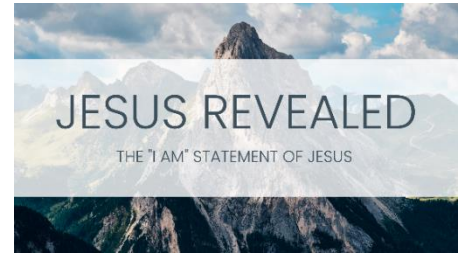
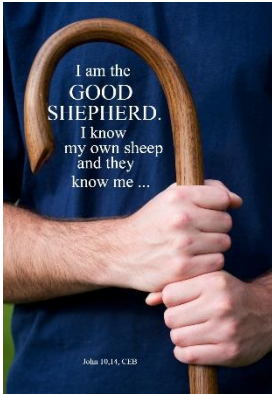


This week we will explore another "I Am" statement from Jesus - "I Am the Good Shepherd." Consider a moment when you have felt God's care and guidance in your life. Maybe when a loved one was sick, or when you had a difficult decision to make, or maybe in a season of grief or loss. We know that God walks with us, for just as Jesus said, he is the Good Shepherd.



Questions for Reflection:



- How is Jesus like a shepherd? What layers does the symbol of shepherd add to our multilayered picture of Jesus?
- How does Jesus's identity as the Good Shepherd complement and deepen the picture we have of Jesus as Light of the World and Bread of Life?
- How does the statement, "I am the gate" relate to the one Jesus says a few verses later, "I am the good shepherd"? Is Jesus more like a gate or a shepherd? How does emphasizing one or the other change our perspective on who he is?
- Why do the people ask for Jesus to "tell us plainly" whether he is the Messiah in John 10? What sort of answer are they hoping for? What does Jesus response to them say about how his understanding of the Messiah differs from theirs?
- Say the opening of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd." What word do you emphasize?

How does emphasizing different words enrich the meaning of this sentence?

- Which parts of Psalm 23 do you find most compelling? Why? How do that part enhance your view of Jesus as the "Good Shepherd"? What do you hear the psalm calling you to do as one of the flock who follows the Good Shepherd?
- What can you do to open your ears to the shepherd's voice?
- How can you position yourself in such a way that you lead others to the gate?

Prayer: Lord God, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to you that we may see you as our Good Shepherd. Help us to hear and recognize your voice and respond to you in faithfulness. Call us by your name and lead us in your way; in Jesus's name we pray. Amen. Pray Psalm 23 as a prayer. Adapted from Jesus Revealed Leader Guide, pgs 35-41

Spiritual Practice: Star Words

The use of star words is a prayer practice connected to Epiphany and the new year that has been growing in popularity in Protestant churches. A star word is a word of intention, rooted in the spiritual practices of the desert mothers and fathers who would seek a word to reflect on. Star words are a word to focus on or pray over that might help one listen more intently to what God is placing on your heart and calling you to dream and live. A star word can help us hear the Spirit whisper into our soul.

Sanctified Art, creators of the From Generation to Generation resources we have been using during Advent and Christmas has provided 160 different words for us to use. Word cards will be available in worship Sunday, January 8 or at the Star Words Prayer Stations in Faith United's chapel from January 8-15. If you aren't able to attend in person, I invite you to text (330-224-6138) or email me (kschmucker@faithumchurch.org) a number between 1-160. I will then respond with the word that corresponds to that number and include some suggestions for how you might use that word in your daily prayers as we begin a new year.



Once you receive your word, spend some time in prayer reflecting on your word. Ask God to help you understand what this word may mean to you in this new year. Perhaps it is a quality you are being called to develop. Perhaps it is something you are asked to give to another.

In addition to choosing a star for yourself, you may also want to choose a star word to pray over your children or grandchildren.