



LENTEN
DAILY DEVOTIONAL
GUIDE
—2025—



WELCOME *and* INTRODUCTION

During the six-week period leading to Easter, Christians around the world observe the season of Lent. Lent is a forty-day journey dedicated to an intense, renewed focus on discipleship to Jesus. We turn toward the cross. We consider what it means to *take up* our cross. We contemplate what it meant for Christ to take up *his*. We are called to repentance. We are encouraged to fast. We learn to long for resurrection. On Easter Sunday, we celebrate a risen Savior.

In a well-known prayer, Richard of Chichester (1197-1253) says, "Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which thou hast given us; for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us. O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, may we know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly; for thine own sake."

Clearer. Dearer. Nearer. Knowing. Loving. Following. For you, Lord, and your kingdom.

For the past three years, this devotional guide has made use of the Revised Common Lectionary. Lectionary readings remind us that we belong to the body of Christ, calling churches to engage in a shared reading of the Word that reaches beyond the local fellowship. Use of a lectionary helps us pay attention to the whole of Scripture, directing us to selections from the Old Testament, Psalms, a Gospel reading, and then other portions of the New Testament. The lectionary also challenges us to consider texts we might otherwise avoid. Rather than sticking to our favorites, we contemplate the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

This year, we are doing something a little different. We turn our attention to the Gospel of Mark. We will walk through Mark's account with and alongside Jesus. In considering the immediacy and urgency with which Mark presents his account of Jesus, the Son of God, perhaps we will be challenged afresh to live as his disciples *today*, seeking his will *now*, trusting him this *minute*, aligning our lives with him *always*.

In this devotional guide, you are invited to seek God alongside the students, staff, and faculty of Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. Each day's devotional entry links to a Scripture passage, includes an excerpt from that passage, contains a short meditation, and leads the reader in a brief prayer. Our goal each day is to read God's Word, seek God's will, and do God's work. Our prayer is that God, by grace, would lead us to increase in faith, hope, and love, that we might proclaim, demonstrate, and embody the Gospel.

This guide has been composed and compiled by those whom Christ has gathered as part of the community that now studies together at the Seminary. We offer these meditations to the world, inviting all people into relationship with God through Jesus Christ and desiring that those who already walk with him might be encouraged in their faith. We believe Jesus is King and Savior. We believe he is good beyond measure. We trust that all who call out to him receive the forgiveness of sins, freedom from sin and death, and an everlasting hope, life abundant, both now and with God forever.

Jesus is mighty to save. Let us follow him.

REV. BEN SIMPSON

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MARCH 5 | ASH WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 9:1-8

— PREPARE US ANEW, O GOD —

“Prepare the way of the Lord...”

At this time of year, I begin clearing out cluttered rooms filled with old things, dust, and distractions. My house becomes ready for something new to take place once I've cleaned and organized. Lent is like a spiritual spring cleaning, a time for the Holy Spirit to clear the clutter in our hearts and prepare us anew for God's transforming work.

Mark opens his Gospel declaring a new beginning for God's people through the "good news of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God." He introduces John the Baptist as the messenger who prepares the way for Jesus, using a blend of Old Testament texts—Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah. John's role is a fulfillment of God's promises and a continuation of the work of prophets like Elijah, who called people to prepare their hearts for the Lord.

Just as the Israelites waited for the promised Messiah, we too are waiting—for Christ to come into our lives more fully. John's message is clear: repentance is not a mere outward act but a 180-degree inner turn. It's not just about changing our behavior but about a deep, heart-level transformation—turning away from sin and rebellion against God to prepare our hearts for Jesus.

As John baptized with water, he pointed to the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). This is the transformation we need—not just rituals, but the power of the Holy Spirit working within us to renew us.

Lent is a time to examine our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to purify us. It's an opportunity to clear the clutter in our hearts—the sins, distractions, and attachments that keep us from fully experiencing God. As we receive the ashes today, let them remind us that we are dust, but also that in Christ, we are called to a new beginning.

Heavenly Father, remove the clutter from my heart through the transforming work of your Holy Spirit that I might know and love Jesus more.

ELIZABETH E. SHIVELY, PhD

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MARCH 6 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 1:9-11

— LORD, BE PLEASED *with* ME —

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.””

Jesus is following in the footsteps of those he is called to serve. Without hesitation, Jesus goes to the water for baptism by John. This shows us the human character of Jesus! Jesus led by example in all that he did. He did not just talk about it; he practiced what he preached!

Not only do we recognize the human character of Jesus as he goes to the Jordan for baptism, we also see the true desire of Jesus to do his Father's will. As the time drew near for Jesus to be crucified, he said, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

During this Lenten season, I challenge all believers to ask this simple question: how much do we truly desire to do our Father's will? Are we willing to endure temptation? Are we willing to endure betrayal? Are we willing to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim the name of Jesus in areas where persecution, judgement, and even death may occur?

Lastly, because of Jesus' willingness to be about his Father's business, we see those famous words from our Heavenly Father: “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

We are living in a world where everyone wants and seeks the approval and pleasure of human beings. We should, as believers, strive to mimic Christ in his desire to do his Father's will, and not his own. Only then do we hear those words echoed from heaven towards us: “This is my child, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

*Father, please help me to focus on doing your will, and not my own will.
I want to hear you say that you are pleased with me.*

MONTE WHETSTONE

*Master of Divinity Student
Fort Worth, Texas*



MARCH 7 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 1:12-13

— REFLECTION, REPENTANCE, *and* PREPARATION —

*“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.
He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan;
and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”*

In the season of Lent, we are called to the work of reflection, repentance, and preparation to deepen our relationship with God. Jesus himself went through a similar season when he was tempted in the wilderness.

Reflection Leading to Repentance: Jesus endured temptation by Satan in the wilderness. He came to redeem his people, Israel, from their past failures. The Israelites rebelled against God in the wilderness and thus endured forty years of wandering, but Jesus remained faithful during his wilderness trial, resisting temptation. Jesus rights the wrongs of the past in order to bring God’s people into right relationship with him once again.

In order to have true and meaningful repentance, we must first reflect on our standing before God. In this season, we are to look at ourselves with a sober mind so that we can turn to God once again. We need to know where we are so we can know where we must go. Do we, like the Israelites, need to be brought back to right relationship with God?

His Preparation, and Ours: In the Gospel of Mark, the temptation of Jesus happens before his public ministry begins. The forty days in the desert served as a time of preparation. Jesus was drawn closer to God before he began his work. This experience prepared Jesus for what was ahead. Mark tells us that “the angels waited on him,” or “ministered to him” (NASB, 1995). The forty days of temptation were not undergone by Jesus as a show of strength. Rather, this was a time for Jesus to draw near to the Father in order to prepare himself for his great reconciling ministry.

Lent is intended to be a time of preparation for each of us. We may not have three years of incredible ministry abounding with miracles lying ahead. However, every one of us lives a life that tells those around us about God. How will you allow God to prepare your heart this season?

*God, I ask that I would have the humility to see myself honestly
so that I might be prepared to accept your great gift of mercy.*

GRACE SWARTLEY
*Master of Divinity Student
Sioux Falls, South Dakota*



MARCH 8 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 1:14-12

— ABANDONING THE PLAN —

*“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.’
And immediately they left their nets and followed him.”*

Sometimes life doesn't turn out the way you planned. You thought you'd be married by now, but you aren't. You thought you'd have the promotion by now, but you don't. You thought you'd be happy by now but you're still deeply depressed. You thought your life would go as planned but then it didn't. The four men in today's devotional reading knew this feeling all too well.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John probably thought they would fish every day for the rest of their lives. It was how they kept food on the table and made their livelihoods. That is, until Jesus notices them and wrecks all of their plans (v. 16, 19). He calls them to let him lead them as he forms them into different kinds of fishermen (v. 17, 20). Through this call, Jesus compels these four men to use their skills for the building of his kingdom and his plan.

Their first response to this call is to leave behind everything—their nets, their boats, their families, their livelihoods (v. 18, 20). These men abandon every semblance of their plans for their lives in order to enter the new life that Jesus came to offer them.

This Lent, may we be encouraged that when life is not going as planned, a reformation of our plans is on the way, noticing us and calling us to leave these plans behind and to let him lead us in a new way to live. His name is Jesus.

*Lord, help us to willingly and joyfully leave our plans behind to follow you
and teach us how to use our gifts for your glory. Amen.*

KAT COLE
Master of Divinity Student
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MARCH 9 | SUNDAY | READING: MARK 1:21-28

— THE AUTHORITY *of* JESUS —

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law... The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Things are moving fast in Mark. We are only in the first chapter and Jesus has already been baptized, seen the Holy Spirit descend upon him, been sent out into the wilderness to be tempted, shared the gospel, and started gathering his disciples. Phew! The story is developing quickly, and Mark doesn't want to miss a beat! By the time we arrive in Capernaum, Jesus has received an invitation to teach in the synagogue, as was custom at the time for visiting teachers.¹

In our passage for today, notice verse 22. The people were amazed because Jesus taught them as "one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." The paradox highlighted here shows us that one who is a teacher is not always synonymous with who has authority. The teachers of the law, or scribes, were known for their expertise in interpreting and applying the law of Moses.²

The Gospels are filled with references to conflicts that arise between Jesus and the religious leaders of the time. The men who served among the Pharisees, Sadducees, Priests, and Scribes would have trained intensely for their professions. Yet, Jesus comes into the synagogue without their same level of formal education and captivates the crowd. Scripture notes that those gathered were amazed by the authority of Jesus' teaching! Not only does he teach with authority but he takes action that backs up that authority (v. 27).

For many of us, this passage can be a good reminder that "head knowledge" without "heart knowledge" is really no knowledge at all. The power of Jesus' teaching came from his relationship with God. Sure, he studied Scripture and knew it well enough to stand before the synagogue. But he didn't astound the people just because of his knowledge of Scripture. It is his relationship with God that set him apart as the true teacher.

Lord Jesus, may we humbly seek wisdom and knowledge through you first. Amen

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¹ Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew – Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 714.

² Wessel and Strauss, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew – Mark*, 715.



MARCH 10 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 1:40-45

— ALL THINGS NEW —

“... Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘i am willing. Be made clean!’ immediately the skin disease left him, and he was made clean.”

Yesterday, we read about Jesus driving out an impure spirit from a man in the synagogue on a sabbath in Capernaum. Tomorrow, we will read about the healing of a paralyzed man who was lowered through a roof to reach Jesus. Today, we focus our attention on a leper.

To have leprosy meant you were cut off from your community. In mark 1:40, this man breaks the law—he comes into society and falls at Jesus’ feet, begging to be made clean. There is no mention of the leper coming to Jesus with a great offering or preparing in any way. He came and fell at the feet of Jesus just as he was, a man burdened with leprosy.

These three healing stories from yesterday, today, and tomorrow showcase the power and greatness of Jesus. We are witnesses to his ruling over the heavens and the earth. We are also witnesses to the outcast, downtrodden and lowly who come humbly before Jesus. Jesus sees them, loves them, and heals them. He restores them. He makes them new.

Let us remember this during lent. Jesus comes to us. You. Me. He comes for us all. Therefore, let us come to Jesus in our imperfections and fall at his feet. Oppressed, burdened, beat down, tired, desperate, marginalized—wherever we are, Jesus comes, and nothing is too great for the one who conquered death. Let us see ourselves in the leper. We need not prepare, be buttoned up, or ready. Instead, we must go to him with haste and humility.

O lord, open our hearts and draw us near. Let us come to you just as we are. Amen.

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MARCH 11 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 2:1-12

— WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS —

And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

During Lent, we reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The story in Mark 2:1-12 offers us insight into the nature of Christ's work and the life-changing power of faith.

The scene is set in Capernaum, where Jesus is teaching inside a house so full that there is no room for even one more person. Amid the commotion over Jesus' presence in the house, four friends lower a paralyzed man through the roof, determined to bring him into the presence of Jesus. The faith of both the friends and the paralyzed man is incredibly visible not in words but in action: a relentless pursuit for healing.

Jesus' response is striking. Instead of immediately addressing the man's physical condition, Jesus speaks to his deepest need: "Son, your sins are forgiven." This statement sparks controversy among the religious leaders present, who accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Yet Jesus demonstrates his authority as God's Son by also physically healing the man.

Our key verse, Mark 2:12, records the crowd's reaction: "We have never seen anything like this!" This awe-filled response from the crowd reminds us that Christ's work defies human expectations. Our Lord does not merely address the superficial problems of humanity; He penetrates deep into the heart, offering forgiveness, restoration, and eternal life.

As we move through Lent, we are invited to consider the deeper areas of our lives that need Jesus' healing touch. Are there sins we have hidden or burdens we have carried for too long? Like the paralyzed man and his friends, we are called to bring our brokenness to Christ, trusting that he will give and we will receive what only he can offer.

Jesus continues to work in ways that leave us in awe, often beyond what we can ask or imagine, which leads us to proclaim in awe on our own faith journey, "We have never seen anything like this!"

*Lord, thank you for your power to forgive and heal.
Help us to trust you with every part of our lives, so that we can
experience and bear witness to your transformative work in this world. Amen.*

DAVID ZAMORA
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MARCH 12 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 2:13-17

— CEDAR, SINNERS, *and* THE SAVIOR —

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

I didn't know I had seasonal allergies. But every winter/spring, with the Central Texas cedar in bloom, I would get these mysterious sinus attacks that eventually became full-blown infections. Finally, my wife stated what was obvious to everyone but me: “You have allergies. You need to see a doctor.”

In today's passage, Jesus is walking by the sea with a crowd that just saw him forgive a man's sins, then proving he can do that by also healing the man's paralysis. The crowd included more than only a few tax collectors and sinners. Verse 15 notes, “for there were many who followed him.”

And yet, there's still one sitting in his booth. Levi (also called Matthew) hears Jesus utter two little life-changing words that all who encounter him must face: “Follow me” (v. 14). Levi not only accepts, but invites Jesus, his disciples, and a rowdy crowd of sinners into his home for dinner.

As they're enjoying the meal, some Pharisees ask why Jesus, this supposedly holy teacher, is so cozy with sinners. Jesus replies, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners” (v. 17). And here's the real kicker: Jesus' mission doesn't stop with the tax collectors and sinners, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

My denial of my allergy to cedar only hindered my healing. In the same way, an insistence on do-it-yourself righteousness only holds Jesus at arm's length when what we really need is to be seated with him among other sinners. The only real difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector isn't any absence of sin, but the ability to recognize it and obey that one, simple command: “Follow me.”

Today, take a moment to recognize your infirmity and thank God for the presence of Christ, our Healer.

*Jesus, I admit my need for a healer and rejoice in the grace
you show daily as I follow hard after you. Amen.*

MATT RILEY

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MARCH 13 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 2:23-28

— REST *or* RESTRICTION? —

“Then he said to them, ‘The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.’”

Sabbath sounds so simple. You take a day off from work and rest in the presence of the Lord. Yet, I personally get so bogged down in the details of which day should be my sabbath, or what to do if I have something that needs to get done, that I feel more constricted by the sabbath and end up not entering into God’s promise of rest. This results in feelings of shame rather than peace. That decision, while on the opposite end of the spectrum, is not dissimilar to the Pharisees in its deviation from God’s heart.

In considering the sabbath and what that practically entails, I have a day that technically could “count,” a day in which I will often spend time in worship or fellowship with friends rather than working. To call it sabbath though comes with a feeling of restriction, almost like being a prisoner to an expectation where I no longer can work on things if I need to.

When did sabbath become about what is expected rather than as the gift that God gave us? When did it become more about a checklist of things not to do rather than an opportunity to be free in the presence of the Father? When did the false expectation of doing absolutely nothing invade my heart and shove out the reality of what sabbath is?

Jesus confronts this directly in this passage, gently reminding us that the sabbath was made for us. He establishes his authority over it. A common theme throughout Scripture is God’s grace over our inadequacy, and our ability to sabbath “correctly” is no different. We need to dethrone the rules and expectations placed on us by others and by ourselves about what correct sabbath rest looks like in order to fully experience the loving presence of our God. Our sabbathing will not all look the same, and that is okay. Let us remember that Jesus, not us or our expectations, is the lord of the sabbath.

*Lord, I pray that you gently correct my view of the sabbath
and remind me to rest in your presence. Amen.*

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MARCH 14 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 3:7-12

— VISION *to* VICTORY —

“Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.”

In today’s verses, crowds gather from all directions, drawn by whispers of healing and freedom. From Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, and beyond, they press in, hands outstretched, seeking a touch from the Savior. As Jesus healed, the unclean spirits recognized him. They fell at his feet, crying out, “You are the Son of God!” (v. 11). They recognized him but remained bound by their nature. It was a vision of truth, a sight of the divine without transformation. Their cries, though true, were silenced—words without power.

We are often in a similar place—recognizing Jesus, his power, his love, yet struggling to let that knowledge move us. But unlike the unclean spirits, we are not without hope. Though they were silenced in their futility, in Christ, we are invited to respond—to allow his truth to reshape us and bring victory!

Reflecting on my journey to seminary, I recall an important crossroads: I was doing the right things—praying, seeking, serving—then grief struck, sharp and sudden. The call to release certain people and comforts was unmistakable, but I hesitated. I had known the warmth of belonging, but in clinging to the gift, I resisted the victory the Giver offered.

It was a quiet tension—holding onto blessings that bound me. In surrender, I found the strength to take the next right step. It wasn’t about preserving comfort, but embracing who Jesus is, beyond his gifts. I began seeing Him as the telos—our ultimate purpose. Each step of trust led to freedom, revealing that every blessing and calling is a path to walk, not a possession to cling to.

Lent calls us to look beyond the blessings to the One who gives them. True vision isn’t just seeing—it’s responding, letting his truth sink deep and reshape our lives. To see him is to surrender, to let that vision bring the victory of transformation.

Lord, thank you for the hope of your victory. Open our eyes to the vision of your restoring work, that we may surrender fully and walk in the transformation you offer. Amen.

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MARCH 15 | SUNDAY | READING: MARK 3:13-19

— WANTED —

“He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.”

The God of the universe wants us. The one who created all, sees all, and knows all wants us.

In this passage, we see Jesus calling the Twelve to himself and giving them their mission as apostles. They are to be with him, go out and preach, and are given the authority to drive out demons. So why didn't Jesus choose others? What was so special about these men compared to any others he might have chosen? In calling these twelve men, did he not exclude others who might be more qualified or gifted? Did Jesus not want others?

I believe the answer has nothing to do with the twelve chosen, and everything to do with the One choosing. Jesus wanted these men because he had created them for this moment and this purpose. It was not that he excluded others because he did not want or love them, but rather that this was not their mission.

Our culture tells us we can go anywhere and do anything. The God who loves and created us tells us that we are wanted in Christ for a specific time, mission, and call. This might mean we are excluded from certain circles, jobs, ministries, or relationships, but ultimately, it is better to be excluded while walking in obedience to God's call than to attempt to walk separately from God's grace and covering.

Lent offers us an opportunity to remember the choices Jesus made to ignore the temptations of power, wealth, and fame for the lonely call to death, because he wanted us back more than anything.

Lord, thank you for wanting me, pursuing me, and calling me to a life lived in obedience to you. May you give me the grace to walk in your footsteps.

AUSTIN HALLMAN

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MARCH 16 | SUNDAY | READING: MARK 3:31-35

— FAITH MANIFESTING *in* OBEDIENCE —

And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

The opening scene in the third chapter of Mark’s Gospel witnesses Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath. Outraged by his disregard for Sabbath laws, the Pharisees conspire to destroy Jesus. In their eyes, he is a lawbreaker who must be dealt with.

When Jesus leaves the synagogue for the Sea of Galilee, unclean spirits perceive that he is the Son of God. Ascending the mountain, Jesus commissions the twelve disciples to preach and cast out demons. Hearing reports of his exorcisms, Scribes from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of being in league with Beelzebub.

These exchanges create a dramatic build-up to the concluding verses of the chapter, where Jesus asks, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Clearly, it is not his biological kin, who are standing outside the door. It is also not the religious leaders who keep the letter of the law but fail to perceive the spirit of law embodied in Jesus’ healing ministry. Nor is it the unclean spirits, who rightly identify Jesus but otherwise remain unchanged.

Jesus says that his true family are those who do God’s will. Rightly identifying Jesus as the Son of God is not enough. If it were, the unclean spirits would be Jesus’ family. No, true faith is manifest in obedience. If we truly trust in Jesus, then we will obey his Father’s will. We simply cannot disregard the Law in the name of the Gospel. Rather, in the light of the Gospel, we must discern the spirit of the law and live accordingly.

So, what is the spirit of the law? Jesus himself embodies it by healing the sick, confronting evil, and pronouncing forgiveness. If we want to be counted among his family, then we must do the same.

Lord, help us this Lenten season to bring healing to those who are sick, liberation to those who are suffering from evil, and forgiveness to those who remain in rebellion against you and your kingdom. Amen.

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MARCH 17 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 4:1-20

— SOIL, SEEDS, *and* SCRIPTURE —

*“...but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth,
and the desire for other things come in and choke the word...”*

In our reading for today, we encounter the first parable taught by Jesus in the book of Mark. Jesus uses an agricultural approach. He knows the crowd would be familiar with the language of seeds and soil. The disciples ask for clarification; Jesus explains the parable, equating the seed sown with the Word of God.

How many times in life do we take soil and seeds for granted? We have become so accustomed to purchasing our food that we forget the miracle of a new seedling bursting from the soil. Consider: a tablespoon of soil contains billions of microorganisms, creating the perfect ecosystem which can bring forth new life right from under our feet. Consider also the seedling: taking root, growing, and, hopefully, eventually, bearing fruit. It is amazing to think what a plant must fight to survive: weeds, hungry insects, crazy Texas weather patterns, and pesky Waco squirrels! (Why, oh why do the squirrels love my raised garden bed?)

Just as we take God's creation of the soil and seeds for granted, we can do the same with Scripture. While we know that the Word of God is ever present and alive, the busyness of our lives and the desires of this world can seem louder than Scripture. With smartphone technology, social media, and other outlets vying for our attention, these resources can spark unrest within us rather than helping us maintain space for Scripture to take root within our hearts.

During this Lenten season, I encourage you to get in the garden. Plant seeds and marvel in the miracle of the earth, which God made, and which provides everything needed for seeds to sprout. The same God who makes the seeds flourish in the soil is the same God that creates hearts within us that can receive the gift of Scripture. Set aside busyness and the desires of this world so our hearts can become rich soil in which Scripture takes root, flourishes, and bears fruit as we journey toward Easter.

*O God, wonderful Creator of the soil, seeds, and Scripture,
allow our hearts to receive your word and your creation as grace
and be filled with both awe and wonder.*

MEREDITH SANDERS

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MARCH 18 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 4:26-29

— THE MYSTERY *of* SEEDS —

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.”

In this season of Lent, what an image we receive, what a representation of the Kingdom we find in the Gospel of St. Mark.

I love the expression here as we delve into the workings of the kingdom, explained so easily in imagery we can understand: seeds are spread, the plants grow, and the harvest is reaped. But within this seemingly simple process lies a deeper mystery, one for which we are given no explanation. What causes the sprouting and the growing that enables the harvest to eventually take place?

I am sure that we could fill in the blanks with an all too human and complex answer, but the answer may be simple: to experience a mystery, we must empty ourselves. Our self-denial, or penitence, is an emptying of ourselves, a tilling of the soil of our souls. It is a preparation for the conversion of faith that is planted by the seed of the gospel.

The seed, the word of our Lord, grows in our hearts as we consider it in obedience. Faith begins to sprout. Slowly, tended by caring, love, and prayer, something so small and delicate grows stronger, a stalk, but not apart from the wind and storms of this world. They batter and test the plant as it grows, and yet the full fruition of faith, that which is to be reaped by the hands of our great Lord, is a glorious event despite our trials. It will be a harvest unlike any other, one in which the fruit is not consumed, but saved and preserved, for it has been made whole and healthy, even if it does not know why.

And why should this seem so strange to us? He was laid in the tomb, in the earth, and three days later our salvation sprang forth to new life, in full bloom. We know not exactly how! And the kingdom grew, and it grows.

Oh God, most merciful sower of the seeds of our lives, we thank you for the mystery of faith and for our growth in it. May I be emptied of myself so that your glory may shine upon me. Grow me according to your design, in the name of our resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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MARCH 19 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 4:30-34

— OFFERING OUR SMALL FAITH —

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.”

The season of Lent has a way of highlighting our exhaustion and opening our eyes to the demands of our lives that comes from our jobs, relationships, and even our daily rhythms that seem to strain our felt relationship with God. As we try to follow Jesus through his forty-day journey in the desert in which he resists temptation while centering on simplicity and contemplation, we might find ourselves feeling worn and weary.

We might feel disappointed in ourselves for not successfully giving something up or starting something new during the Lenten season. There might be frustration when we miss a day in our Lent Devotional. Whatever that thing is, this season sometimes has a way of highlighting our exhaustion and imperfections. So, what do we hold onto as we encounter this reality in our Lenten journey?

The words of Jesus in Mark 4:30-34, the parable of the mustard seed, offers a gentle and kind reminder to keep journeying despite our exhaustion and imperfection. Jesus extends encouragement to our souls as he gives reassurance that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed – the smallest seed known on earth – we can rest knowing growth is possible.

The growth of our faith, just like the growth of the Kingdom of God, is assured if we can hold onto an ounce of faith the size of the tiniest seed – the mustard seed. Lent reminds us to trust God and give time for the loving Gardener to cultivate growth within and through us over time. These small acts of obedience we observe during Lent such as prayer, Scripture meditation, fasting, etc. can lead to transformative growth in our spiritual lives despite our ability to practice them perfectly.

Dear God, please remind us of Jesus’ words that the smallest measure of faith or acts of devotion, despite imperfection or exhaustion, like a mustard seed, can lead to flourishing growth over time. Amen.

RYAN McCORD

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MARCH 20 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 4:35-41

— IN THE BOAT *with* JESUS —

“A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.”

We have trekked through the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel for the past three days. Have you noticed what Jesus has been up to?

Jesus, while sitting in a boat, teaching a large crowd gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He tells the parable of the sower, illustrating how different hearts receive and respond to God's Word. Jesus also explains the parable to his disciples, emphasizing the importance of seeking and understanding God's truth.

He continued to teach using the parable of the lamp, the parable of the growing seed, and the parable of the mustard seed to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of God. With urgency, Jesus emphasized the importance of hearing and understanding his teachings and the need for faith and trust in him. Overall, Jesus was reaching out to the people, teaching them, pointing to the kingdom of God, and demonstrating his humble authority. His mission was (and is) to bring salvation to all who believe in him.

While still in the boat, Jesus nudges his disciples to sail across to the other side of the sea. Jesus had been in the boat all day. Jesus had been teaching all day. Jesus, appropriately, took a nap!

My mind often wonders why Jesus, who is fully God, would fall asleep during such an alarming situation. However, this moment reminds us of Jesus' humanity and his complete trust in God. Even while sleeping, Jesus showed his disciples that they could trust God's protection and care. When the disciples woke Jesus, he called out and calmed the storm. "Peace! Be still!" What a powerful statement of his authority over nature and his ability to bring peace amid chaos.

Lord Jesus, meet us today! During this Lenten season, give us the boldness to follow your teachings while resting in your care, and help us to trust in your sovereignty, especially when facing life's storms.

BOBBY CONTRERAS

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MARCH 21 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 5:1-20

— FACE *to* FACE —

“As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him.”

In Mark 5:1-20, we see an interaction between Jesus and the residents of a region called the Gerasenes. When Jesus arrives, people and demons come face to face with Jesus.

When meeting someone new, it is natural to ask, “Who are You?” Throughout history people have asked the same question about Jesus. C.S. Lewis said Jesus was either a liar, lunatic, or Lord. John Duncan called this the “trilemma,” or a three-fold dilemma. We must decide who Jesus was and is. Just like those residing in the Gerasenes, we encounter Jesus and face the question, “Who is Jesus to me?”

For the demons called Legion, they knew Jesus was God. He was not their Lord and Savior, so they fled. For the people, they must have thought He was a lunatic or a liar, so they ran Jesus off due to fear. But for the man who had been freed from the Legion, he knew Jesus to be Lord, so he followed.

Sometimes I like to put myself in the story and wonder, “what if I was a bystander who witnessed the crazy man sitting sane? Or, what if I was the man with the Legion?”

I think you and I are both. Jesus came to reveal God’s glory so that we may be free; not from physical chains, but from spiritual chains. Whether there is a Legion, or whether we have lived in sanity, we are all in need of Jesus as our Lord.

So, as a bystander of God’s miracles in the written Word and in the lives of people around me, as a woman freed from the chains of sin, I have come face to face with Jesus saying, “Lord, let me be with you.” In return, Jesus says to you and to me, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you” (Mark 5:19, NRSV).

Thank you for coming from heaven to earth to face and free us. Help us to remember and share our testimony. We declare you, Jesus, not only as God, but as Lord, for the glory of your name. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

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MARCH 22 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 5:21-43

— HEALING, RESTORATION *and* FREEDOM —

*“Jesus said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you.
Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.’”*

We are nearing the halfway point of the Lenten season. For some, this journey may have begun with great excitement and high expectations about what you will experience as you seek to empty yourself and be filled with the truth of God. Whether this Lenten season has rekindled and deepened your faith or left you feeling confused and anxious, may you find the healing power of Jesus and the freedom he offers, as illustrated by the two daughters of Israel we read about today in Mark.

During his ministry, Jesus is consistently seen crossing boundaries—whether social, economic, or spiritual. When Jesus returns to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, He meets Jairus, who pleads with Him to “come and lay [his] hands on [his daughter], so that she may be made well and live.”

As Jesus begins to walk with Jairus, he is surrounded by a large crowd. In the midst of this crowd, bodies are pressing together as people push to get closer to Jesus, creating a chaotic atmosphere. Suddenly, Jesus pauses. He feels a presence that stands out among the crowd. It is a woman who has suffered from a blood disorder for twelve years. Despite many doctor visits and possibly spiritual visits, she has been left hopeless and drained—mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially.

While the woman receives her healing through her encounter with Jesus, Jairus learns that his daughter has passed away. However, we know how the story ends: when Jesus enters Jairus’s house, his daughter is healed and restored.

During this Lenten season, as we strive to be imitators of Christ in faith, let us remember that true healing, restoration, and freedom are found in the presence of God. Those who encounter Jesus are never the same. There is a transformation that takes place, as seen in the stories of the unnamed woman and Jairus’s daughter. This leads us to one question that we all must ask ourselves during this time: how can we bring Christ’s healing into the lives of others, leaving them in a better condition than we found them?

God, may we genuinely seek you above all else. May our faith illuminate your goodness, faithfulness, and healing power. Thank you for granting us the courage to enter into the lives of others, no matter their condition or circumstance, and equipping us with the resources needed to alter their condition.

JIMI NSHIMIRIMANA

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MARCH 23 | SUNDAY | READING: MARK 6:1-6

— TOO GOOD *to* BELIEVE? —

“And he was amazed at their unbelief.”

Word had spread about Jesus' exploits in the region of Galilee. In Capernaum, he had healed a paralyzed man (2:11-12). He had restored a man's withered hand in a synagogue (3:5). On the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, he had driven demons out of a man (5:13). He had healed a lady hemorrhaging for twelve years (5:29) while on the way to raise up Jairus's deceased daughter (5:41-42). It had reached a point where those who had afflictions knew that if they could simply touch Jesus (or his garments) then they would be healed. What faith!

On the heels of performing these many miracles in and around Galilee, we read that Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth and began teaching in the synagogue. Like many passages before it, we read here that Jesus's listeners are astonished at his wisdom and miracles. Yet their perception quickly turns from one of amazement to one of disgust. Those gathered take great offense at him and his teachings. They were scandalized. Despite hearing his proclamation of the kingdom of God and perhaps even being eyewitnesses to some of his miracles, it seems that they could not believe that this Jesus was the same man, “the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon,” (6:3) who came from their town of Nazareth. It seemed too good to be true. Consequently, we read that Jesus's works of power were severely limited there due to their unbelief.

It is easy to point fingers at the people of Nazareth for their lack of faith. Or perhaps at Peter who eventually would deny Jesus not once, not twice, but three times, despite having experienced firsthand the truth and power of his words and deeds. Yet, if we're honest, we too have born witness to the life-giving truth and miracles of this Jesus and still fail to believe at times. But praise God that the faithfulness of Jesus outstretches our faithlessness.

Jesus, grant us faith that we might discover anew your goodness and grace.

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MARCH 24 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 6:7-13

— THE BEAUTY *of the* DIVINE CALL —

“He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”

The Lord is calling. Are you ready to answer? The mission of the Twelve reminds all Christians that we have a divine call on our lives. This special calling was given to us by our Savior, Jesus Christ. It allows us to participate actively in the kingdom mission here on Earth. As his disciples, obeying our calling moves God’s mission forward—a mission that sends us out to be witnesses to all.

It is in this special relationship with the LORD where we find our purpose, which calls us to action. As gospel witnesses, we get to be ambassadors carrying out our Lord’s life-changing and life-saving teachings. We get the blessing of partnering with other Christian believers to share the good news—the same good news that brings deliverance and healing.

Mark’s narrative informs us that throughout our journey, there will be places that may not welcome or accept God’s teachings. This knowledge is important as we prepare for our various ministry assignments. Having this knowledge in advance helps us to not get discouraged along the way. Instead, we must continue to move on and reach out to those whose spirit wants to hear from the Lord. As authorized missionaries, we must proclaim Jesus to all hearers who choose to listen.

Our mission unites us all with Christ through his teachings. As his called disciples, we are given the authority to teach others. Your purpose has been anointed with power from the only source who holds all power—power that has authority over all things. Power that calls the lost back to their Creator and saves them from their sins as long as they repent and profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Remember, brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not need to take anything for our journey. We just need to be content and fully dependent on God and trust in his provision, knowing wholeheartedly “that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“Lord Jesus, we ask that you continue to mentor us in your ways so we can minister effectively to your people in your name. Amen.”

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MARCH 25 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 6:14-29

— POWER ANXIETY —

“The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.”

Growing up, I thought power was everything. If there was a character in a movie that had destructive, world-altering magical powers, then that would be the person I played on the playground. I always had to be the king or general in our backyard battles because I clearly knew the best battle tactics. I ran the grand high council of my friends with an iron fist!

My desire to be someone with all the power and control has dwindled as I've grown up. This is mainly because of the terrible toll that power, even whimsical playtime power, exacts on a person. This toll is the fear of losing power.

Herod Antipas feels fear in this scene. Why else would he go through with such a grotesque request from his wife and niece? While John clearly provoked and angered Herod, the passage indicates that Herod still enjoyed listening to him. However, Herod made an oath in front of everyone. I can image the anxiety Herod felt as his dinner guests all turned to him, waiting to see if he's a man of his word. Herod's fear of holding on to power, respect, and control leads him to permit the execution of John the Baptizer.

This passage is located right before the feeding of the five thousand, and because of that, we can see a shocking difference between the power of Herod and the power of Jesus. Herod's power is one that is wrapped up in fear and scarcity. Jesus' power is best displayed through service, abundant giving, and, as we will see later in the Gospel, selfless sacrifice.

As we journey to the cross this Lenten season, let us put aside the power of this world that hoards and destroys, and live into the power of Jesus, which loves and uplifts.

Jesus, help us to let go of our desires for power and control and teach us the power of service, giving, and sacrifice. Amen.

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MARCH 26 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 6:30-44

— COMPASSION *and* PROVISION —

*“He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place
all by yourselves and rest a while.”*

Does this sound familiar to you? After a wildly busy season, we seek rest. In my decades of ministry, I have needed a respite—“a place to rest awhile.” This is the invitation Jesus gives his disciples. But, just as for the disciples, our rest is often abruptly disrupted by people’s needs.

A great crowd had gathered because of Jesus’ miraculous works. They wanted more of his attention, time, and ministry. At this moment, Jesus reveals to us, once again, the heart of the Father. He had compassion for them. He took “a small loaf and two fishes” and fed the hungry masses.

This scene reminds us of the tension we often feel between personal rest and the urgency of ministry. We find ourselves overwhelmed by the people’s “need.” But Jesus, ever attentive to the needs of others, saw an opportunity to teach his followers something profound: ministry flows not from our strength but from God’s abundant provision. Compassion and provision go hand in hand.

When we feel depleted, it’s easy to see interruptions as obstacles. But Jesus transforms interruptions into opportunities for grace. He demonstrates that proper rest isn’t found in escaping the needs of others but in relying on the Father to meet those needs through us. Rest isn’t a withdrawal from ministry—it’s a posture of trust, believing that God will sustain us as we pour ourselves out in love.

This passage challenges us to embrace both compassion and dependence: compassion for the meeting of needs around us and dependence on the One who can do immeasurably more than we can imagine. Even in seasons of exhaustion, he reminds us that he is the source of all we need.

*Jesus, you are the source of compassion.
We find our rest and compassion in you. Amen.*

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MARCH 27 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 6:45-52

— HE SEES US *from the* MOUNTAINTOP —

*“Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.
And they were utterly astounded.”*

Have you ever tried walking on water?

I know I have, and I can giggle at the thought of an eight-year-old me, with a puffed-up chest and pink swimsuit, trying for the fifteen minutes to make it across my grandma’s pool without swallowing a mouthful of water.

When this passage was written, biblical, Jewish, Greek, and Roman traditions reinforced the commonly held notion that rulers had power over the sea, symbolically showing a ruler’s authority. Why is this significant for us?

This passage evinces Jesus as the true King, with ultimate and full divine authority.

In verses 45 and 46, Jesus sends the disciples into the boat, saying farewell. This implies a loving assurance to the disciples to have faith in reaching their destination. In verse 47, Jesus remained alone on the land until early morning, which would have been between 3:00 AM and 6:00 AM. Jesus can see the disciples in the sea from the mountaintop he was praying on amid darkness and distance (v. 46). That’s extraordinary! But, in verse 48, the disciples have made little progress against the wind as Jesus intended to pass them, just as God passed by Elijah and Moses in Exodus.

Jesus manifested himself to his disciples as the true King and Messiah. But “when they saw him walking on the sea” (v. 49), they were all “terrified” (v. 50). I’m sure I’d be frightened, too. But Jesus reveals himself, saying, “It is I.” These are the same words God said to reveal himself to Moses through the burning bush. It also foreshadows the soon-to-be reappearance of Jesus after his death and resurrection. So, Jesus stepped into the boat (v. 51) in the middle of the disciple’s disbelief and their “hardened hearts” (v. 52).

In this Lent season, let us be reminded that Jesus sees us from the mountaintop amid the storm, walks towards us on water, steps into our boats, and casts out our disbelief with his undeniable divinity. We are not afraid, because it is he who defeated death and rose again.

*Jesus, thank you for all the times you’ve left the mountaintop to be with me in my storms and disbelief. Please continue to show me and remind me of your divinity.
Amen.*

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MARCH 28 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 6:53-56

— RECOGNIZING JESUS —

“...people at once recognized him...”

“Which is better: number one or number two?” the ophthalmologist asks, flipping between lenses during an eye exam. The hope is that your vision will be adjusted in order to see crisply, cleanly, and clearly.

In yesterday’s reflection, the disciples’ failure to see and understand Jesus clearly caused them great and unnecessary fear. By contrast, our passage today says that when the boat reached Gennesaret, “the people at once recognized him.” They saw Jesus clearly and knew with certainty who he was.

In the middle of everyday life, it is sometimes hard to recognize Jesus. School drop offs, work, grocery shopping, and even church activities can blur our vision, causing us to begin feeling anxious or to look elsewhere for healing.

The disciples failed to recognize who Jesus truly was, even while walking with him daily. By contrast, those who lived “in between” recognized him immediately and believed that just touching the fringe of his garment could bring healing. By wishing just to touch his tassels (called tzitzit; which observant Jewish men wore on prayer shawls), they were proclaiming him as not only a prophet who could heal, but as the Messiah.

Where do we need to ask Jesus to adjust our vision in order to see him more clearly today? Where have we lost sight of who he truly is, or allowed beliefs or circumstances to skew our vision? Have we failed to recognize him in our daily lives?

During this Lenten season may we seek to see him clearly, in all his humbleness and in all his glory, to truly recognize Jesus in all those around us and in the midst of our circumstances.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for failing to see you clearly at times. Help us to recognize you in the midst of our busy lives, the people around us, and those we love. Give us eyes to see you clearly and to respond in faith.

HOLLY MASSIE

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MARCH 29 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 7:1-8

— CHECK YOUR HEART —

*“Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,
‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’”*

In the past few of days, we have read about Jesus performing miracles, including the feeding of several thousand people, his walking on water, and healing the sick. Yet the Pharisees and scribes in today’s reading are focused on rituals and tradition. Traveling from Jerusalem to see Jesus, they did not seek to follow him. Instead, they were looking for evidence they could use to support their rejection of him as the promised Messiah.

In this scene, they focus on ritual purity, condemning Jesus’ disciples for not engaging in the traditional handwashing ceremony before a meal. Quoting Isaiah 29:13, Jesus turns the tables on the religious leaders. Calling them hypocrites, Jesus reveals the importance of inner purity, rather than mere external cleanliness achieved through ritualistic performances. Jesus calls them hypocrites, because their traditional rituals mask the true nature of their hearts—they claim to honor God with their rituals, but their hearts are far from him.

This reading offers us an important reminder for the season of Lent: we must be sure our Lenten rituals, traditions, and practices draw us closer to God and are not for mere show or vain worship. This means we need to check our hearts.

The religious leaders, concerned with traditional handwashing rituals, emphasize external purity, not the inner purity of their hearts. Traditions are important, but not more important than having hearts close to God. God cares more about our heart posture than our precise execution of religious rituals.

During this Lenten season—as we sacrifice, reflect, and repent—let us pursue God, rather than mere ritual. Let us check our hearts, so we can be sure our hearts are not far from him.

*Dear God, helps us see the true nature of our hearts,
and give us a desire to pursue you this Lenten season. Amen.*

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MARCH 30 | SUNDAY | READING: MARK 7:24-30

— GENUINE FAITH —

“But she answered him, ‘Sir, even the dogs under table eat the children’s crumbs.’”

When I was given this text, my first reaction was, “What do we do with this passage, which includes a statement by Jesus that seems so harsh?” Here, Jesus encounters a Gentile woman. She decides to go to him and seek help for her daughter, who is possessed. Not only was she a Gentile, but she was also a “Canaanite” of Syrophenician descent. The Jews of that day would have considered her as being the worst kind of Gentile.

Jesus’ response seems harsh to us because we do not expect this kind of response from him. Note: his response in verse 27 includes the word “first,” which implies priority, not a monopoly. When we see a “first,” there follows a “second.”

There is another image in this passage, that of a household both children and dogs. The children represent the Jews, and the dogs are a metaphor for the Gentiles. Thus, the Jews were to receive God’s divine revelation first, before its being given to others.

The woman’s response shows she was quick-witted. She seemed to understand what Jesus was saying. She addresses him formally, showing she understood her position and dependence on his mercy. She could have walked away when Jesus seemed to admonish her, but she chose to respond with courage and faith. This led to her daughter being healed.

This woman exhibited genuine faith in approaching Jesus. As you reflect on this story, may you exhibit the same faith, demonstrating courage and finding hope as you approach God.

*Father, may I walk in the same faith as this Gentile woman
as I boldly approach you, making my petitions to you. Amen.*

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MARCH 31 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 7:31-37

— HE HAS DONE EVERYTHING WELL —

*“He has done everything well,” they said.
“He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”*

Jesus continued to travel as he left Tyre, through Sidon, and on by the Sea of Galilee. Still in Gentile territory, he was brought a deaf man with a speech impediment. Jesus took the man aside in private and performed a miracle. Verse 34 says Jesus looked up to the heavens, sighed, and said, “Be opened.” The man could now hear and speak plainly. Once Jesus healed the man and was brought back to the crowd, they could not contain their amazement at what Jesus had done. Verse 36 says that the more Jesus ordered them not to tell what He had done, the more zealously they proclaimed it. The crowd and the healed man proclaimed, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf hear, and the mutes to speak.”

Imagine how difficult and socially isolating it must have been for the healed man to have lived in an oral tradition while being unable to hear or speak properly. This would have affected how his community interacted with him and how he, in turn, interacted with them. But both he and his community had faith that Jesus could restore him. Their faith in Jesus allowed them to gain more than they expected: physical restoration of the man and a shared spiritual revelation, causing them to marvel at Jesus.

How much faith do we have in Jesus, both for ourselves and others? What would happen if we took the little faith we have to Jesus, believing that he will answer and he will restore? I believe we too would be like the man and his community, expecting one thing but receiving even more than we could imagine; enabling us to exclaim “He has done everything well.”

*Lord, help us to act on the faith you have given us so that our ears are open
and our tongues may always exclaim, “he has done everything well!”*

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STEPHANIE BARRETT

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APRIL 1 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 8:1-10

— CAN IT BE TRUE AGAIN? AND FOR ME? —

“His disciples replied, ‘How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?’”

The story of Jesus’s feeding the four thousand hits me like a movie title containing the number “2.” (“Really? You couldn’t have come up with something better than *Gladiator 2*?”) Second installments tend to be second-rate and live off their predecessor’s name and nostalgia.

I feel these things when I turn the page to Mark 8: “Didn’t I already read this story? You mean the feeding of the five thousand, right? Oh, four thousand. Got it. So, Jesus basically did this again? Oh, but fewer people with more food? So . . . a lesser miracle? Got it.” What possible nutritional value could this story hold that I haven’t already gleaned from the first feeding?

The story comes to life for me, however, when my eyes shift from Christ to the disciples. The same literary trope of repetition (i.e., yet another feeding narrative) that makes Jesus’s miracle appear lesser also makes the disciples’ disbelief appear greater. The rerun of their not-getting-it now becomes doubly disconcerting. I am amazed at their unbelief, and I want stand beside Jesus to ask the Twelve his question: “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 6:21). How is it possible that the disciples could have taken part in the miraculous feeding of five thousand and not been ready to believe that Jesus could do it again?

But, on closer examination of my own heart, I find that I am not able to stand beside Jesus. I stand, rather, among those dense disciples. For example, I read all sorts of miracle stories in the Bible and “believe” them: God’s creating *ex nihilo*, the parting of the Red Sea, Jesus’ resurrection. I know what the Bible says—at least with my head. Still, I hunger: a loved one needs healing, a pre-teen needs guidance, a congregation needs growth, a work for which I need equipping. How often do I come to the text with an empty plate and clean fork, starving—angry, bitter, worn—and wondering, “Is there anything here? Anything left? Anything for me?” In my daily disbelief and hunger, I hear the Lord asking me also, “Do you not yet understand?”

*Lord Jesus, may I come to you this day trusting in you,
in your Word, and in your power to provide, heal, deliver, and redeem.
Increase my faith in you, and give me understanding. Amen.*

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APRIL 2 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 8:14-21

— FORGOTTEN BREAD —

“When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full... did you collect?” They said to him, ‘Twelve.’”

We generally read the Scriptures with judgmental eyes. How could the disciples forget the miracles their rabbi had performed? The solution is obvious to us, especially when Mark gives us this account immediately following Jesus’s feeding of the four thousand. Bread was not the only thing the disciples forgot. This exchange describes us more often than not.

How often does desperation and panic blind us to the past goodness and provision of God in our lives? Like the disciples, how often do we let the gravity of our struggles warp our view of who God is? All through the Old Testament, we hear God tell his people to remember—establish festivals to remember, place stones to remember. When we remember that our Heavenly Father is merciful, completely good, loving, kind and sovereign, trusting him becomes possible. When we remember what he has done for us, we find rest for our souls.

Jesus asked them, “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full...did you collect?” Did they understand as they answered him, “twelve” – knowing there were twelve of them? Perhaps these hungry thousands were not the only people to whom Jesus was offering provision. Was it intentional that there were twelve baskets of leftovers to remind the disciples they would always be provided for as well? As they answered him, “twelve”, did they remember the miracles he had performed? Did they remember who he was?

Let us be people who are intentional in remembering. Remember how God has provided for you. Remember who God is. He is faithful. He is good. He is gracious. Remember what God has done for his people.

Holy Father, teach us to remember. Help us to keep who you are and what you’ve done at the forefront of our hearts and minds. Amen.

LAUREN ARMSTRONG

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APRIL 3 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 8:22-26

— TWO-STAGE SIGHT —

“Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.”

Yesterday, Jesus left us with a startling question, “Do you not yet understand?” Despite all that the disciples had witnessed and learned from Jesus, they still lacked understanding. Though they had seen his miracles, they did not yet grasp the full scope of his mission. You might say they were partially blinded to the truth.

Which brings us to our present passage. This unique miracle is the only instance of a two-stage healing in any of the Gospels, which coupled with its placement between two accounts of the disciples and Jesus, points to the importance of this story for understanding discipleship in Mark’s Gospel.

The blind man at Bethsaida is very similar to the disciples in the first half of Mark’s Gospel. This man is guided by Jesus out of the village and experiences his healing touch, but at first he is only granted partial sight. Like the disciples, he does not yet grasp the full picture. It is only upon experiencing Jesus’ touch again, and looking intently after the fact, that his sight is fully restored.

The disciples, and Peter most especially, will have their own two-stage experience in Mark 8:27-30 and Mark 8:31-9:1, where their understanding of Jesus’ mission will be challenged and clarified. Like the blind man at Bethsaida, they must look intently at who Jesus is and what he says if they are to truly come to know him.

During this Lenten season, as we prepare to celebrate the victory of our Lord in his Resurrection, we should reflect on the person and work of Christ. Where do we remain partially blind to the transforming nature of the gospel? Where do we try to fit Christ to our predetermined understandings, rather than look intently at the Jesus of Scripture and allow our understanding to be shaped by him?

*Lord Jesus, help us to see you clearly and know you truly,
as you have revealed yourself in your Word. Amen.*

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APRIL 4 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 8:27-30

— “YOU ARE THE MESSIAH” —

*“He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”
Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”*

Yesterday, we saw Jesus restore the sight of a blind man in Bethsaida, giving him clear vision. Instead of sharing this amazing news with everyone around him, Jesus commanded the man to go straight home. Today, we reflect on a moment that Christ shared with his disciples, where his true identity was confirmed and held to be a secret.

Jesus and his disciples continued their journey to Caesarea Philippi, where he asked them a series of the most direct and important questions found in the Gospels. First, Jesus asked, “Who do people say I am?” (v. 27). The disciples shared the various answers they had heard: one of the prophets, Elijah, and even John the Baptist (v. 28).

While each of those prophets was chosen by God and played an essential role in the coming of Christ, the disciples knew that Jesus was not these men, that he was so much more. Jesus asked them again, “But who do you say I am?” It was Peter who answered, “You are the Messiah” (v. 29). This very same Peter, who would go on to deny Christ in the face of his arrest, was the one who confirmed that he was the one and only Messiah!

Once again, Jesus commanded the disciples not to say anything (v. 30). Imagine knowing the most incredible, life-changing secret: you know the Messiah, and you can’t tell anyone. We are privileged to be on the other side of this life-changing conversation involving the disciples. We know who Jesus Christ is and his identity as the Messiah. Unlike Peter and the disciples then, who were told not to talk about it, we can and should share the good news of the Messiah with everyone!

*“Jesus, as we reflect on the Lenten season, help us to remember
that you are the Messiah, deserving our honor and worship. Amen.”*

SARAH BAULCH

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APRIL 5 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 8:31-9:1

— THE CALL *to* SURRENDER —

“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

Jesus displayed his great power through miracles in the beginning of Mark 8. Then, Peter declared him the Christ, the Messiah, the long-awaited conquering Messiah! Jesus consistently surprised the twelve disciples. He still amazes us today. Instead of taking over by force, the Son of God came to suffer, be killed, and rise again. Peter couldn't fathom this being true, but Jesus reminded him that he was setting his mind not on divine things, but on human things.

The kingdom of God on earth is a paradoxical kingdom. It is easy to be stuck in the worldly view, with no clear vision of the upside-down way of Jesus. In fact, the powers of this dark world fight to limit our sight only to what our culture embraces. They teach us to hold on to things tightly. Jesus shows us that we must surrender everything and even be willing to embrace suffering. That does sound outrageous, doesn't it?

The season of Lent is a time to reflect, repent, and prepare for Resurrection Sunday. We look to death so that we may celebrate life. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you something you are grasping for or holding on to tightly. Is there anything you need to surrender to God? In doing this, how might you embrace the upside-down way of Jesus today?

*Lord, help me to freely and fully surrender
all things to your glory and service. Amen.*

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APRIL 6 | SUNDAY | READING: MARK 9:2-8

— SEEING JESUS' GLORY —

“It is good for us to be here.”

This odd little passage provides theological riches disproportionate to its length. We see Jesus' divinity shine through the flesh in which he had come to dwell. We see an affirmation of Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of both Law (Moses) and Prophecy (Elijah).

What most draws my attention as a historian, however, is the resonance between this story and the “beatific vision.” In mystical theology, this vision is the summit of the spiritual journey, the moment when a person receives such a powerful sense of God's presence and love that all senses are overwhelmed, and the person is lost in spiritual bliss with God.

Peter, James, and John receive just such a vision. Peter exclaims, “It is good for us to be here,” and offers to build shelters so they can all stay awhile. Instead, a cloud overshadows them, and the moment is gone. John Chrysostom preaches that Peter offers this in order to avoid the suffering and tragic loss that Jesus predicted in the previous chapter.³ Why not just stay on the mountaintop? Jesus knows, however, that his work is not complete without the suffering that is to come.

If you are lucky, Jesus will at some point show you his glory like he does here. You cannot find it yourself. You can make your heart ready, but there is no sure way to get there. If you do receive this gift, you cannot keep it, for it is only a foretaste of glory divine. It IS good to be on the mountaintop with Jesus, but it is not good to stay there. There is still work to do before we can enter forever into God's glory.

Lord Jesus, grant us today a deep sense of your glory, and let it empower and sustain us when you lead us down from the mountaintop and into your service.

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3 <https://www.liturgies.net/Transfiguration/chrysostom.htm> (accessed 1/3/25)



APRIL 7 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 9:14-29

— THE PRAYER *of* UNBELIEF —

“I believe; help my unbelief!”

The journey of growing in faith can feel daunting at times for the believer. Faith is a currency in our Christian walk that is challenged every day. A diagnosis can challenge your faith in God's attribute as a healer. Financial burdens can challenge your belief in him as a provider. A parent with a child battling addiction can struggle to believe in God as a deliverer. We face these battles as human beings. Like us, the father that we meet in this chapter in Mark was undergoing trial, struggling with his own faith.

Faith is mainly challenged by our sight. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that we should walk by Faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Sight is deceitful, debilitating, and limited, and Jesus knew this father was debilitated. The disciples of Jesus are not able to help his son. He had seen his son thrown in the fire, thrown into the water, and had seen his son close to death each time the evil spirit attacked his son. Jesus took time to address the state of this man's heart. We cannot encounter Christ and leave the same. What is the current state of your sight?

The father answered Jesus, “I believe, but help my unbelief” (v. 24). His acknowledgement of unbelief did not disqualify him from experiencing the healing he so desired for his son. The grace of God can move us from unbelief to belief. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

For those of us whose faith has been tested by our sight, God is able to move us to belief through prayer. We can not only pray for God to change our circumstances, but we can also pray that God can change the state of our heart. To pray for faith is an acknowledgement that God is still all powerful and all things come from him, even our faith. Both the son and the father received exactly what they needed from Jesus. The man came for healing for his son, but with a simple prayer he also encountered Jesus, and his faith was forever changed.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you strengthen my faith today. In the areas where my faith has weakened, I desire to move to belief. May I believe in you more, love you even more, and desire to walk faithfully in all you have called me to.

WARINGA KABUGI

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APRIL 8 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 9:33-37

— HOW TO BE GREAT —

*He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them,
'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'*

GOAT. Not the four-legged creature that likes to hang out on cliffs. GOAT is an acronym of this age—the Greatest of All Time. It is mostly used in relation to athletes. Has LeBron James achieved GOAT status? Maybe not, but Michael Jordan is the NBA GOAT. The question that has split the world into two hostile factions is who, between Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, is soccer's GOAT.

We idolize great people and hold them to a higher standard. We admire them from afar. There are things they will not do or places they will not go. They are exclusive.

In our passage, we encounter Jesus' disciples as they grapple with the topic of greatness. They want to know who among them is the greatest.

To this question, Jesus enlists a child as a teaching aid. Focusing on that child, he says "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." The culture of Jesus' day did not idealize children like we do today. Judaism saw children as weak, and insignificant ('not yet people of the covenant').⁴ To be great, therefore, is to welcome (and serve) the least among us. In doing so, we welcome Christ, and by welcoming Christ, we welcome God our Father.

Jesus, in the Incarnation, demonstrates that greatness in God's Kingdom is not exclusive, it is inclusive. He came to serve those he created. It is to this life of inclusive service to the weak and insignificant among us that we are called.

*Lord, may you open our eyes to see this other-worldly vision
of greatness to which you are pointing us, AMEN.*

MATEGYERO NUWAMANYA

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4 Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 444.



APRIL 9 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 10:13-16

— “ONCE A MAN, TWICE A CHILD” —

“Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”

Today, our focus is on Jesus’ command to have “childlike” faith. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (v. 15). What are the characteristics of “childlike” faith that we are to remember during this season of Lent? I suggest two that teach us, in part, how to follow Jesus.

The first is helplessness. At the heart of our Christian faith is the realization that we are utterly helpless on our own. We do not have the strength of character to always do what is right. We do not have the spiritual strength to live disciplined and holy lives. Neither do we have the emotional maturity to always respond in love and with compassion. We are utterly helpless when it comes to living out the Christian life; we simply cannot do it in our own strength. Just as a child is utterly helpless without a care giver to provide for its every need, so we too are helpless before God. Thus, true faith begins when we recognize our helplessness and stop depending on our own strength.

The second childlike quality is dependence. If we are helpless in our own strength, then we must therefore become dependent on God. The Lord is our Provider, and we are dependent on God’s provision, both in this life and for the next. No one can enter the Kingdom of God in their own strength. No one can enter the Kingdom of God through an attitude of independence. To enter the Kingdom of God, we must be childlike in acknowledging our helplessness and our dependence. As we do that, so we shall become inheritors of the Kingdom of God and know what it is to have life in all its fullness. Having that mindset is a wonderful place to be and a wonderful way to live because we are finally released from social pressures to succeed, and we have nothing to prove to anyone anymore.

Help us, Lord Jesus, to have a childlike faith that looks beyond ourselves and is totally dependent on you and your will. Amen.

GARRY KNOWLES

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APRIL 10 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 10:17-31

— TRANSFORMED *in* SUBMISSION —

“Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

In today’s passage, a rich young ruler presented himself to Jesus as one who had lived in obedience to the law in totality. The rich man presented his spotless track record to Jesus and confidently asked, “What else do I lack?” Despite his pride, Jesus loved this man and answered his question, desiring that the rich man would truly enter the kingdom of heaven. In the rich man’s rejection of Jesus’ answer, Jesus revealed that obedience to the law was not complete by checking off a list, but rather by complete submission to God. That is the real heart of the law.

When the rich man presented his inquiry, the focus was on what he must do to enter the kingdom of heaven. He was the main actor. Perhaps the rich man believed that in his obedience to the law, he could be good, perfect, and without flaw. But as Jesus emphasized throughout his ministry, he came because there is nothing any human could ever do to be good enough.

Jesus’ desire is that all would be united with him, that none would be lost. But as he spoke to his disciples and as he speaks to us today, he is well-aware of our inability to faithfully live according to his purposes apart from him. Jesus didn’t detest the rich young ruler but, rather, he loved him. Even though it may be easier for a camel to pass through a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom, God chose to make it possible through his Son, Jesus Christ. He continues to guide us through our Helper, Holy Spirit.

In our gratitude and daily submission to the Father, he graciously continues to teach us and cause us to look more like him.

Lord Jesus, thank you that only you are good. Thank you, God, for being a good Father to us. Help us to always remember that you have given yourself that we might be faithful to the life that you call us to live. May we always rely on you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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APRIL 11 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 10:35-45

— REDEFINING GLORY —

“...their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant...”

What is glory, and what is its source?

While imagination is the seedbed of hope, it can also be corrupted by compromised definitions of greatness. Idolatry, the elevation of lesser loves and the fulfillment of longings through unworthy pursuits, shows that other sources by which we seek glory are utterly insufficient when compared with a holy God. But our problem isn't always simply going to the wrong source- it also stems from warped visions of desired outcomes.

In Mark 10, James and John went to the right source. They asked Christ for their hearts' desire: to sit at his right and left. Their imagined glory included an expectation of elevation and high position, a vision that makes sense under a cultural construct of greatness that “lords” power over others.

But it makes no sense when submitted under the lordship of Christ. His kingdom is founded on a radical redefinition of glory: exaltation as humility- and “of the truth of these words Jesus himself is the proof; of the certainty of their fulfillment to us he is the pledge.”⁵

“Christ, though in the very form of God, didn't regard equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself, taking on slavery, humanness, and humble obedience unto death on a cross, sealing this promise by blood.

And God exalted him, to the glory of the Father.”⁶

How do you imagine glory? What is its source? Where are you trying to find it?

The whole point of Lent is to “give up” our right to ourselves and trust our lives to Jesus- not in part, on our terms, ordering Jesus to do our bidding. The language of “must” in Mark 10 isn't a Christian suggestion- this reorientation of our conception of glory through crucified obedience are non-negotiables for a life fully submitted under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Don't mark Lent by temporary and partial submission to God while continuing to seek false glory from any alternative source. Trust God, the true source of all glory. Submit instead your everything, for here is our greatness: to give all glory to the only One worthy of it.

LORD Jesus- take all that I have and all that I am, for YOUR glory. Amen.

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⁵ Murray, Andrew. *Humility*, 99

⁶ Philippians 2:6-11



APRIL 12 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 10:46-52

— SIT in SCARCITY —

*“Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly,
‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”*

True desperation is developed when we sit in scarcity.

On this, the eve of Palm Sunday, Jesus continues his Jerusalem journey and encounters Blind Bartimaeus sitting near the city gates. How many people passed through that day? Sure, there was a crowd following Jesus, but what of those rushing about, minds bent on whatever errands traveling through Jericho might entail? A hub of commerce, there would be many who ignored their need for mercy in favor of trade, a restock of wheat, or all manner of other ordinary business. Many would lack eyes to see the embodied mercy walking among them...but not Blind Bartimaeus. Though his eyes were clouded, he perceived Jesus clearly in his spirit. Seeing Jesus for who he was, he began to cry out, and as he cried, the seeing blind tried to silence him. In the face of stern disapproval, what gave him the gumption to cry out “even more loudly?” True desperation.

Maybe you find yourself caught up in the busyness of ordinary life, entranced by everyday pressures and desires—their pursuit numbing your spirit’s hunger for God’s mercy—blinding the eyes of your heart from seeing your need for God. Just as numbness is nurtured, so too, desperation is developed.

Lent is a season for reflection and a time to embrace lack, forty days to adopt the posture of Blind Bartimaeus. While countless people walked through Jericho’s gates that day, Bartimaeus was sitting and begging. Forced to depend upon others to sustain his life, Bartimaeus sat in scarcity and his desperation for Jesus grew.

Do you find it hard to desire Jesus? Are you discouraged by your lack of guttural response to the beauty of resurrection? Sit in scarcity. It’s not too late.

Lord, as I spend one more week in scarcity, will you cultivate my desperation for you so that my soul might cry hungrily for your mercy, and receive it in full? Amen.

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APRIL 13 | PALM SUNDAY | READING: MARK 11:1-11

— A PARADE *for* ORDINARY PEOPLE —

*“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

The Triumphal Entry is the most well-known event of Palm Sunday. Jesus sends two disciples to fetch a colt, where upon no person has ever sat, as his mode of transportation into the Holy City. The parade commences. Jesus is the grand marshal. Palm branches, cut from the fields, line the rocky road, and are the makeshift banners the people use to signal their praise and requests of deliverance upon “the One that comes in the name of the Lord.”

There are no banners, no carriages or palanquin, no horns, no royal flowing robes, no army bringing up the rear, just ordinary people with their expectations for deliverance.

This is a poor man’s parade. The conditions of the road, the animal, the palm branches, the cloaks laid in the road, and the cries emanating from the lips of the people are all clues that tell us of the parade’s attendees and their expectations.

“Hosanna!” translated, “save us now!,” is the music of this parade. Over and over again: “Hosanna!” Scholars have interpreted the cries of Hosanna as the people’s desire for a political or military leader to exact rule over their Roman occupiers. They have deemed their expectations as misguided and misplaced. However, behind the cries for deliverance is the desire for liberation, justice, mercy, and peace. The coming Kingdom is one where oppression, greed, exploitation, and multifaceted forms of violence are not welcome.

Lent is a time where our hopes for justice and equity ought to be revived afresh, no matter how often those hopes are denied for the many and reserved for the few. Lent reminds us that the Kingdom of God is upon us; it is the already, not yet reality of shalom for every person. Lent is a season that every believer, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, or geography should sing aloud the current and eschatological blessings that Easter promises.

*Jesus, thank you for the justice, mercy, and hope that only you can bring.
We sing, “Hosanna!” Amen.*

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APRIL 14 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 11:15-19

— SACRED SPACES, INCLUSIVE PLACES —

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”

After the Triumphal Entry, Jesus made his way to the temple before leaving the city that evening. There was nothing said or done, just a visit. Then the following day, after reflecting all night on what he had experienced, he went back to the temple and was outraged by what he found. He overturned the tables and drove out the vendors, declaring, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” The temple was meant to be a sacred space—a place where all people, regardless of background or identity, could encounter the Divine. Yet, the commercialization of the temple had transformed it into a place of exclusivity.

As we reflect on this passage during Lent, we are invited to consider the ways in which our communities—whether churches, schools, or neighborhoods—have also been turned into spaces that exclude or marginalize others. We must ask ourselves: Are we truly a house of prayer for all people, as Jesus envisioned? Or have we, knowingly or unknowingly, created systems of oppression that favor some and exclude others?

In Lent we are invited to examine the social injustices in our world and in our faith communities. From gender inequality to racial injustice, from economic disparity to ableism, there are many ways that our “temples” have become places that harm rather than heal. Jesus’ words challenge us to create inclusive, welcoming spaces where all can find a sense of belonging and connection with the Divine.

During this season of repentance and renewal, we are invited to confront these injustices. As we repent, we also strive to repair and restore the brokenness in our communities. This means advocating for the marginalized, confronting systems of injustice, and ensuring that our communities are not only places of spiritual refuge but also of social transformation.

May our communities be places of healing, where all people are welcomed, loved, and valued.

Holy Loving God, help us tear down the barriers that divide us and guide us to build a house of prayer for all nations—no exceptions. Amen.

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APRIL 15 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 12:13-17

— BEYOND THE IMAGE *on the* COIN —

“And they came and said to him, ‘Teacher, we know that you are sincere and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’”

Jesus’ ominous death march to the Cross has begun. He is in Jerusalem. He attracts widespread attention and admiration from the crowd and full opposition from the religious leaders, some surveilling and some conspiring. Confrontational questions are raised, aimed at Jesus, and Jesus counters their question with questions of his own (Mark 11:27-33, 12:1-37). Such was the scene in Mark 12:13-17. Tension heightened when the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians who also had an earlier appearance in the Gospel (Mark 3:6). Their unholy alliance – one associated with strict Jewish laws and the other with loyalty to the Roman-appointed dynasty of Herod underscores the growing hostility towards Jesus.

Bent on ensnaring Jesus, they asked Jesus an insidious question regarding whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not (Mark 12:14-15). For the Jews, this was a quandary question, for they saw the imperial tax as religiously illegitimate yet politically inevitable. Jesus, recognizing their layered motives and disingenuous attitude, responds without abrogating Jewish monotheism or committing treason, as the Herodians and the Pharisees hoped to hear. Jesus asks for a coin and says, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s (Mark 12:16-17).”

The emperor is entitled to the coin that featured an embossed image of Caesar’s head, but God is also entitled to “the things that are God’s.” Humanity bears God’s image, and we belong to God. We are his. If Caesar is due the coin, we owe God our very lives. We owe God our heart, soul, and mind. Lent invites us to reflect and ask ourselves: are we truly giving to God what is God’s? Let this be a time of deeper self-examination and surrender, giving to God a gift that exceeds any human currency: the gift of our very hearts.

*Lord, help us to recognize that we are made in your image
and help us to give you all that we are, surrendering our hearts,
our lives, and our wills into your loving hands. Amen.*

NGOZOTO VERO

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APRIL 16 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 12:28-34

— THE GREAT COMMANDMENT —

“You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

A scribe who was a Jewish scholar and expert in the law of Moses approached Jesus with a question: “Which commandment is the first of all?” (v. 28).

Knowing his audience, Jesus begins his answer by quoting the Mosaic Law. The Law of Moses contains 613 Jewish commandments, and Jesus’ answer cuts directly to the heart of the law: love. Love is the great commandment, and all of the other commandments stem from love. Without love, following the commandments becomes a worthless pursuit.

Many people, myself included, tend to back away or tense up when they hear the word “command.” People’s natural tendency is that they don’t like to be told what to do. But as Christians, we are called to obey God’s commands.

The good news is that God does not require anything that he has not first given to us. God first loved us with an all-encompassing love, even though we turned our backs on him. God is love, and all he asks for is our love in response: to love God and to love each other.

This Lenten season offers us a reminder of God’s great love for us. God demonstrated the greatest act of love by sending his Son Jesus into the world as a sacrifice on our behalf so that we may be invited into and share in God’s loving fellowship. As we reflect and prepare during this season, let us clothe ourselves in the love of God, seeking to fill our heart, soul, mind, and strength with the love of God, and embodying the love of Jesus Christ. Love is how we confidently know that we “are not far from the kingdom of God” (v. 34).

*Jesus, open our hearts to graciously receive the love you have given us.
Write these words that you command us on our hearts and
teach us to love others as you first loved us. Amen.*

STEVEN DAWSON
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APRIL 17 | MAUNDY THURSDAY | READING: MARK 14:12-25

— HOPE *in the* CRUCIBLE —

*“The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room where
I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”*

Before his suffering and death, Christ desired one last meal with his disciples. He had prearranged the place for their Passover meal (Mark 14:12-16). This meal was no ordinary gathering; every act and word of the Lord was deeply prophetic and eschatological. He knew what was about to happen and who would betray him, yet he did not confront or rebuke Judas. His subtle references to betrayal troubled the disciples, but everything was unfolding as written about him. In the face of impending danger and tragedy, he remained incredibly calm and confident.

The secret of his peace was his deep trust in the Word of God. He saw everything happening as it had been foretold about the Messiah. Although it was painful to witness his own disciple betray him, he understood that even this was part of God’s salvific plan. Thus, he gave bread and wine as tokens of his love and covenant to everyone, including the traitor.

Ministry often becomes a crucible—a place of testing that involves breaches of confidence, pain, and trouble. Nevertheless, even in the midst of the crucible, you may catch a faint silhouette of our Lord. He comforts us with these words: “Take; this is my body.” Like Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:5-8), we are nourished by heavenly food and drink. Just as the Lord strengthened the weary prophet and sent him back to Israel with a renewed mission, Christ feeds, comforts, and empowers us to continue our ministry for the sake of salvation.

As he gave the cup of wine to his disciples, Christ looked ahead with hope, anticipating the day he would drink the new wine with them in his Kingdom. It was with this eschatological hope that Christ walked through the crucible of suffering. Now, our Master invites us to follow him, carrying our own cross with the same hope.

Lord, may my life and ministry reflect your mercy and love. Amen.

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APRIL 18 | GOOD FRIDAY | READING: MARK 15:21-32

— THE SUFFERING SERVANT —

“Save yourself and come down from the cross.”

Characteristic of the Gospel of Mark, the crucifixion of Jesus is recounted with utter simplicity. The features of the story are quickly recounted one after another. A “passer-by” is conscripted to carry the cross of the beaten Jesus (v. 21). The one so weakened from his torture refused the pain-dulling wine that was intended as an antidote to such suffering (v. 23). And then, in great brevity (only three Greek words), Mark announces, “And they crucified him.” The entire Gospel has been building to this moment, and yet Mark spares us any theatrics, preferring instead to invite us to linger in the gravity of it all—“And they crucified him.”

The charges against him were clearly on display (v. 26), much as his now nearly naked broken body was on display for all to see. As the crowds passed by, their acts of shaming were matched by their mocking taunts, “Save yourself and come down from the cross.” The chief priests and scribes likewise hurled mocking invectives at him, taunting him “to come down from the cross” (v. 32). Even the two bandits joined in the torturous ridicule.

The one who hung there on that cross was the one who had stilled the stormy seas and resuscitated the life of a sweet child. He was the one who had freed the demon-possessed man and brought sight to another. In each of these moments, and others beside, Jesus spoke and the seemingly impossible occurred. In each of these moments, Jesus called into existence what was not.

But not here, not in this moment. On the cross, with insults being hurled, Jesus remains silent—silent not because he is powerless to act, but because the seemingly impossible is being accomplished through his suffering silence. He refuses to come down because in this moment, even in his silence, he is calling into existence that which is not—the redemption of all of creation.

O Jesus, in your redemptive suffering, we have found new life. On this holiest of all Fridays, the one we affectionately label as “Good,” teach us to linger in the gravity of this day, so that we might love you all the more.

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APRIL 19 | HOLY SATURDAY | READING: MARK 15:42-47

— WAITING *in* HOPE —

Then Joseph bought a linen cloth and, taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

What do you do when your whole world falls apart? What do you do when what you thought was God's plan for your life (and the world) seems to have become completely impossible?

In today's passage from Mark's Gospel, we are given a glimpse of how some followers of Jesus reacted to such a time. When Jesus was crucified by the Roman oppressor, all their hopes were lost for the future coming of the Kingdom of God. The Messiah had failed them. God had abandoned them. Many of the disciples ran away and hid in terror.

A few, however, reacted differently. In that strange twilight time between Jesus's death and the sunset which marked the beginning of the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea risked his wealth, position, and perhaps even his life, to go before Pilate to ask for Jesus's body (v. 43). This action arose from more than love of a departed friend. Joseph was also acting in obedience to God's commandment to bury a body which had been killed by hanging on a pole before sundown (Deut. 21:22). Mary and the other women who had remained with Jesus through his crucifixion accompanied Joseph in this sorrowful task. Then, from sunset through Saturday, they rested and kept God's Sabbath (Mark 16:1). In their moment of greatest crisis and deepest despair, these faithful followers chose to cling to God's law rather than to reject it. They waited in the hope that God had not abandoned them. In the words of the Psalmist, in following God's law they "found comfort in affliction" (Psalm 119:50).

Of course, their hope was not in vain. While they obeyed on Holy Saturday, God was acting for their redemption more powerfully than they could ever have imagined. On Holy Saturday, we who wait like these early friends and followers of Jesus can also take consolation in the promises that when our lives seem darkest and most hopeless, God is still acting for us.

Lord Jesus, give us the strength and faithfulness of Joseph of Arimathea and Mary; that we may obey and persevere during life's trials, knowing that we too will one day experience your comfort and redemption.

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APRIL 20 | EASTER SUNDAY | READING: MARK 16:1-8

— EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED —

“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.” (Mark 16:6)

Today is Easter Sunday! On this day of days, Jesus-followers the world over—from north to south and from east to west—will gather to celebrate and to exclaim, “Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!” This common, core confession of the Christian faith is grounded in the word of eyewitnesses, not least faithful female followers of Jesus (note, for example, Mark 16:1).

Throughout this Lenten season, we have been journeying together through the Gospel of Mark. Time and again, in what is the shortest and seemingly the earliest of the four-fold Gospel witness, we have been amazed by things that Jesus has said and done and by things that have been said and done to him. Our amazement, however, reaches an apex when we come to the end of Mark’s Gospel.

Truth be told, attentive readers and auditors of Mark’s Gospel should not be surprised when the “young man [i.e., an angel] dressed in white sitting on the right side [of the tomb]” announces to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome that the crucified One is now the risen One (see Mark 16:1, 5-6). For, Mark weaves Jesus’ predictions of his crucifixion and resurrection throughout the latter half of his Gospel. In fact, no less than three times, Jesus plainly speaks of his forthcoming death and resurrection (note Mark 8:31-32; 9:31; 10:33-34).

Neither should attentive readers and auditors of Mark’s Gospel be surprised that the three women are told to tell the disciples, not least Peter (who had recently denied Jesus three times [see Mark 14:66-72]), that Jesus is going before his disciples to Galilee, where they will see him just as he had told them. For, after the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that after he had risen from the dead he would go ahead of them into Galilee (Mark 14:28).

Arguably, attentive readers and auditors of Mark’s Gospel should not even be surprised that the female followers of Jesus who made their way to the tomb very early on that “great gettin’ up Sunday” to anoint properly the body of the Lord whom they loved were alarmed, afraid, and bewildered by the presence of the angel and the absence of Jesus’ body. Not only is astonishment and fear a reported reaction to Jesus elsewhere in Mark (note, e.g., Mark 10:32), but even the disciples did not understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of his forthcoming death and resurrection, and even they were afraid to ask him to offer further explanation (see Mark 9:32).

What surprises attentive readers and auditors of Mark’s Gospel is the way the narrative ends, with the women saying, “nothing to anyone because they were afraid” (Mark 16:8). What?! You must be kidding me! Was Mark’s project cut short? Was his original ending lost? Could it possibly be the Evangelist intended to end his Gospel where the earliest extant copies of Mark’s Gospel stop, that is, at Mark 16:8?

Whatever the case, and Markan scholars have differing views regarding the ending of the so-called First Gospel, it is clear that the good news of Jesus’ resurrection soon became widely known among his earliest followers and that it quickly became, even as it remains, foundational for the received faith.

Rumor has it (let the reader understand) that it is not only He but also His who will be resurrected (read and reflect upon, e.g., 1 Corinthians 15; John 14:1-6). Why not?! We do well to expect the unexpected when reading Mark’s Gospel and when following the crucified, resurrected One, whom the First Evangelist so ably, if not always predictably, proclaims.

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