

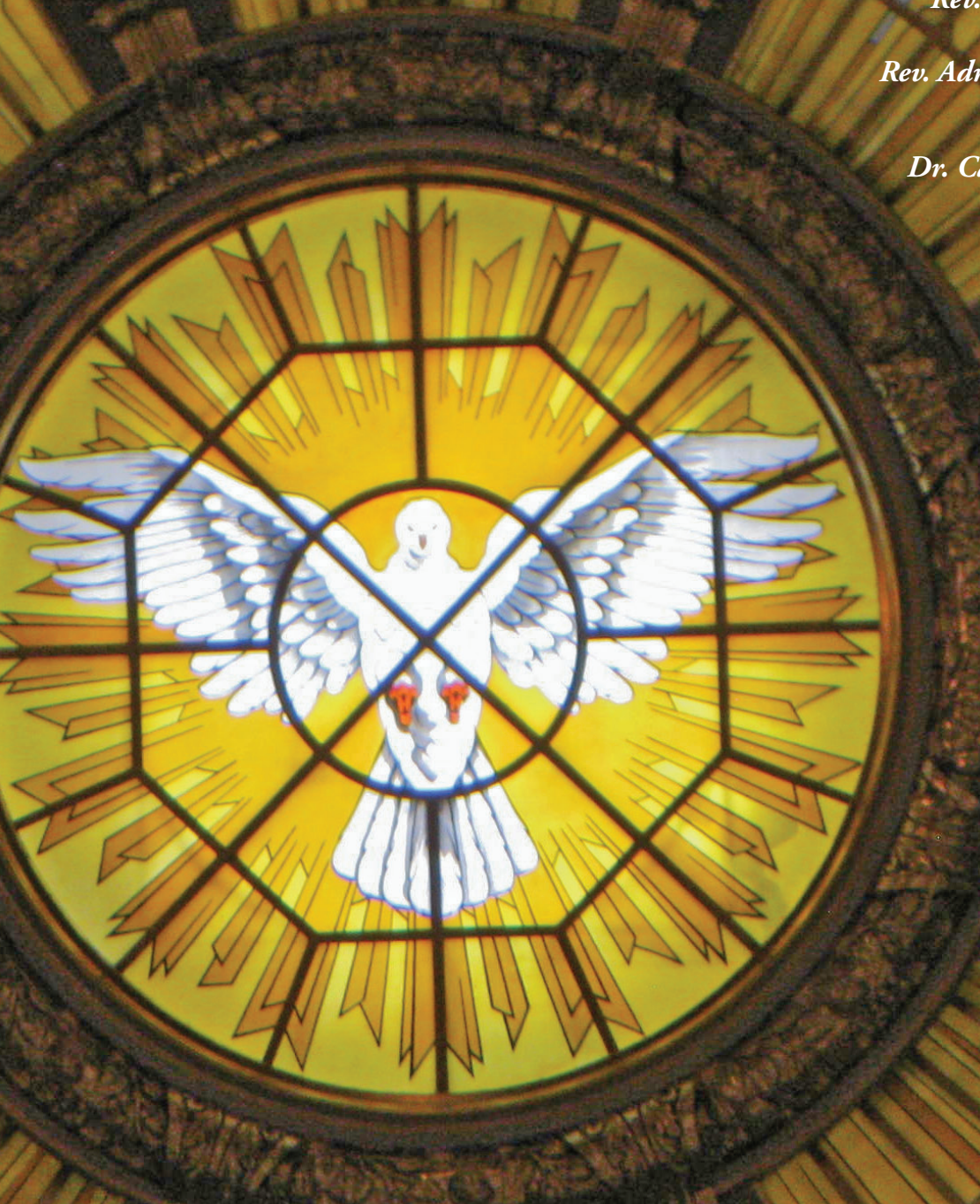
God of the Bible:

A Study for United Methodists about
How God Is Revealed in Scripture

Written by
Rev. Aida Fernandez
Dr. Susan Hysten
Rev. Adrienne Trevathan

Edited by
Dr. Carol Cook-Moore

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



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LEADER'S GUIDE | PARTICIPANT'S WORKBOOK | APPENDICES

All Scripture readings are from New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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ADDENDUM

Included in Addendum:

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

SERMON STARTERS

Bibliography and Additional Resources

USEFUL BIBLICAL RESOURCES: COMMENTARIES, TRANSLATIONS

Women's Bible Commentary: Reviewed and Updated, 3rd Edition edited by Carol Newsom, Sharon Ringe and Jacqueline Lapsley (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012)

The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation (Priests for Equality, 2007)

The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version (Oxford University Press, 1995)

BOOK LENGTH INTRODUCTIONS TO EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE THEOLOGY

In Whose Image? God and Gender by Jann Aldredge-Clanton (Crossroads, 2001)

Aldredge-Clanton traces the history of male language in Christianity to arrive at a new understanding of "the totality of God's revelation in scripture, tradition, reason and experience" (p. 64). The author then explores the liberation of knowing a God with both feminine and masculine traits for people of all genders.

The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God by Rebecca S. Chopp (Wipf & Stock, 2002)

An academic review of the emancipatory power of expansive language. Chopp discusses the social-symbolic ordering of words, suggesting that language carries "a certain economy" (p. 111). Emphasis is placed on the role of proclamation in the church.

Finding Words for Worship by Ruth Duck (Westminster John Knox Press, 1995)

This helpful edition guides the reader through a creative method to develop unique images in our preaching, prayer and song. Starting with prayer, she leads the reader through a process of imagining, brainstorming, focusing, allowing words to flow and sit, then revising and hearing feedback. An excellent process resource.

Inclusive Language in the Church by Nancy Hardesty (Westminster John Knox Press, 1988)

An older volume that can be found online, Hardesty's book emphasizes the importance of expanding language about God to honor all people. This text includes an interesting discussion of the term "Lord" for those who struggle to preserve it.

The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (Crossroad, 1983)

A classic, foundational work in recovering the feminine in Christian liturgy and worship. Look for this edition in your public library.

God beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God Language by Gail Ramshaw (Fortress Press, 1995)

Gail Ramshaw discusses our use of gendered and hierarchical terms, including "Father," "kingdom," "Lord," and even "God." The text explores problems with anthropomorphizing God while lifting up objective metaphors like "tree of life."

Sexism and God-Talk by Rosemary Radford Ruether (Beacon, 1993)

A classic theological argument against the pervasive patriarchy and hierarchy in our Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Using the Exodus story of the burning bush, Ruether argues for an understanding of God as “person without being imaged by existing social roles. God’s being is open-ended, pointing both to what is and what can be” (p. 67). Her work is foundational in Feminist Theology.

More than Words: Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities by Janet Schaffron and Pat Kozak (Meyer Stone Books, 1988)

A practical guide to using a wide variety of images for God in worship. Considers both gender and cultural pluralism. Includes sample liturgies as well as guidelines for writing your own prayers and congregational responses.

What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology by Brian Wren, Crossroads, 1989.

Wren investigates the power of language from the position of a man becoming aware of it himself. Acknowledging that the language of Christian worship sees God through the metaphor of male kingship: King, God, Father, Wren uses the language of hymnody and poetry to break free of those images and explore equally enlightening metaphors.

DENOMINATIONAL RESOURCES AND POLICIES

Resolution #8011: “Biblical Language” in The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2012 (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012)

Unitarian Universalist Association: Inclusive Language Guidance
<http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/ways/200008.shtml>

Metropolitan Community Churches: Inclusive Language Policy 1981 and 2002
mccchurch.org/resources/mcc-theologies/

United Church of Christ: Inclusive and Expansive Language in the UCC
<http://www.ucc.org/worship/inclusive-language/>

The Episcopal Church: Inclusive Language
http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/109399_14559_ENG_HTML.htm

Presbyterian Church of New Zealand: Thinking about the Language We Use in Worship: A Study Prepared by the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (New Zealand, 2011)
<http://knoxcentre.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Inclusive-Language-Study-Resource.pdf>

ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDIES FOR CONGREGATIONS

Rock, Shepherd, Friend available from gcsrw.org

Women Called to Ministry available from gcsrw.org

WORSHIP PLANNING RESOURCES:**MUSIC**

The Faith We Sing (Abingdon Press, 2000)

The New Century Hymnal (The Pilgrim Press, 1995)

Circles of Care: Hymns and Songs by Ruth Duck (The Pilgrim Press, 1998)

Roll Down, Justice! Sacred Songs and Social Justice, by Mark A. Miller (Choristers Guild, 2015)

PRAYER AND CREATIVE DESIGN

Touch Holiness: Resources for Worship, Updated, by Ruth Duck and Maren Tirabassi (Pilgrim Press, 1990)

Calling On God: Inclusive Christian Prayers for 3 years of Sunday by Peter Bankson and Deborah Sokolove (SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2014)

Sermon Starters

INTRODUCTION

One of the ways we can enhance learning and development processes in our congregations is by stimulating people's multiple intelligences. God gifted humans with the capacity to learn and understand our environment in differing, but equally valuable, ways.

Dr. Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory (The Theory of Multiple Intelligence, pgs. 6 -7 PDF document at <http://howardgardner.com/multiple-intelligences/>) identifies eight predominant intelligences: linguistic, logical mathematical, spatial, musical, naturalistic, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Since his original proposal 20 years ago, he has also suggested an additional intelligence: existential. According to Gardner, existential intelligence "reflects an individual's capacity for considering big questions about life, death, love and being." This intelligence or capacity is particularly linked to our spiritual formation and development since spirituality has its roots in the inquiry about our faith and origin. In fact, all intelligences help us identify and relate to God through our perceptions and our intuition.

The value and joy of multiple images and metaphors for God is their ability to resonate with different ways of thinking and types of intelligences. These ideas foster our creativity and imagination about God. They prompt us to ask new questions and explore our relationship with God more deeply. In this study series we invite you to rediscover those images in worship through sermons and liturgy. We encourage you to journey into the mystery and vastness of an approachable God. Consider using a variety of bible translations and paraphrases to enrich your congregation's experience of scripture.

The following sermon starters suggest simple ideas to encourage your creativity and excitement about the wide range of God imagery. For the hymn selections you may visit hymnary.org and hymnsite.com. Be courageous and daring, plunge into a spiritual adventure that will guide you to a closer and more personal relationship with God.

WEEK 1: IMAGINING THE MYSTERY AND LOVE OF GOD**TITLE: “Accountable Leadership” OR “Watch out, I am coming down!”****Text:**

Ezekiel 34: 1-16 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

34 ¹The word of YHWH came to me: ²“Mere mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, saying to them: ‘You shepherds, thus says the word of YHWH: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who take care only of yourselves. Shouldn’t you be taking care of the flock? ³You drink its milk, wear its wool and slaughter the fat ones, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick or treated the wounded; you have not brought back the strayers, or sought the lost; but you ruled them with harshness and brutality. ⁵They scattered because there was not shepherd, and once scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep are scattered throughout the world, with no one to ask about them or search for them.’

⁷“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH: ⁸As I live, says Sovereign YHWH, because my flock lacks a shepherd, it has been looted and is now the prey of wild animals. And because my shepherds did not search for my scattered flock, caring for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹hear the word of YHWH, you shepherds: ¹⁰Thus says Sovereign YHWH, I am going to deal with the shepherds, and I will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending my flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, for it will no longer be food for them. ¹¹For thus says Sovereign YHWH: I myself will search for my sheep; I will seek them out. ¹²As shepherds seek out their flocks when their flocks are scattered in every direction, so I will search for my sheep and rescue them, no matter where they scattered on that day of full clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the countries and bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by its streams and wherever there is a settlement. ¹⁴I will feed them on good pasture land, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing ground. ¹⁵I myself will tend my flock and have it lie down, thus Says Sovereign YHWH. ¹⁶I will seek out the lost, I will return the strayed, I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and I will watch over the fat and the sleek. I will be a true shepherd to them.”

Image:

Shepherd

From Bible Study:

After criticizing the shepherds (leaders) who do not care for the sheep, God offers to serve as the shepherd. Seeking out, gathering, rescuing, and caring for sheep are primary activities of God as shepherd.

The focus of this text might be a call to the local church to accountability for the ministries that have been entrusted to them. You can open the sermon with a personal story in which you were called to accountability by a friend, colleague or supervisor for not fulfilling or neglecting a major responsibility. Include in the story, 1) how the image of God as a shepherd helped and challenged you, and 2) give examples of grace-full leadership as portrayed in Ezekiel’s story.

The Psalter:

Psalm 23

Suggested Hymns:“The Summons” *The Faith We Sing* #2130“Come and Find the Quiet Center” *The Faith We Sing* #2128**WEEK 2: LISTENING TO WISDOM****TITLE: “She’s Not Just a Pretty Faith” or “The Art of Listening”****Text:**Proverbs 8: 32-36 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

³¹ And so my daughters and sons, hear me well:
happy are you when you keep my ways!

³³ Take my instruction seriously and grow wise;
don’t neglect my lessons.

³⁴ Happy are you who listen to me,
and keep watch at my door for me,
waiting at my gates.

³⁵ For you who find me find life
and earn the favor of YHWH.

³⁶ But you who lose me lose your own souls,
for all who hate me love death.”

From Bible Study:

In Proverbs 8 we learn about the nature of God through the personification of God’s wisdom. Since Wisdom is a way to know and understand God and God’s creation, finding her is like knowing God.

Using a song might help illustrate the point of women’s competence, strength and wisdom. A popular tune like “She’s not Just a Pretty Face,” by Shania Twain, might help stimulate conversation. Invite the congregation to reflect on God’s wisdom in approachable and realistic ways. During your sermon, distinguish between wisdom and intelligence, specifically identifying that wisdom is not the same as intelligence, but a deeper quality. It might include beautiful imagery or mystical encounters, but is not limited to them. Rather, wisdom is an inclusive and expansive way to discover God in the nuts and bolts of our ordinary life, in addition to those extraordinary breath taking moments. Attentive listening to what is going on in our surroundings and our interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics clues us into the wisdom of God.

Image:

A large candle or lantern

The Psalter:

Psalm 1: 1 – 3

Suggested Hymns:“Holy Wisdom, Lamp of Learning” *Circles of Care*, #46“Praise the Source of Faith and Learning” *The Faith We Sing* #2004

WEEK 3: GOD WHO LOVES, NURTURES, AND PARENTS**TITLE: “Happy Parent’s Day, God” Or “I Can Never Forget You!”****Text:**

Isaiah 49: 13-16 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

¹³ Shout for joy, you heavens! Exalt, you earth!
You mountains, break into happy cries!
For YHWH consoles the people
and takes pity on those who are afflicted.

¹⁴ But Zion said,
YHWH has abandoned me,
Adonai has forgotten me.”

¹⁵ Does a woman forget her own baby at the breast,
or fail to cherish the child of her womb?
Yet, even if these forget,
I will never forget you.

¹⁶ Look and see:
I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are forever before me.

Galatians 4:6-7 (*The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version.*)

⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of God’s Child into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father-Mother!”

⁷So you are no longer enslaved but rather you are a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

From Bible Study:

The image of God as Father is familiar in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Also present in the Bible is the image of God as Mother. God is like a nursing mother. Just as the mother cannot forget her child, so also God remembers us. Even if a mother might forget, God will not. The image suggests God’s devotion to humankind. God loves and thinks about God’s children just as a mother does.

You may approach this sermon with a couple of vignettes about parenting. One of the vignettes may be of a child experiencing anxiety separation at the first day of preschool. The mother hugs and kisses her child, promising everything will be ok and that she will be back soon. Another story might be about a 10-year-old foster child who has been adopted by a couple. They assure the young person that there is no need to scrub the floor in the kitchen to earn their love. The parents hold the young child’s hands and look straight into the child’s eyes, as they say. “You are our child whom we love no matter what.” During the sermon invite the congregation to share a moment when the image of God as a nurturing parent in their lives brought comfort and a sense of belonging to them. Celebrate the images of God as a parent, particularly as a mother, who never forgets us.

Image:

A large sculpture or painting of mother and child

The Old Testament Poetry:

Isaiah 66: 7-11

Words of Comfort Litany (Adapted from the Rev. Grace Imathiu)

Like a mother, God hears us and is quick to help us. When we are afraid and lonely, the Lord tells us “I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

Blessed be your name Divine Parent!

When we are grieving God tells us: “As a mother comforts her child, so I’ll comfort you. And you will be comforted.” (Isaiah 66)

Blessed be your name Divine Parent!

When we are anxious God reminds us: “Calm and quiet your soul, like a weaned child with his mother.” (Psalm 131)

Blessed be your name Divine Parent!

When we are discouraged, God tells us “you shall nurse; you shall be carried upon my hip, and bounced upon my knees.” (Isaiah 66:12)

Blessed be your name Divine Parent!

When we are up against giants Jesus tells us; how often I have wanted to gather you the way a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Luke 13)

Blessed be your name Divine Parent!

When we mess up and are afraid there is no place at the table for us, we hear: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have tattooed you on the palms of my hands.” (Isaiah 49)

Blessed be your name Mother and Father of all! Who always comforts, loves, nurtures, and cares for us. Amen.

Like a mother, God hears us and is quick to help us. When we are afraid and lonely, the Lord tells us “I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

Blessed be your name Divine Parent!

Suggested hymns:

“Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us” *The New Century Hymnal*, #583

“O God, in Whom We Live” *Worship and Song* #3153

WEEK 4: GOD OF ALL CREATION

TITLE: “On Eagle’s Wings” or “Fluttering”

Text:

Deuteronomy 32:11-13 and/or Exodus 19:3-4 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Deuteronomy 32:11-13

¹¹ Like the eagle that stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young, God spreads wings to catch you, and carries you on pinions. ¹²YHWH alone leads you: no foreign god is with you. ¹³ God gives you the heights of the land to ride and feeds you with the fruit of the mountains. God nourishes you with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crags.

Exodus 19:3-4

³ Then Moses went up to God, and YHWH called out from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob, what you are to tell the Israelites: ⁴ ‘You saw for yourselves what I did to Egypt, how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.’”

From the Bible Study:

Although many of our images attribute human qualities to God, other biblical images compare God to animals or inanimate objects. Explore what we can learn about God from these unusual metaphors.

Consider reflecting on R. Deane Postlethwaite’s hymn, “The Care the Eagle Gives Her Young” (UMH 118). This beautiful and comforting hymn acknowledges God’s providence in the face of life challenges using female images. Compare it to the more neutral parenting images in Michael Joncas’ hymn “On Eagle’s Wings” (UMH 143). A sermon comparing the use of eagle imagery in these two hymns helps give the congregation insight about seeing God in nature. You may incorporate liturgical dance in the service or a video showing an eagle caring, nurturing and prompting her offspring to fly and soar into the open horizon.

Image:

Eagles and rocks

Psalter:

Psalms 62: 5-8 (RSV)

Suggested Hymns:

“The Care The Eagle Give Her Young,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* 118

“On Eagle’s Wings” by Michael Joncas, *The United Methodist Hymnal* 143

TITLE: “All and One”, or “Beginning Again, for the First Time”

Text:

Exodus 3: 1-15 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

¹ Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock deep into the wilderness, Moses came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

² The messenger of YHWH appeared to Moses in a blazing fire from the midst of a thorn bush. Moses saw--”The bush is ablaze with fire, and yet it isn’t consumed!” ³ Moses said, “Let me go over and look at this remarkable sight--and see why the bush doesn’t burn up!”

⁴ When YHWH saw Moses coming to look more closely, God called out to him from the midst of the bush: “Moses, Moses!”

Moses answered, “I am here.”

⁵ God said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from our feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground!”

⁶ “I am the God of your ancestors,” the voice continued, “the God of Sarah and Abraham, the God of Rebecca and Isaac, and the God of Leah and Rachel and Jacob!”

Moses hid his face, afraid to look at the Holy One.

⁷ Then YHWH said, “I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt; I have heard their cries under those who oppress them; I have felt their sufferings. ⁸ Now I have come down to rescue them from the hand of Egypt, out of their place of suffering and bring them to a place that is wide and fertile, a land flowing with milk and honey - the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the children of Israel has reached me, and I have watched how the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Now go! I will send you to Pharaoh, to bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

² God answered, “I will be with you, and this is the sign by which you will know that it is I who have sent you: after you bring my people out of Egypt, you will all worship at this vast mountain.”

¹³ “But,” Moses said, “when I go to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is this god’s name?’ what am I to tell them?”

¹⁴ God replied, “I AM AS I AM. This is what you will tell the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵ God spoke further to Moses: “Tell the people of Israel, ‘YHWH, the I AM, the God of your ancestors, the God of Sarah and Abraham, the God of Rebecca and Isaac, and the God of Leah and Rachel and Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my Name forever; this is the name you are to remember for all generations.”

From the Bible Study:

*In this story, God discloses God’s name to Moses: I AM WHO I AM. While this may seem like an unusual name, is it possible that God is offering us an invitation to express how we understand the divine in new and different ways? Perhaps, as disciples, it is not up to us to define God with one or two images or place the One we worship in a box. There is no perfect metaphor or one clear symbol that we can all understand. Rather, God is as broad and deep as our imaginations. If God **is**, as God tells us in Exodus, we have an open invitation to experience God in all of creation!*

As you conclude your sermon series, briefly reflect on the images you have explored. Celebrate those images during the sacrament of Holy Communion, where the incredible grace of *I AM WHO I AM* is made known in the symbols of the bread and the cup.

Image:

A table set for communion with chalice and paten

Psalter:

Psalm 67

Suggested Hymns:

“In The Midst Of New Dimensions” *The Faith We Sing* 2238

“God of Many Names” *The United Methodist Hymnal* 105

“Author of Life Divine” *Worship and Song* 3166

WEEK 5: KNOWING THE UNKNOWNABLE**TITLE: “All and One”, or “Beginning Again, for the First Time”****Text:**

Exodus 3: 1-15 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

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“God of Many Names” *The United Methodist Hymnal* 105

“Author of Life Divine” *Worship and Song* 3166

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We hope you have found these resources helpful as you move your congregation to more expansive images of God and the Divine. While they are not exhaustive, we have attempted to offer a broad sampling of useful information as you continue exploring and experiencing “God of the Bible.”