

In the First Word for ***Sunday January 5, 2020***, John 1:1-9's mystical and majestic passage can be read from many perspectives. Early Christians were often not literate, so images played a big part in their spirituality. This passage asks its readers to meditate on the image behind all images: light itself. And to think of Jesus as the one who lights all else. How has your sense of Jesus lit your views of all else? What about the dim times? Sunday's message is ***"To Live Light"***.

In the First Word for ***Sunday January 12***, Matthew 3:13-17 does something amazing that we can find in other gospels, too. It is rather common in the Jewish scriptures to find "call stories", stories of the Samuels and Isaiahs that recount how God awoke them to their calling in life. But it's a bigger leap to read that Jesus himself had a Calling Moment. Many of us have multiple calling moments in our lives, and some of us can't remember or isolate any sense of calling. How do you experience a sense of calling, or do you? How has that shaped your spiritual perspectives? Sunday's Message is ***"Your Calling"***.

In the First Word for ***Sunday January 19***, as we share in the celebration of Dr Martin Luther King Jr and others who have done great good for our world, we read John 1:29-42. The time Jesus lived in was full of seeking, of frustration with what was the way of the world Palestinians lived in. There was a keen sense of hunger, of wanting better. So for many, Jesus lit a match that was already in their hand. Watch how quickly they choose to pursue Jesus. John Wesley worried that with wealth, we would lose our hunger for God, for goodness; That we would live too contented to even see the gaping holes in our souls. How are you hungry for better? How does contentment affect those hungers? Sunday's message is titled ***"Thankful, but Not Content"***.

In the First Word ***Sunday January 26***, as we *anticipate the message from Bishop Carcaño(!)*, as a congregation let's read the Lectionary, whether this is the Bishop's passage or not. It's Matthew 4:12-17. We see yet again that Jesus' primary message was that God's kin-dom is breaking in on our world and our lives. How has that kin-dom broken in on your life this year? How has that kin-dom broken in on us as a church family?

In the First Word for ***Sunday February 2***, the passage before us is the famous and challenging Matthew 5:1-12. With Jesus' words here, our expectations get turned inside out and upside down. Which was likely his purpose. This is a wakeup call. In

what do we expect to find our blessedness? And how can we discover blessedness in much different circumstances? Sunday's message is titled ***"Surprising Strength"***.

In the First Word for ***Sunday February 9***, we read Matthew 5:13-20. Jesus sees the "righteousness" of the Pharisees and teachers of the law as self-focused, rather than being salt and light for the world. He insists that healthy spirituality is good for others, not just ourselves. The law gets fulfilled when we light the world, not just when we don't steal or curse. How can we accept Jesus' bold statement about ourselves, that we are the salt of the earth, that we are the light of the world? And how can we be more a part of the salting and the lighting? Sunday's message is titled ***"You Are Light"***.

In the First Word for ***Sunday February 16***, Matthew 5:21-37 expands on Jesus' assertion that we are to go beyond the written law if we are ever to be truly fulfilling it. Due to our distance from some of the issues in their day, some of these can lead to misunderstanding Jesus' point without some context, but the point is still strong: Go beyond the minimum! Do love extravagantly, as God does! You are growing even greater love and goodness. How do you see it happening in you? Sunday's message is titled ***"More Goodness; Then Even More"***.

In the First Word for ***Sunday February 23***, Matthew 17:1-9 asks its readers if we can allow ourselves to see Jesus as a Big Deal for our lives and our world. This question is developed in what is now a well known story. How has the Jesus story affected your life? How does the Jesus story define your journey and light your path? Sunday's message is titled ***"The Bigger Deal"***.

In the First Word for the first ***Lent Sunday March 1***, from Matthew 4:1-11 we see the familiar story of Jesus having to choose. To choose to not be self centered, or to not set up his faith life as some kind of exam for God to pass. You have made big choices in your life to become who you are. What have been the biggest choices so far? Which ones have led you to seek goodness? And to seek God? This week is a good one to reflect on how we got to today, and to anticipate where God may be taking us from here. Sunday's message is titled ***"Choices"***.

In the First Word for ***Sunday March 8***, we get to look together at John 3:1-17. It's interesting to take the well-known passage of John 3:16 in context. It makes it a

wilder (and of course, longer) passage! What can we learn from the phrase “born from above”? At minimum, Jesus asserts that our faith is not self made, but God initiated, God given. This doesn’t forewarn the call to choice, but does argue that our faith is a grace given to us. Sunday’s message is titled **“Everyone is Gifted”**.

The First Word for **Sunday March 15** is John 4:5-30. The Lectionary even has us reading to verse 42, but to keep this long passage short, let’s focus on just these verses. By the end of this story, this woman becomes the first “evangelist” in the gospels. The story is a clear call to Drink(!) from the gift of Jesus. To soak in the gifts he brings. Do, Friends! What have been meaningful ways you have drunk from this great grace lately? Let’s do this together. Sunday’s message is titled **“Cheers to You”**.

In the First Word for **Sunday March 22**, the Lectionary recommends we read all of John 9:1-41. Let’s read at least chapter 9:1-12 together. Jesus heals even people who don’t understand who he is! The gospel of John uses the metaphors *light* and *sight* frequently to describe our faith journey. Jesus seems to be splashing sight and new eyes everywhere he turns. In looking over your life story, do you see ways in which God has given you sight and light that you might have missed without grace? Does it seem subtle or momentous? Constant or occasional? Sunday’s message is titled **“The Gift of Seeing Light”**.

In the First Word for **Sunday March 29**, we’ll take a look at what is often seen as a Christmas passage. The “annunciation” is the passage in Luke 1:26-42 where Jesus’ birth is announced to a very, very surprised Mary. But even as daunting as it is, she said “Yes”. These passages have led Christian families from Catholics to Orthodox to the Coptic and Tewahedo churches to value Mary as an example of discipleship, even when it costs us greatly. You know times in your life you had to choose the path of goodness even though it cost you. How did you find that strength? And when you haven’t found that strength and have chosen less wisely, how can we recover from when we dodge our calling? And how can we find the courage to choose the good in the future faithfully? Sunday’s message is Titled **“A Model for Getting it Right”**.