Why is it important to know the voice of the gatekeeper? What would happen to sheep that didn't know the voice of the gatekeeper?

Week 5, Day 4

John 10:11-18

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Understanding the Text:

Like the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, Jesus lays down his life for us. But his act of self-sacrifice on the cross isn't the only way this happens. His whole life is a model of sacrificial love and it is the model for the way in which we should live.

Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd here, but after his resurrection, he charges his followers with that same task – “feed my sheep” (John 21:17). He says that he lays his life down for the sheep, and in 1 John 3, we are told that we ought to lay down our lives for one another. The work of the good shepherd continues through us.

Our sin nature leads us to self-protection and self-preservation. It is not natural for us to want to lay down our lives for someone else. Though there are some who give up their physical lives for others, this is rare and probably not the thing to which Jesus was calling all of us.

What if laying our lives down for others looks like abundant mercy and love? What if it looks like giving something that can never be paid for or returned? What if it looks like self-limitation so that someone else can have freedom? What if it looks like sacrificing a desired purchase in order to give resources to someone who needs them?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Read Psalm 23. Take a few minutes to write down how you experience God as a shepherd.
2. How are you fulfilling the call to “feed my sheep”?
3. What does self-sacrifice mean to you?

Week 5, Day 5

John 11:17-27

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Understanding the Text:

Pastor Rob Fuquay contrasts resurrection with the idea of resuscitation. So many of us think we are longing for resurrection, but what we actually want is resuscitation, which is simply bringing back to life the old thing that is gone. What we should long for is resurrection, which is the "miracle of new possibilities." Resurrection doesn't just restore the old life, but brings about a completely new one.

These new possibilities cannot come about unless we have first suffered through the pain of death. That is, truly, the hardest part about resurrection: it requires death to occur. This is the place where Jesus found Mary and Martha. They were deep in grief from their brother's death when Jesus declared to them, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Martha's response is hopeful. She says, "but even now I know" in her acknowledgement of Jesus' power. She says that she believes Jesus is the Messiah coming into the world. It is the presence of God that gives her hope even in the midst of her pain and anger. But she still doesn't understand the timeline. She reiterates to Jesus what was commonly believed by the Pharisees in the first century: that there would eventually be a resurrection, and all would be raised to life with God.

This is where Jesus corrects her. The resurrection isn't some distant, unknown day in the future. The resurrection is now, through Jesus. He wants her, and all of us, to understand that we can have new, resurrected lives in the present.

As Christians, we take comfort that God is in the business of resurrection, making old things new, redeeming the lost and returning all things back to the original good that God declared in the beginning of creation. This happens both in our lives now and in our life that comes beyond death. Yes, in our life there is death and there is grief, but death never has the final say. Jesus Christ and that glorious empty grave is our promise that God is in the business of resurrecting those things that have died.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What do you think it means to experience resurrection now?
2. Have you experienced a death in your life – of a loved one, a relationship, a job, financial security, health – that led you to the miracle of new possibilities? What was that like? How did you see God in that situation?
3. Do you long for resurrection or resuscitation?

Video Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus uses “I Am” statements?
2. To which of the “I Am” statements do you most relate? Why?
3. What do you think it means to never hunger again?
4. Tom talked about how he sometimes doesn’t turn to Christ for fulfillment. Can you relate? What does that look like in your own life?
5. Do you feel like you are “working for” the bread? How can you turn away from this mentality of working for things that benefit you rather than the kingdom?
6. How have you experienced Jesus as the light on your path?
7. What are the characteristics of the Good Shepherd? How does that impact your trust in God?
8. How does Jesus’ promise to be the resurrection right now look in your life?

Prayer requests and other notes.