

Personal Daily Devotions R10

Mark's
Jesus,
My
Jesus



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Week 1

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS

MONDAY – Announcing God’s good news

Today we set the scene for the journey that Mark takes us on in the weeks leading up to Easter.

Scholar and pastor Eugene Peterson - Mark’s urgency:

“Mark wastes no time in getting down to business – a single-sentence introduction. There’s an air of breathless excitement in nearly every sentence he writes. The sooner we get the message the better off we’ll be for the message is good, incredibly good: God is here, and he’s on our side ... Mark, understandably, is in a hurry to tell us what happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – the Event that reveals the trust of God to us, so that we can live in reality and not illusion.” (The Message – Eugene H. Peterson)

There is much overlap between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are called the Synoptic Gospels. *Synoptic* meaning “seen together”. However, Mark has a special thrust. The Son of God proclaims the Kingdom and demands repentance – now! Mark is the urgent evangelist. His Gospel is filled with action at a rapid pace. The word *‘immediately’* appears twenty-seven times. Mark starts with the baptism and ends with the Resurrection, giving a short, powerful account of the ministry of Jesus.



Mark 1: 1-20

In Vs 1 we read *“This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* Vs 4 *“So John appeared in the desert, baptising and preaching. “Turn away from your sins and be baptised,” he told the people, “and God will forgive your sins.”* Vs 9 *Not long afterwards Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* Vs 10 *As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, He saw the heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove.* Vs 11 *And a voice came from Heaven, “You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.” (Good News Bible)*

Jesus went into the wilderness, alone with the desolation, the animals, Satan and the angels. He

stayed there for forty days, symbolic of the Israelites’ forty years in the Sinai, in conflict with Satan. During

this time, He hammered out the nature of His ministry in prayer and

Jesus does not just bring good news; He is the good news.
Timothy Keller

fasting. When Jesus emerged from the wilderness, He preached His first and essential sermon: *“The right time has come,”* He said, *“and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away*

from your sins and believe the Good News!” Jesus did not call people to a one-time emotional event, but to a lasting choice to live in a new way.



- What are some of the ways Jesus has led you to change your heart and life?
- When you are being tempted or are going through a trying time, do you turn to God in prayer? Maybe even fasting?



Prayer: Lord God, help me to lay my burdens at Your feet and to repent of my transgressions. I so often stumble and fall. Help me to turn away from my sins and to believe the Good News. AMEN.

TUESDAY – He travelled through Galilee



Mark 1: 21-39

Verse 39 *So He travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.*

The only person who might have ever had a right to feel He should (or could) try to fix the world all at once, was Jesus. But He didn't. Yes, He healed the sick, drove out demons and ministered to the whole town gathered at the door of the house. But in the morning, without telling anyone, He left the whole crowd waiting while He prayed. When the disciples nervously said, "Everyone is looking for you," Jesus replied, "Let's go somewhere else." He took the long view of God's plans, and of His own place

in them. We often read in the New Testament that before He embarked on any journey or preached to His followers "Jesus prayed".



Do you pray before you make important decisions or undertake challenging tasks?

The people believed that someday God's Kingdom would come when nations would "beat their swords into

God will heal and mend you. It's what He does. It's who He is

ploughshares” (Isaiah 2:4), when the blind would see and the hungry would not be turned away (Psalm 146). What happened? Jesus brought signs of the Kingdom. He healed a blind man, fed the multitude, drove out demons. The prophecies were being fulfilled!

Imagine for a moment how a modern PR expert might have planned for Jesus to “capitalise” on the crowds He drew in Capernaum. (He was, after all, the Lord of the universe come to live on earth.)



- In what ways can you learn from Jesus’ example, and adopt His attitude toward “success” and letting God, not popular acclaim, define your true value?

Mark 1: 34 used language that, in Semitic idiom (contains a Hebrew influence), implied that Jesus healed everyone who came to Him. In His day, that also included diseases and “cast out many demons”. Today, God usually works through people trained in physical and emotional healing – but it is still God at work.



- What hurt(s) do you bring to Jesus today?
- Do you believe in Jesus’ healing power even today?
- Are you open to God’s help and healing through today’s means?



Prayer: Lord, you know even my most carefully hidden or deeply buried hurts and fears. I ask for your healing touch. I trust you to be at work in my life for my good. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Outer healing as a sign of inner healing power.



Mark 1: 40 – 2: 12

Mark 2: 9 & 11 *Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?*

But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So He said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

In Jesus’ day, a “leper” had one of a variety of visible skin diseases. People thought such people were

highly contagious, so they feared and shunned them – but Jesus didn’t. During excavation in

Capernaum it was noticeable that homes in Jesus' time had a room that could hold about 50 people. This was most probably the "living room". Four men tried to bring their paralysed friend to Jesus on a stretcher, but the room was full. They got creative! During those days most houses had an outer staircase to the roof which was made of branches and rushes laid over beams and covered with dried mud. They climbed up, dug through the roof, and lowered their friend to Jesus.

Jesus' reaction was not what the friends of the paralysed man expected.

"vs 5 Seeing how much faith they had, Jesus said to the paralysed man, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'"

Followers of Jesus were not the only people who had come to the house to see Jesus that day.

"vs 6 & 7, Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, 'How does He dare to talk like this? This is blasphemy! God is the only one who can forgive sins!'"

Jesus said: *"vs 10, I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So*

He said to the paralysed man, vs 11, I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

In Mark 2: 1-12 the man's problem was sin and his need was forgiveness. The healings were signs of the Kingdom, because where God's rule is acknowledged, disease is brought under God's power and control. Mark's Gospel wants us to know that forgiveness and God's kingdom go together and that Jesus has the power to forgive sins. The Son of God was and is working to restore God's original harmonious creation.

The man would have stayed paralysed without his four friends' energetic, creative caring.

Carry each other's burdens



• When was the last time you were able to be a "stretcher bearer" for someone else?

- Who has been a "stretcher bearer" for you?
- How determined and creative are you willing to be to bring Christ's help to someone you know who needs it?



Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for caring about the well-being of my body and my inner self. Help me to live each day in beautiful reality of Your forgiving, restoring grace. AMEN

THURSDAY: Caring for people over rigid rules



READ: Mark 2: 13-28

Compare Mark 1: 21 with today's first verse.

"Mark 1: 21 Jesus and His disciples came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach."

Scholar William Barclay noted, "Steadily and inexorably the synagogue door was shutting on Jesus. Between Him and the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy war had been declared." Jesus kept doing and saying shocking things. He called a tax collector (who worked for Herod Antipas and/or the Romans) to join Him. He said the Kingdom "wine" He brought couldn't fit the old forms the Pharisees clung to. He said He was Lord even over venerable customs like the laws about proper Sabbath-keeping."

One can well imagine the Pharisees' displeasure. Here was a man whose following was growing more and more as each day passed. There must have been a lot of discussion behind closed doors as how to deal with this matter. Particularly as Jesus' view was that *'The Sabbath was made for*

humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27-28)

Scholar N. T. Wright unpacked Jesus' words about Sabbath: "He doesn't deny that the disciples are out of line with traditional sabbath observance, but he pleads special circumstances and scriptural precedent. He puts himself on a par with King David. That's a pretty heavy claim: the implication is that Jesus is the true king."



- In what ways have you already made Jesus the true king of your life?
- Are there areas where you might expand His reign this Lenten season?

Be wary of what you say behind closed doors!



Prayer: Lord Jesus, You upset complacent, "righteous" people, while accepting outcasts like Levi the tax collector. Make me righteous, not in complacency, but in a way that follows You wherever You lead. AMEN.

FRIDAY: Opposition hardened, but apostles enlisted



Mark 3: 1-19

Verses 2 *Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath.*

Verse 14 *He appointed twelve that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.*

In Jesus' day, efforts to uphold the Sabbath (it was the fourth of the Ten Commandments, after all — cf. Exodus 20: 8-11) had led to a complex tangle of rabbinic rules about what was and was not work.

Jesus more often defied those rules than obeyed them, as we saw in yesterday's and today's readings. The Sabbath rules forbade action to make people well on the holy day, a rule that angered Jesus. His determination to offer healing on the Sabbath led "the righteous" to seek an alliance with the corrupt Herodians to destroy Jesus.

Couldn't Jesus have just told the man to meet Him in secret the next day? It seems, in this and other stories (eg. Luke 14: 1-6, John 5: 1-18) that Jesus went out of His way to

show that He valued people's well-being more highly than strictly following rules.



Of course, we need some level of rules and guidelines. Have you ever faced a situation in which you needed to set aside the rules or guidelines in the interest of meeting human needs?



Later Jesus went up the mountain. He called and appointed 12 apostles so that they could be with Him "vs 14 ...and that He might send them out to preach vs 15 and to have authority to drive out demons." What would your reaction have been had Jesus called you to be one of the twelve?

As we journey through Mark's gospel in the weeks leading up to Easter let us reflect on the words of George MacDonald:

"Christ didn't care for government; It was government, after all, that tried to exterminate him. He preferred to teach one human being to love his neighbour and be good like his Father."

George MacDonald 1824-1905



Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the boldness to be one of Your disciples, and the courage to do what is right even when there's pressure to stay quiet and "go along." AMEN.

WHO IS THIS?

MONDAY – Moving



Mark 4: 35 (NIV) *That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.”*

It's easier to stay this side. To stay where we are. They say the grass is greener on the other side, but we don't know for sure. We only know what we have today. It is so much easier to stick with what we know. Jesus calls us to keep **moving**.

Do you believe in Jesus? Or do you follow Jesus? Believing you can **do** on your knees next to your bedside. Following means choosing a life of doing His will, a life of moving. Jesus calls us to keep **moving**. Following Jesus means listening to His call daily. It is about being open to going over to the other side. It is about responding with action, with **movement**.

“The hardest part about moving forward is not looking back.”
Anonymous



What is your other side? Is it a person you need to care for? Is it a life of generosity? Is it a new job?

The other side could be small or big, near or far. It is seldom easy or comfortable. But it will always help you to learn more about yourself, more about others and more about God.

When we follow Jesus, life becomes a journey towards unlimited other sides. It is a journey which gives our lives purpose. Are you willing to **move**?



Prayer: Lord, may my life be one of **movement** as I seek to follow You and do Your will. Help me to know my next **move**.

TUESDAY – Drowning



Mark 4: 38 (NIV) ... “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

No one said it would be easy. Following Jesus is not the path of least resistance. It is the road less travelled. When you truly commit to move with the flow of the Spirit, you will inevitably find yourself, at times, caught in storms. Feeling like you are **drowning**.

Faith is the evidence of things unseen. This is true both of the God who is unseen and of the “other sides” He calls us to. When the disciples cried out “don’t you care if we drown?” they were unable to see the other side. Their fear made them lose sight of the destination that Jesus had called them to. Their fear **drowned** out their faith.

The journey to the other side can be filled with rough waters, uncertainty, chaos. When we let go of what we know, we trust that Jesus knows the

Your lifeguard walks on water!

way. But there will be moments when we feel like He is putting us through more than we can handle. You may even find yourself asking Him, “do you even care if I **drown**?”

When you follow Jesus, He doesn’t only lead you, but He has your back. He protects you. Following Jesus means holding on loosely to the things that bring you comfort and security. It means being willing to go through the storms that litter the road to purpose and meaning, knowing that He has your back. It means being willing to jump into the deep end and trust that He will never let you **drown**.



Prayer: Lord, life is full of storms and challenges and difficulties. And when we choose to follow You, it sometimes feels like their frequency only grows. Help me to trust that You will never leave me to **drown**, even in my darkest times. Even in the storms I face today. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Peace



Mark 4: 39 (NRSV) *He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

The eye of a hurricane is a place of **peace**, of quiet. But it is a short-lived peace. It's temporary. Soon the storm will take hold again. In the storms of life, it is tempting to look for a quick release. Alcohol, drugs or even binge watching our favourite series can bring a temporary peace. But it is not a real **peace**.

When we follow Jesus He leads us through the storm, but the other side is a true peace. True fulfilment. True meaning. When you follow Jesus He also has your back. And He walks alongside you. He goes through the storm with you. This assurance alone can mean that in the middle of the storm you can find **peace**.

It is not a peace that is limited to the eye of the storm, like the temporary

quick fixes. It is a **peace** that reminds you that you are on a journey carefully planned by your Father in heaven, with Jesus as your navigator and protector. He will bring you to a place where the storm goes away. He will bring to the other side.

A peace that passes all understanding.....

We do not need to be like the disciples who only went to Jesus in their moment of desperation. We can choose to live everyday with Him. Talking to Him, listening and trusting. Finding His **peace**.



Prayer: Lord, as I continue in my week, help me to remember that You walk alongside me. In my moments of greatest fear and uncertainty, may I know Your **peace** that surpasses all understanding. AMEN

THURSDAY – Doubting



Mark 4: 40 (NIV) *He said to His disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”*

Flying on an aeroplane can be a test of one’s ability to trust. Landing in high winds can lead even the most frequent flyer to panic. And yet, this fear is not rational. Aeroplanes are designed by skilled engineers to withstand almost anything nature can bring. Pilots are trained to handle the most extreme conditions. But that doesn’t prevent you from **doubting**.

Jesus rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith. But He understood why they doubted. Even though they had seen Him perform many miracles, their human instinct of fear kicked in. It didn’t help that Jesus slept through the chaos! But perhaps that was His way of teaching them to overcome their fears and their **doubts**.

When you follow Jesus, you are following the **son of God**. The same God who created the universe. The God who time and again has come through for His people. If you have been a Christ-follower for some time, you have likely experienced His faithfulness many times. But when you are in the midst of turbulence and the storms of life, is that enough to make you not **doubt**?

As Christians, we need to be aware of our fears and doubts. We need to understand them and respond to them. It is not sinful to **doubt**, but doubt can keep us from reaching the destination; those other sides that Jesus leads us to. Jesus wants you to trust Him and keep walking towards the purpose He has for you.

“Doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf



Prayer: Lord, You have calmed so many storms in my life. Help me to understand why I continue to **doubt** You. Give me the courage to keep walking. AMEN

FRIDAY – Believing



Mark 4: 41 (NIV) *And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”*

The disciples must have been impressed by Jesus teachings and His miracles. They probably knew He was someone special, a great prophet or a gifted teacher. Perhaps the moment when Jesus calmed the storm was the moment when the disciples truly started to **believe**.

Jesus is the Son of God. Even the wind and seas obey Him. Surely we should to. Surely we should **believe**. Not the type of belief where we kneel next to our bedside. The type of belief where we are filled with such awe that we are moved to action.

To know Jesus is to know God.

Following Jesus is following God.

Living for Jesus is living for God and making His Kingdom real here on earth.

No one said it was easy. Sometimes it will feel like your life is going nowhere. Sometimes it will feel like you are drowning. Sometimes you will doubt. Jesus invites you to follow Him anyway.

Let Him take you to the other side. Trust that He will keep you safe. Believe that He knows what He is doing. Believe that He is the Son of God. Choose to **believe**. Choose to follow Him.

Despite everything - Jesus invites
you to follow Him anyway!



Prayer: Today I choose to follow You. Today I choose to give my ‘yes’ to You. Today I choose to hear Your voice and live. Today I choose to follow You. AMEN

A QUESTION AND A CALLING

MONDAY – Who is this man?



Mark 8: 27-30. Read 8: 27-36 read for the full context

Jesus and His disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Who is Jesus to you?

I believe in Jesus, I believe He is the Son of God
I believe He died and rose again, I believe He paid for us all.
Marc Nelson

When did you recognise Jesus for who He is? Do you recognise Him daily in everyone you meet? In every situation do you look to Him for your strength, for guidance, for wisdom? How often do you pause in your day to acknowledge Him?



Exercise for the day:

Here is an Ignatian daily examen for you to use at the end of the day.

- **Become aware of God's presence.**
- **Review the day with gratitude.**
- **Pay attention to your emotions.**
- **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
- **Look toward tomorrow**



PRAYER: Jesus, help me to recognise You in every part of my life. Help me to see others as part of Your divine creation and to walk with You, my redeemer into fulness of life each and every day. AMEN

TUESDAY – Called to compassion



Mark 6: 34-37 *When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And He began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But He answered them, “You give them something to eat.”*

The people who had followed Jesus hadn't taken enough food for the day but when Jesus met people with problems such as hunger or illness, He didn't lecture them or say that God was teaching them a lesson – He had compassion on them and was teaching the disciples an important lesson.

Think of a time in your life when you needed compassion – did you receive this or was it withheld by those to whom you called out? How can you make sure that you don't

withhold compassion from people in need?

Let there be love shared among us, Let there be love in our eyes, May now Your love sweep this nation, Cause us O Lord to arise. Give us a fresh understanding Of brotherly love that is real, Let there be love shared among us, Let there be love.
Dave Billbrough



Challenge for the day:
Who will you meet today who will need your compassion? Be on the lookout for someone you can serve in love.



PRAYER: Lord Jesus, remind me that the good things that come into my life are not there just for me to hoard. Make me responsive to your commands to bless others. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – A call to courage



Mark 6: 45-51 *Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, He went up on a mountainside to pray. Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and He was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn He went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw Him and were terrified. Immediately He spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

Above all powers, above all kings, Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man. You were here before the world began

The disciples had witnessed Jesus' feeding the 5000 people just before their little boat got into the storm which threatened to swamp them. Then they saw Jesus walking on the water and were terrified! They hadn't fully realised that in Jesus, God was truly with them. What helps you to trust Jesus to be with you in all His compassion and power during life's worst storms? Today, remember when life is difficult, how Jesus is able to calm the storms in your life. Ask Him to

connect you to a person or a group who can help you to do life confidently in the knowledge that you do not need to walk alone.



Challenge for the day:

Jesus uses his people to support those going through storms - do you need support today, or can you offer it to someone else?



PRAYER: Jesus, sometimes I feel broken, frightened and insecure. Teach me to trust that You are always good, always compassionate, always ready to forgive. AMEN

THURSDAY – Called to be pure



Mark 7: 5-8 *So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t Your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?” He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.’”*

Jesus reminds the Pharisees, and us, that it is what comes from inside a person that defiles them, not what goes into the body. *Mark 7:21 For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come--sexual immorality, theft, murder.*

(James 3:9). *What is ironic in the human tongue, mine naturally included, is that “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God”*

Change my heart oh God, Make
it ever true. Change my heart
oh God, May I be like You. You
are the potter, I am the clay,
Mold me and make me, This is
what I pray.
Eddie Espinosa



Here is the challenge for today:

- Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
- Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
- Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told to me in confidence?
- Can I be trusted?



PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help me to be authentic throughout this day and to allow you to make me into the person You created me to be. AMEN

FRIDAY – Called to awe and worship



Mark 7: 24-37 read the whole passage for context

As soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. “First let the children eat all they want,” He told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then He told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. Some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place His hand on him. After He took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then He spat and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. And they were overcome by wonder.

And I cry holy, holy, holy God
How awesome is Your name
holy, holy, holy God
How majestic is Your reign
And I am changed in the Presence of a holy God.

Mark Altrogge

C S Lewis says the following about worship “It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men.” *and*

“We only learn to behave ourselves in the presence of God.”

Max Lucado says “Worship is living the principles of Christ in everything we do. You’re worshipping God by what you do all week long.”



How aware of God’s presence are you in your everyday life?

Challenge for the day: Try to become conscious of God in every situation which arises today whether it is in the traffic, at work or at home.



PRAYER: Help me to seek you throughout my day Jesus. AMEN

DO YOU STILL NOT UNDERSTAND?

INTRODUCTION TO Mark 8: 14-21.

Jesus' disciples were often puzzled by things that Jesus said and did. They learned 'by sight' and sometimes found it difficult to 'live by faith'.

Today, we followers of Christ often do not fully understand who Jesus really is. We underestimate and under-use Jesus' power. In these readings, we should be challenged to grow in our faith, and to trust Jesus and put these things into practice. Note that Jesus' approach is not always what we might expect. Today, we call it emotional intelligence as we read a situation and react to it! Jesus understood and used his wisdom to ask people the questions that really mattered! Let's be sensitive to the way Jesus handled situations as we read each day. (NB: Friday's reading)

Prayer: Lord Jesus. We acknowledge your wisdom and praise you for the way you show us how to understand the needs of the people you met when here on earth. We pray that you will enable us to respond with your wisdom as we see how best we can act and react to situations that we could encounter in today's world. Yes! So that your Name may be honoured by everyone. Amen

MONDAY – Divine Affirmation. The way of the cross.



Mark 8: 34 – 9: 13

Mark 8: 34 & 35 *Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it.*

Mark 9: 1 *And He said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."*

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus is well known. Put aside your usual understanding of the story you know so well. Try to imagine the wonder and excitement that Peter,

James and John must have felt, especially after they had heard Jesus talk to the people about the rather sobering challenge of saving and losing one's life. What did He

mean? They could not have been expected to understand what it was all about. This was their friend whom they thought they knew so well. No wonder they were bewildered and responded as they did: especially Peter! Whose voice resounded in their heads and minds: "This is my Son whom I dearly love. **Listen to him!**"

"Do you still not understand?" would have been an obvious question! It's a question that we need to answer.

On a day to day basis, we tell ourselves that we know what Jesus would say or do when we face a situation. Our prayers for those near and dear to us become almost automatic. We ask God to "bless Jack or Jane" without much of an idea of what we hope or think God

should do. After all, we tell ourselves that God knows the situation and will therefore know exactly what to do! Then we go on our way, having prayed for divine intervention. We have done our bit, we tell ourselves. Or is there more? Do we hope our prayers will cause God to change His mind?

We are urged to "Listen to Him". What does that mean? Will we hear a voice? Or how will we hear what God is saying? As we trust God to open our minds, we will more easily listen! Keep on listening as you pray. Keep on thanking God for the wisdom to understand.



Take more time to listen!
It may mean more effort
as we pray, but it is worth it.



Prayer: Teach us to listen before we make requests. Help us to listen to what You are saying to us rather than what the 'world' tells us. May my desires become the same as Your plans for me. AMEN

TUESDAY – "I have faith; help my lack of faith!"



Mark 9: 14-29 *Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Imagine the scene. Desperation was the description. The father had tried everything and was unable to do anything more. He explained what he had done. Nobody could help the boy. The disciples were out of their depth.

Was the problem a spiritual one, or would modern medicine have been able to prevent the terrifying symptoms? We do not know, but Jesus knew He could change things and heal the boy. The father declared his weakness, and trust in Jesus' ability to show all those gathered that He could bring healing. They began to understand. With the question, "If you can", Jesus gave the answer, and taught all those gathered about the power of prayer. 'Jesus revealed that

Look up! Keep
your mind on Him

prayer is not a magical incantation but a total openness to God's action in and through us'. (David E Garland). No gimmicks or magical incantations. That's not Jesus' way.

The disciples must have asked: "Who is this?"

Maybe we have a similar question. **We need to learn to understand our weakness** and trust in Jesus. We can also say, "I believe, but I need to overcome my own unbelief. Help me!"

What do we need to understand in order to allow Jesus to use our wavering faith?



Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can understand the disciples' disappointment, and can relate this to our own faith (or lack of faith). Give us the courage to acknowledge our weakness but also Your power. AMEN

WEDNESDAY –The hard truth of servanthood and suffering



Mark 9: 30-37 *They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because He was teaching His disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days He will rise." But they did not understand what He meant and were afraid to ask Him about it. They came to Capernaum. When He was in the house, He asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these*

little children in My name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the one who sent Me.”

Jesus and His followers “went through Galilee” on their way south toward Jerusalem. As they moved towards what was, for Jesus, enemy territory, Jesus tried to teach them what lay ahead. It wasn’t an easy or comfortable road. They instead saw Jesus as a fearless leader and read the situation in a typically worldly way. This was their Messiah! How could God’s chosen one be put to suffering and death? It was unthinkable.

We need teaching as much as did His disciples 2000 years ago! “Jesus is not leading us on a pleasant afternoon hike, but on a walk into danger and risk”. (N T Wright).



What adjustments has Christ called you to make so far in your ordinary life? What kinds of danger and risk might you face in today’s threatening, secular world? What

are some of the dangers that we and our children face today?

These may include physical dangers but also challenges of different philosophies and various belief systems.

There is just so much more ‘out there’ than there was a generation ago. There are far greater levels of stress (in its various forms: physical, emotional, chemical, spiritual) that we have to deal with now.

Daily, there are attacks on our minds and we need to take ownership of the question: what is God wanting us to do? Philippians 2:5 gives the direction. Let this mind be in you.....

Understand who it is who is leading you. Do not let the evil one distract and mis-direct you. Fix your eyes upon Jesus.



Prayer: When the road is rough and steep, fix your eyes upon Jesus! He alone has power to keep. Fix your eyes upon Him. I believe! Help my unbelief! AMEN

THURSDAY – Jesus still faces tests from His enemies. So do we!



Mark 10: 1-16

Mark 10: 1-5 *Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to Him, and as was His custom, He **taught** them. Some Pharisees came and tested*

Him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" "What did Moses command you?" he replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.

In our modern secular society, it has become common for couples to 'shack up' or live together although unmarried. (Yes, this is the case even among Christians who are regular church-goers). In some cases it makes economic sense. Divorce is not seen as serious as it was a generation ago. "As long as it feels OK" is often the expressed sentiment. Today, people tend to 'cherry pick' Bible verses that they take to show that God condones divorce.

In response, Jesus explains God's requirements to His listeners. He takes them (and us) to the first three chapters of the Bible (Genesis 2 in particular). But Jesus does this in a loving manner.



So, where do we stand on this matter?

Matthew 19: 9 adds some clarification, but the principle is unchanged. Any question about God's standards is likely to be posed in order to justify an action which is most likely contrary to God's plan. We should bear this in mind if we are asked! The evil one is always looking for ways to destroy our faith!

Let's get to the basics: In what ways does the idea of honouring God with your body run counter to much cultural thinking about sex? (eg "If it feels good, go for it as long as no-one gets hurt") What helps you to 'avoid sexual immorality'? We must also remember that there is nothing in our past that will cut us off from God's grace and love. These points will help you work through some of the points dealt with in the **Family Activity** section. It's about God's love for you and forgiveness.



Prayer: Lord God, we know that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139: 14) and that we must honour You as Creator in all we do and say and think. AMEN.

FRIDAY – The healing at the pool



John 5: 1-16. (Although this event is not recorded in Mark's gospel, it is relevant to our understanding of Jesus' teaching). Jesus gets to the real reason for this story.

John 5: 6-11 *When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." **But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'**"*

The man, whom Jesus approached, had been lying at this pool where people were waiting for an almost magical healing when the signs were right. He had little or no chance of getting to the waters before that others. (38 years. That's almost a lifetime in Jesus' day). He was a 'victim' and had explained his inability to be healed to possibly hundreds of people who wanted to help. He must have had friends who were happy to take him to the pool every day but who would not be there when he really needed them!

Jesus asked the question: "**Do you want to get well?**" What a question to ask of a person who had been

He heals the wounds of every shattered heart.

Psalm 147: 3

there for so long! The answer should have been "YES!" but instead we are given his well-rehearsed "victim" response. Jesus's emotional intelligence revealed a greater need!

Action instruction! Pick up your mat and walk. At once he was healed. It didn't matter to Jesus that it was a Sabbath and that work (such as carrying one's mat) on the Sabbath was not allowed. The man was instructed to "stop sinning". [John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Fellowship movement taught students to question those who came to them for healing. 'Too often we assume that a person wants one thing, while they just aren't where we imagine them to be, Since I learned this, when people come to me for prayer or come forward in a service, I usually ask, What do you want God to do for you?' It helps me discern how to pray for them. And as I pray to God for wisdom, occasionally I get guidance on how to pray also.' Not all sick people really want to be healed -- or to surrender their lives to Christ -- even though that is their true need. Sometimes their sickness puts them in a place where they get lots of attention. Jesus set the ministry example for us: Ask! The invalid in our story didn't exactly answer the question. Rather he

explained why he hadn't been healed. His answer tells us something about his character and his faith.]



Why do you think Jesus asked the invalid if he wanted to get well? Why is it important for us not to make assumptions, but to seek discernment about people's needs before we pray for them?



Prayer: Father God. Help us by your Spirit to connect to your wisdom and to be able to understand what the needs of the people for whom we pray really are! This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him. AMEN.

Week 5

A SUFFERING GOSPEL

The context of Mark's Gospel is critical to our understanding of some of what we will be thinking about this week.

At the time of writing, believed to be between 64 and 71CE Jews were suffering under the oppression of the Roman empire. It meant therefore, that Jews who were Christ-followers experienced not only suffering from the Jewish community for their already controversial views, but also from the Romans. Remembering that the Temple was destroyed in about 70CE.

In this context we read of the encouragement that Mark gives in the midst of suffering because of what Jesus has done. He is not suggesting that as Christians we need to suffer otherwise you don't get the badge. Rather it's a book about **how** we deal with suffering because inevitably we will not be able to avoid it in some shape or form.

MONDAY – Are you still afraid?



Mark 4: 35 – 41 (NIV) *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

In the lead-up to this passage Jesus has demonstrated His Power and Authority over suffering by the number of miracles He has performed. He has rebuked demons and forgiven sins. And yet... The

disciples still express their doubt in His love for them by asking: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Sometimes we might think His response was harsh but think for a moment about the caring voice that

replies: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

We are like those disciples – we know He brings peace and calm to others, but when the storms hit our lives, we are utterly terrified. We do not stop to think...ahh... we have seen Him calm storms before, I know He will do it for me.

We need to have a battle plan in place for when the storms come. Yes, when, not if, because they will come.

This is what Mark is saying to us. Trust in what Jesus has done before.



• Think of a time when you felt like you were about to drown and try and hear the

gentle voice answer: why are you so afraid?

- The wind and waves obeyed Christ
- Have you asked God to be with you in the suffering?



Prayer: Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, When the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, Will your anchor drift or firm remain? Lord, help me to reach out and take hold of Your hand when the waters and fears arise. AMEN

TUESDAY – Not even with a chain!



Mark 5: 1-20

Verses 1 – 7 *They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!"*

Yesterday we looked at the compassion of Jesus when He said to His disciples "are you still afraid." Today it is about Patience. Having done so many things to demonstrate His Power and Authority over

suffering to the disciples He crosses the lake to the Roman occupied Decapolis. The demon possessed man is symbolic of the worst of the suffering that could be experienced at

that time. Through the brutal Roman Empire.

Jesus goes to the heart of the problem. The disciples have been trying to avoid this. Standing with Jesus, they must have been terrified. This man who, because of the demons, could not be bound even by chains comes running. Jesus has not caused this man's suffering. He is there to drive out the demons. He very deliberately asks the Demon what is your name?

Jesus sees our suffering and wants us to **name** it so that we are able to be specific about what it is that we need. Our general "suffering" is sometimes just life. This is not

something God necessarily wants for us. He is there to help us through.

Jesus can overcome all things. There is nothing that can bind us that is not within the power of God to overcome. We need to be ready to respond to God's love and care.

We need to embrace the new life that God will bring.



- What is it that you would name today as your suffering?
- Do you need reassurance that this is not God's will that you are suffering?



Prayer: You, Jesus can break every chain that binds me.

My chains are gone, I've been set free

My God, my Savior has ransomed me

And like a flood His mercy rains; Unending love, Amazing grace

Chris Tomlin

WEDNESDAY - The power to transform



Mark 3: 1- 5 *Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.*

Jesus was clearly distressed at the attitude of the “some of them” – we assume from the context that “some of them” meant Pharisees, teachers of the law or such like. They would obey the law every day and do nothing on the sabbath. Perhaps He was referring to the likes of you and me? Ordinary people who do “religion” on a Sunday and not during the week? We perhaps are all too familiar with only “doing” Sundays and deny ourselves the opportunity to be recipients of God’s transforming power all the time. Jesus knows this attitude prevents us from experiencing the fullness of His love.

We need to look at this passage with the eyes of **transformation**. If we could just begin to grasp the concept

that our tribulations are part of a journey – are part of life. And in so doing our attitude to trials will be changed as well.

Perhaps part of the transformation is the prayer that our attitude be changed rather than our circumstance.



- What is **your** “shrivelled hand”?
- What if Jesus said stretch out your hand and you decided it was safer to just do nothing?

What if I dared to change my attitude?



Prayer: Change My Heart O God; Make It Ever True; Change My Heart O God; May I Be Like You. Lord, grant me the courage to see my situations differently; and to let Your transforming love work in my life. AMEN

Thursday – Give up on suffering



Mark 14: 32-39 *They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James and John along with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and troubled.*

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” He said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from Him. “Abba, Father,” He said, “everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.” Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” He said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Once more He went away and prayed the same thing.

This is the season of Lent – would it not be great if we could rid ourselves of suffering. While there is no doubt it is not God’s will that we suffer, Jesus does understand what we are going through. He has led the way; He has shown us how to deal with the suffering.

Let us in this season of Lent view our suffering differently. Stop, Pause, and look at the Cross. In the hours before the most agonising time of cruelty and injustice – the worst of humanity and the attempt of evil to defeat goodness – JESUS in great anguish PRAYED.

His example is that we should pray in times of suffering. He took someone with him. Three close friends in fact.

He had done this before. Mark 5: 35 – 41 tells us the story of Jairus’ daughter who had died and people were scoffing at the thought that Jesus could not heal her. Jesus took the three disciples, and with the mother and father prayed. Perhaps the inference is that we should create an atmosphere of worship and

reverence – gathering together in Jesus’ name.

If we are faced with suffering this Lent, let us focus on turning to God in prayer; in worship and praise, with an open your heart. Let us support each other in times of hardship.



- When you pray today try to focus on who God is and not on what you think He should do.
- Can you make a decision today not to worry? But to let go and let God.

Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength - carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time. - Corrie ten Boom



Prayer: O heavenly Father, I’m tired and weary. You know my struggles, my pain. So here in Your presence, I just want to take a break. I’m not asking for a perfect life, just some relief from the burden. Here, now, I rest in You as You are my hope and salvation (from Miracle Prayer: Jesus

Please Help Me)

Friday: Jesus came to do so much more than just die on the cross!

"I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross...in the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?"
- John Stott:



Mark 15: 33 - 39 *At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"). When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, He's calling Elijah." Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down," he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how He died, He said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"*

Up until the moment of His death, Jesus had endured enormous suffering. He didn't have to do that. But He did. He defeated evil for our sake. At the moment of His death, the temple curtain was ripped in two, from top to bottom. Our separation from God was eliminated and we are able to, in all circumstance, have access to the Fathers love, grace and comfort. ALWAYS!

Jesus death was not the end and neither is our suffering. The dawn will come!

On Good Friday, will you look up to the cross and say with the Roman soldier **"Surely this man was the Son of God!"**



Prayer: Love's redeeming work is done,
fought the fight, the battle won.
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal!
Christ has burst the gates of hell.

Lives again our glorious King;
where, O death, is now thy sting?
Once He died our souls to save,
Wheres's thy victory, boasting grave?

ALLELUIA

24 HOURS

MONDAY – Mark holds a mirror to us



Mark 14: 27 *On the way Jesus told them, all of you will desert Me. For the scriptures say, ‘God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered (Zech 13: 7).’*

After the Last Supper, Mark continues to describe his version of what is known as the Passion Narrative which only lasts approximately 24 hours. The term passion comes from the Latin word for “suffering.” Note that Mark tells the story without a lot of the conversations or utterances of Jesus. He mostly describes the events in chronological order as if he wants us to see ourselves in the people who were with Jesus during the events that follow up to His resurrection.

In Mark 14 and 15, the events described by Mark are as follows:

- The arrest of Jesus by Judas and officials of the Sanhedrin.
- The Sanhedrin trial of Jesus at the High Priest’s residence.
- The denial of Peter.
- Pilate’s trial of Jesus – found not guilty but sentenced.
- The way of the cross – mockery and beatings.
- The Crucifixion.
- The burial of Jesus.

Each one of these events highlights either the good or the sinful characteristics of people like us. In your mind, try to see yourself in these scenes mentioned above.

As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart.

Proverbs 27:19

- The conspiracy against Jesus and teachers of the law.
- The anointing of Jesus by a woman during a meal.
- The Last Supper.
- The agony in the garden and sleeping friends.



•Can you see yourself in any of these events?

- If not, read Mark 14 and 15 and try to recognize yourself in some of the events?



Prayer: God of the living Word, give us the faith to receive Your message, the wisdom to know what it means, and the courage to put it into practice. AMEN.

TUESDAY – Fidelity and betrayal



Mark 14: 1-3 *It was now two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and teachers of religious law were still looking for an opportunity to capture Jesus secretly and kill Him. “But not during the Passover celebration,” they agreed, “or the people may riot.”*

Meanwhile, *Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While He was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over His head.*

Mark begins the passion with three stories of brooding, shameful betrayal and tender fidelity. The enemies of Jesus, often the Pharisees and now the Jerusalem-based priests and elders, never step out of character in which the evangelist has portrayed them from the beginning of the gospel. They had hounded Jesus during His ministry in Galilee and intensified their opposition to His teaching when He had arrived in Jerusalem. Now their implacable hostility is sealed with a plot to take His life.

A chilling new element is added, however: Judas, one of Jesus' own disciples — chosen and loved and entrusted with a share in Jesus' mission — goes to the leaders and offers to betray Jesus to them. They are pleased and pay him for his service (Mark 14: 10-11).

In between these stories, with a dramatic touch typical of his gospel, Mark inserts a story of

exquisite fidelity. While Jesus visits Simon the Leper in Bethany on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, a woman breaks open her alabaster jar of costly perfumed oil, and anoints Jesus' head. In the Bible, kings and prophets were anointed on the head and Mark plays on that memory here.

These three sharply contrasting scenes thrust the reader into the heart of Mark's message. Two major themes run through the entire passion story— one focusing on Jesus, who with intense determination, gives His life for others; the other, on those who surround Jesus, some withering in the crucible of suffering, some exemplifying faith and courage.

Choose fidelity

These stories expose the terrible intent of Judas and the leaders, but it also gives us a glimpse of authentic discipleship in the woman of Bethany. She

understands both who He is and what His destiny entails, and without hesitation acts on that intuition. And therefore she anoints Him for burial and acclaims His royal dignity. For such love she would never be forgotten.



• What will you be remembered for in the future?



Prayer: Father, be all my love, all my hope, all my striving; let my thoughts and words flow from You, my daily life be in You, and every breath I take be with You. AMEN

Wednesday – Blind leaders



Mark 15: 1 *Very early in the morning the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law – the entire high council – met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus, led Him away, and took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor.*

Many of the leaders attacked Jesus. They challenged Him, mocked Him, lied about Him, plotted against Him, and did all they could to destroy Him. But Jesus did not hate them for it. On the day, with spit dripping from His face and their laughter ringing in His ears, with the clothes being torn from His back and whip slicing across His flesh, oh, **how He loved them in the midst of it!** He came to “seek and save what was lost,” not push them away. The cry of His was exactly the same to the religious leaders – the

men He knew would rejoice in the street at the smell of His blood mixing with sand – as to anyone else: “Come to Me....and you will find rest in your souls.”

These leaders, appointed, entrusted by the Father to bless and shepherd His children were blinded by their own importance and the expectation to one day look the promised Messiah in the eye and be recognized for their achievements and knowledge of the law. Well, they did look into His eyes. In fact, at 12 years old, slipping away from His father and

People see God every day, they just don't recognise Him.

Pearl Bailey

mother and into the temple courts of Jerusalem, Jesus chose to go to them first. (Luke 2: 46) Some 20 years later, slipping away from Judea and into the synagogues of Galilee, He again went to them first (Mark 11: 8). *See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey.*

It is a great mystery. If anyone should have recognized that

Jesus was the Messiah, it was these very men – the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Too blind to see the promised Messiah!



- Do you find it difficult to recognize Jesus in your daily life?
- If so, what prevents you from recognizing Jesus?



Prayer: Show me Your ways, O Lord, and teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and guide me. AMEN

Thursday – The sheep scatter and deny



Mark 14: 49-50 *Why didn't you arrest Me in the Temple? I was there among you teaching every day. But these things are happening to fulfill what the Scriptures say about Me. Then all His disciples deserted Him and ran away."*

Mark 14: 72 *And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me." And he broke down and wept.*

At the end of the Passover meal in Mark 14: 31 all the disciples vowed with Peter that they are willing to die with and for Jesus. Yet, a few hours later in the garden of Gethsemane they all scatter as was predicted in Zechariah 13: 7!

It is easy to get angry at the high council and the Roman governor for their injustice in condemning Jesus, but Peter and the rest of

the disciples also contributed to Jesus' pain by deserting Him. While most of us may not be like the Jewish and Roman leaders, we are like the disciples because all of us have been guilty of denying Christ as Lord in vital and sometimes secret areas of our lives. We may pride ourselves that we have not committed certain sins, but we are all guilty of sin.

And the rooster crowed twice.

In this story Mark also tries to warn us that it will never be easy to be a disciple of Jesus. We may promise that we will even die for Him but our lives up to now may prove to us that we do not even have the guts to perform even the most basic of tasks for Him. Peter's temporary failure as a

disciple is a warning to us to consciously consider how much we are willing to sacrifice to enable us to become a true disciple of Christ.



- How many times have you deserted Jesus?

- What prevents you from serving the Lord?



Prayer: Dear Lord. Please help me to never turn away from You. Keep me focused on Your truth and allow me to look up only to You. AMEN

FRIDAY – The penny drops



Mark 15: 37-39. *Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed His last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. When the Roman officer who stood facing Him saw how He had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God."*

Roman crosses didn't tower against the sky—they were only seven to nine feet high. Rome wanted people to see, close-up, what happened if they defied the Empire. So Mark didn't need to offer gory details about Jesus' crucifixion. His readers knew exactly what crucifixions were like—and shuddered.

Like Mark, Matthew and Luke reported that the Temple's curtain

tore in two. Jesus' death, the Gospel writers said, tore all the

barriers between God and us. A young child once drew the tearing of the curtain as a heart being torn in two. In his small but loving mind he understood that the Father's heart was also torn in two.

In calling Jesus the Son of God, the centurion has switched his allegiance from Caesar, the

official 'son of God' according to Roman Law, to Jesus, the real Son of God.

Now at last, not the high priest, not a leading rabbi, not even a loyal disciple, but a battle-hardened thug in Roman uniform, used to killing humans the way one might kill flies, stands before Jesus and says something which, in Mark's mind, sends a signal to the whole world.... The Roman centurion becomes the first sane human being in Mark's gospel to call Jesus God's son, and mean it.

What would the Roman centurion have seen and heard that moved him to the confession he made as Jesus died?



- What leads you to believe and testify that Jesus is God's Son?
- How can your life bear witness that the one you worship and serve "is certainly God's Son"?

Christ our Lord is risen today!



Prayer: Lord Jesus, open my eyes, and keep them open, to see what the Roman centurion saw on that grim hillside outside the walls of Jerusalem. With reverence and joy, I too say that you are "certainly God's Son." AMEN.

Week 7

ODDLY PERFECT ENDING

MONDAY – Mark’s Jesus



Matthew 28: 18-20 *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Saint Mark travelled extensively with Barnabas and Paul on many religious missions, teaching the Gospel and proclaiming how Christ can change lives. During these missions he also founded the Church of Alexandria. He wrote this gospel in approximately 70 CE.

The early manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel conclude with verse 8: the women fleeing from the empty tomb, and saying nothing because they were afraid. Verses 9-20, telling all the glorious resurrection stories, were added at a later date.

This original ending has been debated for centuries. D E Nineham in *The Gospel of St Mark* says “...[it is] the greatest of all literary mysteries.”

Did the original ending get lost?
Did Mark do it on purpose?

I guess we will never know the precise answer. But one thing is for sure: Mark loved the Lord and had a deep desire for others to know Him as well. Of course he knew the story after the resurrection; of course he believed completely in the risen Lord.

His resurrection is meant for me!

Why then were the first eight verses of Mark

16 the ones being emphasised by this gospel writer?

Perhaps Mark was focussing on other key concepts of Easter which could so easily get lost in the glory of the Resurrection like the **life** of Jesus and what it means to us.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you. Ephesians 1: 18



PRAYER: Lord, I pray that you take me on a new journey this Easter, open my eyes and heart to new truths and teachings. Help me to know that You are with me “to the very end of the age.” AMEN.

TUESDAY – What Should Be, Isn’t



Mark 16: 1-6 *When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He is risen!”*

In the normal order of events, the women were taking spices, expecting to embalm Jesus’ body. They were expecting to have a problem with moving the stone. They were expecting to find Jesus’ body.

Yet....The tomb that should’ve been closed → was open. The body that should’ve been there → was gone.

Instead....There is a young man dressed in white talking to them. They are told Jesus is not dead!

The women’s world is rocked to the core that morning! The normal order of things is no longer. The truths and rituals that they had known all their lives: life, death, embalming, burial

– these are no longer absolute concepts.

“Mark’s gospel is a book about shattering human expectations. Even the conventions of how the gospel should end. (C. Clifton Black).

Time to shake things up!

Jesus’s resurrection turns our world upside down and shatters expectations. It makes us question all we believed before. He will work in our lives in ways that we cannot imagine or expect.

“I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21: 5)

And just as we know the Easter story goes on from here to celebrate the Resurrection, so too will our

lives be transformed into glorious stories of His work.



- But are we willing to face the shake-up?
- Will we allow Christ, this Easter, to transform our thinking and expectations?



Prayer: Lord, we so often become comfortable in our lives, comfortable with norms we have in place, that we are unable to see that You are waiting to do so much more in our lives. Help us to see that our expectations can prevent us from seeking new visions and new truths. Give us the courage to let You turn our expectations upside down.
AMEN

WEDNESDAY - He was crucified but....



Mark 16: 6 & 7 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. *But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee.’*”

Yes, they crucified Jesus. The best of humanity dies for the worst of it. Certainly not the finest hour of the religious leaders or the people that got caught up in the events..

The worst thing is never the last thing

What is this saying to us?

God gave us the freedom to choose. He did not take that away then, and He does not take that away today. Sometimes we choose to do things with devastating consequences, like the religious leaders did. We choose to hurt each other by our actions and

words. Sometimes we get caught up in catastrophic events beyond our control: natural disasters, cancer, accidents. This is life. It is not God giving us that “stuff” because of something we did or didn’t do!

What did God do in response? He sent Jesus to show us how to deal with life. He sent Him to live and feel every human emotion and situation. So He would KNOW exactly what our lives entailed. He subjected Himself to the same things that we

face today. Every situation, every emotion – He has done it.
but He ROSE from the tomb – for us.
 “He has risen! He is not here” (verse 6).
 His light defeated darkness.
 His love vanquished hate.
 His life conquered death.

Jesus is saying: Because I did this – you shall have this too!

Adam Hamilton response to the question – Do you believe the resurrection: “***I don’t only believe it, I am counting on it.***”



What will it take for you to believe in the Easter miracle, to trust in it and to count on it?



Prayer: Lord, because You died, and rose, and live, I can face tomorrow without fear. Help me to step forward today knowing that You hold my future in Your hands. Knowing that You have felt what I feel, struggled with what I struggle with and delighted in the things of life. Help me to count on what You did at Easter. AMEN

THURSDAY – Especially Peter



Mark 16: 7 *Go and tell His disciples, especially Peter, that He is going ahead of you into Galilee. (CEB)*

Mark was so specific in mentioning Peter by name – Peter the sinner. Peter the man who loved Jesus, yet denied ever knowing Him. He was racked with guilt and shame. And then Jesus died before Peter could put it right.

sent him out with a great commission. And that is what it means for us

On this rock Peter, (.....) I will build My church

Mark wants to make sure that we understand that JESUS’ death and resurrection put it right with Peter. Jesus loved Peter, forgave him and

today – not only for Peter. We need to really understand this level of forgiveness that Easter gives to us.

Go and tell His disciples – especially: Tom, Susan, Jack and YOU (.....)! ***I forgive***

you, I love you, go out and be my witness.

Mark took that first Easter story and made it relevant for every generation after that. Jesus says to us "I still love you, I still want you and I still need to use you; no matter what you have done. I will never desert you. It will never be too late." Mark's Easter story brings us (yes, you and me today) to the threshold of our faith: saying through our human experiences and failures will we trust the God who is beyond death? The God who has done it all for us.

Matthew 16: 18 & 19 *Now I say to you that you are Peter (which*



Prayer:

At the cross, at the cross
I surrender my life
I'm in awe of You
I'm in awe of You
Where Your love ran red
And my sin washed white
I owe all to You
I owe all to You, Jesus

means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.



– Have you denied Jesus?

– Hear Jesus say:

"It's never too late.

– Do you want to live the rest of your life then as Peter did?

There's a place where sin and shame are powerless
Where my heart has peace with God
And forgiveness
Where all the love I've ever found
Comes like a flood
Comes flowing down
AMEN (Chris Tomlin)

FRIDAY – My Jesus



Deuteronomy 31: 8 *Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; He will neither fail you nor abandon you."*

The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened. Mark 8:16

In the original scripts of Mark's gospel, this is where his account ends – with the fear and silence of

the women. These same women who remained at the foot of the Cross through the horrific events of Jesus' crucifixion. These are not faint-hearted women. After all, the disciples all left!

Was Mark portraying them as fallible? These strong women who had gone against the norms of their day, who had been taught first-hand by Jesus and who were able to witness His death – even they have weakness of belief. Just like the strongest of you and I.

Just suppose for a moment that Mark meant this to be an unfinished ending. That he is challenging us to write our own ending to his Gospel. We know how John Wesley, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce, Corrie ten

Boom, and Desmond Tutu all finished Mark's Gospel.

How are you going to finish Mark's gospel?

What is going to be your story? We are told that "He has gone ahead of you"



– Can you, this Easter earnestly seek and find YOUR path where Christ is leading?

– Are you prepared to make a difference?

This is Mark's challenge to us – centuries later – and so **AN ODDLY PERFECT ENDING!**

Believe you can make a difference



Prayer: Follow now in His footsteps, for He has gone before you.

Serve your Lord in sincerity and faithfulness. Always strive to do His will. Teach those along your way to love and serve the risen Christ.

May God protect you and give you courage to make a difference in a hurting world. Go in peace. AMEN

