



"I am"

**Studies on the
"I am" sayings
of Jesus in
John's Gospel**

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Introduction

These studies have been designed principally for use by small groups in a parish context but can also be used by individuals.

If you are meeting as a group, it is a good idea to appoint someone to make sure that the meeting space is prepared each week. Discussion is aided by having people sitting in a circle or similar arrangement, so members of the group can all see each other. It is often helpful to have a small table in the centre of the space as a focus for the worship time at the start and finish of each session. Ideally, this should not be used for other purposes during the study.

Each session has some suggestions for closing worship. These may be used in the context of a time of open prayer, or as part of the daily office (*A Prayer Book for Australia* pages 383-424).

Many groups find it helpful to have a discussion leader or facilitator. There is, however, no need for these studies to be led by an 'expert'; the material in the study guide should be sufficient to allow the group to provide its own leadership.

Some of the studies require specific resources; these are listed at the start of the study. It may be a good idea to flip ahead at the end of each session and appoint someone to gather any special requirements for the following week.

"I am the bread of life."

Opening worship

You may like to light a large candle as a focus for your time together.

Spend a minute in silence. Allow yourself to think about the things that have been occupying your time and energy in the last couple of hours. As you sit in silence, create a mental image of God's sovereign love – the throne of God, or the cross of Christ, for example. Bring your concerns and pre-occupations into God's presence, and entrust them to God.

Ask God's blessing on your time of study and reflection. As you do so, you may like to use this prayer:

Gracious God,
we thank you for your gifts of wisdom, truth and knowledge.
As we enter into this study,
may the truth of your Word illuminate our lives and
the Spirit of Wisdom enliven our understanding.
Make us alert to your voice in the pages of Scripture and the
words of our neighbours,
that hearing, we may believe and
believing, we may experience your transforming life. Amen

Engaging the text

Read *John 6:31-59*. As you do so, take note of any words or ideas that seem strange, puzzling or particularly significant.

Context/background

One of the great defining experiences in the life of the people of God was their liberation from slavery in Egypt and the journey to the land God had promised them – that great event

we know as the Exodus. During their time in the wilderness, the people had no obvious source of food – no crops, no trading partners, no steady supply of edible plants. So God provides for them each day (Exodus 16:11-36), sending down manna, bread from heaven, which the Israelites find lying on the ground when they rise each morning.

This manna from heaven is a reminder to the people of their utter dependence on God for all things, even the very basics of human sustenance. It is also a sign, repeated daily, of God's faithfulness. The manna the Israelites eat in the wilderness is a sign of God's providential care for God's people.

For Jesus' first hearers, these themes of God's providential care, especially in the context of the Exodus, would have been particularly powerful, because the events of this chapter occurred in the context of the Feast of Passover (John 6:4), the great celebration of God's liberating act in freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt, their 'exodus' from slavery to freedom.

Understanding the text

Reread verses 32-34.

What do you think Jesus is saying about himself?

What do his hearers understand by his remarks?

You may like to reflect on the parallel ambiguity in Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman (John 4:12-15) when Jesus declares himself to be the source of "living water".

Throughout history, bread in its various shapes has been viewed as 'the staff of life', something fundamental to human existence.

What does it mean for Jesus to describe himself as the bread of life?

Biblical scholars have debated at length about what Jesus means when he says “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (v 51, 57-8) Most agree that Jesus is speaking metaphorically, i.e. Jesus is not literally bread, but bread suggests in some way a resemblance to Jesus. We eat this bread of eternal life by faith, not physically – we receive eternal life by trusting in the saving work of Christ in his self-giving on the cross. (v 46-47)

This great work of Christ, and the images of bread and flesh, are brought together in our remembrance when we gather at the Lord’s Table.

What is your experience of feeding on Christ by faith?

Applying the text

How does this shape my understanding?

The ancient Israelites knew God’s care through the daily appearance of the manna in the wilderness. Jesus’ followers saw and touched and tasted his care for them as they ate the bread and fish he provided for the five thousand.

In what ways have you experienced God’s gracious provision?

How has God ‘fed’ you?

How can this change my life?

In the wilderness, God told the people of Israel that they could only gather enough manna for their needs that day – if they tried to store it for the next day, it would spoil. In short, they had to trust God, not once, but every day. Jesus also speaks

of sharing in the bread of life, and consequently abiding in him, as an ongoing, dynamic experience.

Does the Christian life require the same sort of trust that Israel was asked to show in the wilderness?

What are the challenges of trusting God in this way?

Jesus describes those who receive him as the bread of life as abiding in him – being made one with him.

What difference does it make to abide in Christ?

Concluding worship

Guided meditation

Spend a moment sitting quietly. Then have one member of the group read the following reflection.

I invite you to relax, to calm your mind.
Focus for a moment on your breathing.
Feel the rise and fall of each breath.
Rest your feet firmly on the floor, relax your hands.
You may find it helpful to close your eyes.

I invite you to come with me on a journey of the imagination. A journey to a place far away, in time and space. To Galilee, about 2000 years ago.

It's a bit crowded. Capernaum isn't a big town. And it's full of people. People who live here. And people, like you, who have just rowed across that great and treacherous lake, the Sea of Galilee, to be here.

It was worth it – that rough crossing. You've found the teacher. Jesus – the one who was over on your side of the lake yesterday. And he's saying some extraordinary things. Little by little, you put the excitement of the quest behind you, forget the rigours of the journey, and start to listen. Really listen.

This Jesus is clearly someone special, but he's hard to follow sometimes. "I am the bread of life" he says. He's talking about the manna the old timers ate in the wilderness. Gosh, that was such a long time ago, it's hard to know if it's truth or fable. Jesus clearly thinks it's real. Don't give Moses the credit, he says. God sent the manna. Bread for all the camp, every day. Out of nowhere.

Bread out of nowhere ... it reminds you of that amazing business yesterday, when Jesus fed ... what ... how many? 4, 5, thousand maybe? With a couple of those smelly little dried fish and a few loaves, not the size of a man's fist. You'd been famished. And somehow, you had more than enough to eat. You and all the rest.

And now he's on about bread again. Manna from heaven – that was the stuff in Moses' time. And bread from heaven – now. He reckons he's the bread of life, sent from heaven.

You shake your head. That's just too weird. You start to walk away.

Then you stop. The memory of yesterday floods back. It wasn't possible. But it happened.

Bread from heaven – food, strength, life. That was what God had promised, wasn't it.

Could this Jesus be more than a great teacher?

Could he be the fulfilment of God's promise?

You think about your life.

Remember how you feel drawn to this Jesus.

Even this morning, when he wasn't there by the lake.

What was it that made you jump in the boat, and follow him here?

It's another day with no work done.

But there's something about him.
His words.
His presence.
He fills a gap you didn't even know was there before.

(Pause).

I invite you now to leave the village of Capernaum, to bring your mind gently back to our present world.
As you do so, let's take a moment to ask ourselves, in silence – who is Jesus for us?

Prayer:

Grant, O Lord,
that we may see in you the fulfilment of all our need,
and may turn from every false satisfaction
to feed on the true and living bread
that you have given us in Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect (OS19, Yr B) A Prayer Book for Australia

“I am the light of the world”

Resources: some candles, matches, torch, lamp

*African song, “We are marching in the light of God”.
(Together in Song 666)*

Opening worship

You may like to light a large candle as a focus for your time together.

Spend a minute in silence. Allow yourself to think about the things that have been occupying your time and energy in the last couple of hours. As you sit in silence, create a mental image of God’s sovereign love – the throne of God, or the cross of Christ, for example. Bring your concerns and pre-occupations into God’s presence, and entrust them to God.

Ask God’s blessing on your time of study and reflection. As you do so, you may like to use this prayer.

Gracious God,
we thank you for your gifts of wisdom, truth and knowledge.
As we enter into this study,
may the truth of your Word illuminate our lives and
the Spirit of Wisdom enliven our understanding.
Make us alert to your voice in the pages of Scripture and the
words of our neighbours,
that hearing, we may believe and
believing, we may experience your transforming life. Amen

Engaging the text

Read John 8:12-20. As you do so, take note of any words or ideas that seem strange, puzzling or particularly significant.

Context/background

In Jesus' time there was no street lighting or electricity. Darkness and light were very powerful images. In Hebrew thought, light is revelation, the presence of the divine and salvation.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a reminder of the time the ancient Israelites spent wandering in the wilderness, guided by God's presence in the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. During the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, the Women's Court in the Temple was brightly illuminated. It is in the midst of this spectacular Feast that Jesus claims: "I am the light of the world".

In the introduction to his account of Jesus' life and ministry, John states that Jesus is "the life that was the light of all people" (1:4) and thus links light and life. Jesus' life is the light that lights men and women and brings life to them. Light reveals, and so we see our true identity and situation; we can either seek life in Christ or we can turn from Christ, the light of the world, and thus come under condemnation... "people loved darkness rather than light" (3:19).

Jesus declares himself the light in 8:12; 9:5;

Understanding the text

If doing this study at night, turn off the lights, shut the curtains and sit still for two minutes. If during day time shut your eyes and set the alarm for two minutes.

What do you feel?

What impresses you about being in total darkness?

Again make the room as dark as possible but now light a candle, lamp, or turn on a torch.

What sensations and impressions, thoughts come to you?

Share in the group.

Light brings judgment because it shows us choices and it reveals what we choose. But light's role is to save and to bring forth life in us. Jesus is the light that enables me to see. I can decide to walk in love and justice or I can return to darkness, to un-light, where concealment and evil, the dark-side of our human life, rules. (3:19-21)

What factors might influence the choice you make? What does that choice say about you?

In the midst of the spectacular Feast of Tabernacles Jesus claims: "I am the light of the world". Not unexpectedly, his claim is challenged: you cannot be your own witness. Where are your witnesses to back up this claim? Interestingly, this very question shows how untrustworthy and unjust our world is: I cannot be trusted, I must have a witness to my claims! How sad. Hence, "the testimony of two witnesses is valid"(17). Jesus states that his Father is his witness to his claim, "I am the light of the world".

What reaction does this cause? Why may the people have reacted like this?

If there is time, read the account of Jesus bringing sight to the blind man in John 9:1-41. How does this illustrate Jesus' claim, "I am the light of the world" (9:5; 8:12)?

Applying the text

How does this shape my understanding?

How is a person “light”?

In what ways is Jesus “light”?

In what ways is Jesus the “light of the world”?

In what ways is Jesus the answer to the question: “Where is God?”

Light is not always welcome. Light enables us to see things clearly. It also shows up things that would otherwise be hidden.

In what sense does Jesus as the light of the world reveal, judge, save and nurture life?

How can this change my life?

With revelation comes truth and accountability. Justice is not only about my own just behaviour but about a just world because Jesus is the light of the world. It involves seeing all of life as it really is and asking, “Am I prepared for this?”

What role do I and can I have in making a just world?
(Micah 6:8)

In John 12:35,36 Jesus encourages his followers to walk in the light and to become children of light. .

What might this mean, for ourselves and for others?

Share ways in which you invite people to become children of the light.

Concluding worship

Play or sing and dance the African song, “Walk, walk, in the light, walking in the light of God”.

Reflect: “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” (3:19-21)

Take a moment to reflect on those times when you have not allowed God’s light to shine fully and freely in your life. Ask God’s forgiveness for these times.

Take an unlit candle. As you hold it, think about the ways in which you can be a light in the world. Place your candle on the metal tray or sand dish, and light it.

Once the candles are lit, pray together:

God of Light and life, we confess that we have sometimes chosen the darkness of selfish living rather than the light of your love.

Shed your light in our lives, and make us whole.

Jesus, light of the world, we thank you that by your living and dying you make us children of light.

Teach us to walk in the light, and bring wholeness to others.

Jesus, light of the world, you bring sight to the blind:

Help us to see as you see, and to care as you care.

Jesus, light of the world, you call us to new life.

**Give us the will to live as children of light,
spreading your light of justice and truth throughout
the world.**

“I am the true vine.”

Resources: Song – *“I am the vine you are the branches”*
(optional)

Opening worship

You may like to light a large candle as a focus for your time together.

Spend a minute in silence. Allow yourself to think about the things that have been occupying your time and energy in the last couple of hours. As you sit in silence, create a mental image of God’s sovereign love – the throne of God, or the cross of Christ, for example. Bring your concerns and pre-occupations into God’s presence, and entrust them to God.

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the Spirit of Wisdom enliven our understanding.
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words of our neighbours,
that hearing, we may believe and
believing, we may experience your transforming life. Amen

2. Engaging the text

Read John 15:1-8. As you do so, take note of any words or ideas that seem strange, puzzling or particularly significant.

Context/background

Grapevines play a big part in the life of Israel. All Jesus' hearers would have known how important it was to prune or 'cleanse' the vines each year, removing any dead or diseased wood to allow for the growth of a healthy vine.

For the disciples gathered in the Upper Room, however, this reference to the vine would have been rich with meaning on many other levels. They have just shared a meal with Jesus – his last, as they will soon discover. In the midst of that meal, Jesus has taken the fruit of the vine - a cup of wine - and shared it with them, speaking as he did so of his own blood, and of the new covenant.

This new covenant was greatly anticipated. God had promised it to Jeremiah (Jer 31:31). It is both a testimony to God's grace and faithfulness, and a sad indictment of Israel. In several places in the Old Testament, God speaks through his prophets, likening Israel to a vine, not a strong, productive, healthy vine but a wild, unproductive vine that will not respond to pruning, will not bear good fruit.

It is against this background that Jesus declares "I am the true vine".

Understanding the text

Draw a grapevine in the space below:

Label the parts of the vine.

Reread John 15: 5.

To what part of the vine is Jesus referring?

In verses 1-3, Jesus talks about the way in which God the Father cleans or prunes the vine. In doing so, he assures his disciples that “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

Take some time to reflect on the ways in which the Word of God has cleansed you.

Verses 4-8 focus on the fruitful life that awaits those who abide in Christ.

Make a list of people you have known who have shown you something of what it means to abide in Christ.

How did their relationship with Christ reveal itself in their lives?

3. Applying the text

How does this shape my understanding?

Look again at your drawing of the vine.

Where do you see yourself?

Where do you want to see yourself?

How can this change my life?

What does it mean for you to abide in Christ?

What can you do to remain as strongly connected as possible to Jesus, the true vine?

4. Concluding worship

Play the song – “I am the vine you are the branches”

- Thank God for our life in Christ, the true vine
- Pray for perseverance.

“I am the way and the truth and the life.”

Opening worship

You may like to light a large candle as a focus for your time together.

Spend a minute in silence. Allow yourself to think about the things that have been occupying your time and energy in the last couple of hours. As you sit in silence, create a mental image of God’s sovereign love – the throne of God, or the cross of Christ, for example. Bring your concerns and pre-occupations into God’s presence, and entrust them to God.

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Make us alert to your voice in the pages of Scripture and the
words of our neighbours,
that hearing, we may believe and
believing, we may experience your transforming life. Amen.

Engaging the text

Read John 13:31-14:14. You may like to arrange for five readers of the passage,: the Narrator, Jesus, Simon Peter, Thomas and Philip.

As you listen, take note of any words or ideas that seem strange, puzzling or particularly significant.

Context/background

Jesus is saying, “Goodbye” to his disciples during the course of what will be their last meal together. They have gathered for this ‘Last Supper’, in the upper room to eat the Passover meal, a reminder of God’s final act of judgement and grace in breaking them loose from Pharaoh’s grip in Egypt by having God’s angel of judgement and death kill all the first born in Egypt, only “passing over” and sparing from death those who had obeyed God’s command to mark their door posts with the blood of a sacrificial lamb. Unknown to the disciples, this Passover celebration is the setting for the coming self sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Jesus’ farewell ministry to his own disciples in the upper room begins with the footwashing in chapter 13 and concludes with Jesus’ prayer for them, and us, in 17. The events of his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection then follow. Thus, these chapters 13-17 are loaded with emotion and significance as Jesus says goodbye to his disciples, responds to their concerns and questions as expressed by Peter, Thomas and Philip and seeks to care for them. “I will come back for you,” Jesus assures them. “One day you will be with me and my Father. Until then, trust me, and remember who I am.”

Understanding the text

Following the footwashing and the departure of the traitor, Judas Iscariot, Jesus declares, “Now is the Son of Man glorified” referring to his now inevitable death and resurrection. This title, ‘Son of Man’ refers to Daniel’s vision of the one sent by God to exercise everlasting rule over the earth (Daniel 7:13-14). That Jesus uses it in this context points to a great paradox: the glory of God is shown in the love which suffers. Jesus leaves the disciples with a fundamental task which will be both comfort and challenge- “Love one another; by this all people will know that you are my disciples”. Jesus’ disciples are to love one another.

In what way(s) do you think that the disciples’ love for one another glorifies God?

Peter asks the question which must surely have been in the minds of all the disciples: “Lord, where are you going?” (13:36) He asks with a clear purpose – so that he can follow Jesus wherever he goes. He is not content that Jesus says he can follow later, he wants to do so now, even if it involves dying for his Lord and Master. There is a certain irony here; Peter declares he will lay down his life for Jesus but fails to do so, while Jesus is about to lay down his life for Peter!

Reread John 14:1-4. In the face of their confusion, what reassurance does Jesus give?

Jesus tells the disciples he is going away, going to prepare a place for them. Where is this place that Jesus is going to, a place to be prepared also for the disciples? In what way do you think this fellowship in the upper room was somehow the forerunner of being with Jesus in “the place where I am going”?

The question posed by Thomas: “How can we know the way?” (14:5) shows the disciples’ ongoing confusion at Jesus’ talk of

his going. “Where to?” “Which way?” “Please, we need directions!”

How do we understand this place to which Jesus is going, described as the ‘Father’s house’ and ‘the place’ for those in Christ? We find a clue in the similarity of the words, “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places” (14:2) and, “Abide in me, and I in you.” (John 15:4) In other words, it is not a destination on a map but a person- The Person, the “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”!

The goal of our life is perfect fellowship with the Father and the Son. The full meaning of this is beyond our understanding. We catch glimpses. The ‘new heaven and new earth’ are essentially where the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb dwell with “his peoples” (Rev 21:1-3,22).

The way and the dwelling are personal; in a person, in Jesus himself. We pass through him to get to and to dwell with the Father.

What does it mean for us to experience Jesus as “the way”?
What does it mean to abide in Jesus, and through him to abide in the Father?

Jesus doesn’t just claim to be the way to the Father, he also says “I am the life.” True life is the life of Christ. “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’”. (Acts 17:28) “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John10:10) As we are united to Christ we are united to the Father. Thus “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus knows that he is about to journey through death to eternity. Death is a thick curtain blocking sight, sound and touch, knowledge and knowing. Some speak of playing golf with Saint Peter, but in truth we do not know. Jesus will open the way through death to life eternal by his self-offering on the cross. (Hebrews 10:12)

What do you think the disciples understood when Jesus declared himself to be ‘the life’?

What does it mean for us to know that Jesus opens the way to eternal life for us?

Philip, bewildered by Jesus' claim that the disciples have seen the Father, asks that Jesus "Show us the Father" (14:8). His request brings forth a restatement of Jesus' revealing of the Father and then the call and challenge of Jesus for his followers to engage in mission: "(You) will do the works that I do" (14:12) Note the vital role of prayer in mission (14:13,14).

How do we understand this call to be missionary disciples?

Do you expect to see these signs of faith in your situation today?

Applying the text

How does this shape my understanding?

Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth and the life." "I am the truth." Truth is 'conformity with fact or reality' (Macquarie Dictionary 3rd Ed) and this is so in Christ. Truth is not a set of propositions but a Personal Being known relationally by love. Truth, then, is personal. Through Jesus Christ there is knowledge of God. (1:18)

How do we discern and follow truth?

How can this change my life?

Jesus says, "Believe in God, believe also in me."

What does this "believe in" actually mean in my day by day living?

When is it easiest to believe?

What makes it hard to do so?

"Jesus is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3).

How are we to take hold of/ hang onto this truth?

What do I want my funeral notice in the newspaper to say about me?

Does it refer to my dwelling/ abiding in Christ?

Is this true to my life?

Concluding worship

Reflection

Sit quietly for a few minutes, while a member of the group reads the following reflection:

Can you remember a time when you felt lost? Not emotionally, or spiritually, but just plain physically lost.

Perhaps you were driving somewhere unfamiliar, or walking in the bush with poorly defined or badly signposted tracks.

Maybe you had ventured into a big shopping mall, where everything looks the same, and there was nothing to give you a sense of direction.

Remember how it felt to be lost. Were you frustrated? Afraid? Anxious? Annoyed?

How did you feel at the moment when you regained a sense of where you were, and where you needed to go?

Sit with that feeling for a moment.

Jesus said, "I am the way". In him, we have our direction, our path, our goal.

Let's pray:

Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life.

Lead us, guide us by your Word that we may follow in your footsteps.

Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life.

Give us your Spirit of discernment that we may know your truth,

Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life.

**By your death we are freed from the tyranny of death.
Pour out your Spirit upon us that our lives may declare your glory.**

“I am the resurrection and the life.”

Resources: A wide, shallow bowl filled with water. Some fresh flower blooms to float in the water during the closing worship.

Opening worship

You may like to light a large candle as a focus for your time together.

Spend a minute in silence. Allow yourself to think about the things that have been occupying your time and energy in the last couple of hours. As you sit in silence, create a mental image of God’s sovereign love – the throne of God, or the cross of Christ, for example. Bring your concerns and pre-occupations into God’s presence, and entrust them to God.

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that hearing, we may believe and
believing, we may experience your transforming life. Amen

Engaging the text

Read John 11:1-44. As you do so, take note of any words or ideas that seem strange, puzzling or particularly significant.

Context/background

Since the time of King David, Jerusalem had been the centre of Jewish religious life, the symbol of God dwelling with God's people. But it was also the centre for the religious leaders opposed to Jesus. Bethany was only a few kilometres from Jerusalem. It was therefore risky for Jesus to visit Bethany. Jesus enjoyed his friendship with the two sisters and brother. (Luke 10:38-42) It was a friendship which was obviously rich and precious, as we see in verse 3: "Lord, he whom you love is ill." Would Jesus risk visiting them or stay away and pray for healing?

In his commentary on John's Gospel, Dr Leon Morris reminds us that human beings have always known death as the great enemy: "Throughout the ancient world the fear of death was universal. Death was a grim adversary that all feared and that no man could defeat." Jesus is faced with a very difficult decision. Remember that Jesus' life was already under threat (John chapters 7 & 8) and Thomas is expecting Jesus' decision to visit Lazarus will mean the disciples' own deaths. But Jesus also knows that his dear friend Lazarus is dying, without him. Death all around!

Bringing someone back from the dead is an extraordinary event, and occurring as it does towards the end of Jesus' ministry, we can understand it as the climax of his ministry. Even more significantly it highlights Jesus' self-revelation, "I am the resurrection and the life". (v 25) In demonstrating his power to give life Jesus heightens his clash with the religious leaders and draws his own death closer.

Understanding the text

For how many days was Lazarus dead?
What does this imply?

Look again at verses 21 and 32.

What did Mary and Martha each say upon meeting Jesus?
How do you think they felt about their friend's response to their call for help?

Jesus was confident that "All is for the glory of God" v 4.
Do you think it was?

For whom/what were Jesus' tears shed...his friend Lazarus, the weeping sisters, people's fear of death, their lack of trust in God, or his own coming death and suffering?

Can you imagine what the people were thinking would happen when Jesus commanded, "Lazarus, come out!"?

Would you have helped unbind Lazarus? Why?

Would this have helped people believe Jesus' claim, "I am the resurrection and the life"?

What would their response have meant?

Applying the text

How does this shape my understanding?

Christ is the source of all life: 'All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.' (John 1:3) Resurrection is victory over death. Though Jesus seemed weak when he was crucified, his death was actually the time of victory, of life gained through death.

What does it mean for us to say with Martha, "I believe in the resurrection" (verse 25)?

Eternal life: John wrote his account of Jesus' life with a clear aim: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.' (John 20:30,31)

Where are you up to in your conversation with Jesus? Can you say with Martha, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (11:27)?

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God's purposes will succeed; life **will** conquer death as shown by Jesus' raising of Lazarus and as supremely seen in his own resurrection from the dead.

How does Jesus' death and resurrection shape your understanding of death?

How can this change my life?

How does the hope of the resurrection and the assurance of eternal life transform our behaviour, beliefs and emotions?

The Apostle Paul comforts and exhorts the Christians at Corinth, saying,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.’ (1 Cor. 15:54-58)

Does Jesus’ victory over death encourage you to be ‘steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord’? In what ways?

Concluding worship

Place a wide, shallow bowl filled with water in the centre of the group. Surround it with some seeds, and some flower blooms. Invite each member of the group to come forward and place a flower in the bowl, reflecting as they do so on the lives of those who have gone before them in faith and love.

Prayer:

The leader prays

Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection and life of all who trust themselves to your keeping; you have taught us not to grieve, as people without hope, for those who sleep in you.

Raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Grant that when we depart this life we may rest in you, and that at the resurrection on the last day

we may receive the kingdom you have made ready
for all who love and fear you. **Amen.**

All:

**In darkness and in light,
in trouble and in joy,
help us, O God,
to trust your love,
to seek your purpose,
and to praise your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(A Prayer Book for Australia)

“I am the good shepherd.”

Opening worship

You may like to light a large candle as a focus for your time together.

Spend a minute in silence. Allow yourself to think about the things that have been occupying your time and energy in the last couple of hours. As you sit in silence, create a mental image of God’s sovereign love – the throne of God, or the cross of Christ, for example. Bring your concerns and pre-occupations into God’s presence, and entrust them to God.

Ask God’s blessing on your time of study and reflection. As you do so, you may like to use this prayer:

Gracious God,
we thank you for your gifts of wisdom, truth and knowledge.
As we enter into this study,
may the truth of your Word illuminate our lives and
the Spirit of Wisdom enliven our understanding.
Make us alert to your voice in the pages of Scripture and the
words of our neighbours,
that hearing, we may believe and
believing, we may experience your transforming life. Amen

Engaging the text

Read John 10:1-18. As you do so, take note of any words or ideas that seem strange, puzzling or particularly significant.

Context/background

In our world, livestock farming and fencing belong together. But even today, there are few farm fences in Palestine. Flocks of sheep and/or goats range freely across the landscape, under the watchful eye of a shepherd, who wanders with the flock. But the shepherd does more than wander along behind the sheep. It is the shepherd's job to lead the flock to good grazing areas, to help them find their way to water, to protect them from the wild animals with which they share the land, and to ensure that none of them wanders away or suffers any misadventure.

This kind of shepherding leads to a very different relationship with the flock than that of an Australian sheep farmer out on the quad bike. A shepherd in Jesus' time would know each of his sheep by name, be aware of their idiosyncrasies, know if any had a particular need. Similarly, the sheep knew the shepherd. They recognised his voice and responded to his call.

In the Old Testament, God sometimes accuses the leaders of Israel of being false shepherds, leading God's people astray, failing to care for and protect the flock with which they had been entrusted, and leaving the sheep vulnerable to attack.

Understanding the text

In verses 2-5 Jesus paints a picture very familiar in New Testament times. Often a number of shepherds would bring their flocks together at night and secure them in a sheepfold. One of them would act as gatekeeper, while the others slept. In the morning, each shepherd would call his sheep, and they would follow him out into the pasture. When we read these verses alongside verse 16, we have an interesting picture. The 'sheep' who know Jesus' voice and leave the sheepfold

to follow him represent the Jews, such as the disciples, who respond to Jesus' message. But they are not all of Jesus' sheep. There are other 'sheep', 'sheep' who are not part of that fold; that is to say, not part of Israel. Jesus declares these others to also be part of his flock.

What does this mean for us as followers of Jesus?

Reread verses 11-13. When the flock is under attack, their lives depend on the shepherd. Does the shepherd care about them enough to put himself between them and the attacker, risking injury, or even death, himself? A hired hand is unlikely to stand his ground and defend the sheep; risking life and limb is 'above his pay grade'. He simply doesn't have a big enough investment in the sheep to make it worth his while. But, Jesus says, the good shepherd will risk anything for his sheep.

Can you imagine a situation where you would be prepared to put yourself in danger for the sake of an animal?

What about another person?

Jesus likens us to the sheep, the ones for whom he is willing to risk everything.

What does this tell us about Jesus and about God's intention for us as human beings?

Applying the text

How does this shape my understanding?

What do you think Jesus means by his words in verses 17-18: "I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 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"?

How do these words affect your understanding of the events of the Easter story?

How can this change my life?

How do you feel about being described as a sheep? How does this image fit with your sense of yourself as a person, and as a disciple of Jesus?

Can you think of any occasions when you have been particularly conscious of Jesus as your shepherd?

Concluding worship

A reading for two voices

(based on Psalm 23 & John 10:1-18)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
For you are with me;
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. I lay down my life for the sheep.

Prayer:

Jesus, good shepherd of the sheep,
By whom the lost are sought and guided into the fold:
Feed us and we shall be satisfied,
Heal us and we shall be whole,
And lead us, that we may be with you,
Where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect (Easter 4, Year B) A Prayer Book for Australia

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