

LENT

A Journey Through Mark's Gospel



*Adapted from Tom Wright's
"For Everyone" Study Guide on Mark*

Introduction

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the early stories about Jesus and it's also the gospel that the lectionary (from which most of our scripture readings are taken) follows this church calendar year.

With this in mind, Lent might offer the perfect opportunity to journey into this gospel, pausing to reflect along the way.

Each week, from Monday to Thursday, there is a question or statement to 'set the scene' and a suggested reading, followed by one or two points to reflect on afterwards if you wish.

This resource is for you to use as you please. It may be that you decide to do all things for each day, or you may just prefer to read each passage of scripture.

Before you read you might like to light a candle and use the following prayer:

**Lord your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path (x3)
Amen.**

and this one afterwards:

**Lord, may the things you have revealed
and the thoughts that have occurred to me;
dwell in my heart and stir me to action.
In Jesus' name I pray.
Amen.**

The First Week of Lent



Monday – The Good News of Jesus

If someone woke you up and told you that the prime minister or the queen was on their way to visit you, how would you respond?

Read: Mark 1.1-45

Reflect:

- 1) The main thing Mark gets us to do in this opening passage (vv. 1-13) is to sense the shock of the new thing God is doing. If you're ever unable to sleep, sometimes the night seems to go on forever. But just when you're beginning to doze, the alarm clock goes off; time to get up. It really is morning. That's the mood here.

Where do you think there might be a need for a wake-up call in our Church, or nation, or community right now – or perhaps even in your own life?

- 2) Jesus began his ministry with the message, "Repent and believe the gospel." Church people tend to hear this as: "Give up your sins and become a Christian."

Of course, Jesus wanted people to stop sinning, but repentance for him meant two rather different things as well. First, it meant turning away from the social and political agendas which were having a destructive effect on people's lives, especially the most vulnerable. Second, it meant calling Israel to turn back to a true loyalty to their God.

To follow Jesus, the fishermen have to cut loose from other ties and trust him and his message (vv. 14-20). Why is it so often difficult for us to do likewise today?

Tuesday – A Life of Forgiveness

How has forgiving someone or being forgiven changed you?

Read: Mark 2.1-3.6

Reflect:

- 1) *In what ways does the Church today risk being so blinded by a commitment to unnecessary rules that it fails to support God's healing and restorative work?*
- 2) *In most of the Western world, society as a whole no longer observes the sabbath as it did in past generations. How can we learn to live in a life-giving rhythm of work and rest without becoming too fixated on rules in the process?*

Wednesday – Following Jesus

Which famous person, or person you admire would you go out of your way to see if they came to town - and why?

Read: Mark 3.7-35

Reflect:

- 1) *What kinds of reactions have you gotten from people when you talk about God or Jesus, or when they find out you go to Church?*
- 2) When Jesus' family was looking for him (vv. 31-35), how he responded was scandalous. Loyalty to the family was the local and specific outworking of loyalty to Israel as the people of God. But Jesus was quite capable of challenging the symbols that lay at the heart of the Jewish sense of identity.

What is Jesus really saying here about the right attitude to family and other close relationships? Do you find it difficult to stomach?

Thursday – Parables of the Kingdom

If you were composing a song about your spiritual life, what would it be like?

Read: Mark 4.1-34

Reflect:

- 1) The traditional translation of verse 25 ("the measure you give will be the measure you get") has inspired all sorts of reflections about the meaning of justice. Here Jesus seems to be telling his followers that the level to which they pay attention to what he's teaching them will be the level at which they will receive the benefits of the kingdom.

How can we go more deeply into Jesus' teachings?

- 2) Jesus reached for stories to help people to understand the ways they might experience God in their lives.

Which of Jesus' parables rings most true to your own experience of trying to follow God's ways? Or is there another picture or symbol which really speaks to you?

The Second Week of Lent



Monday - Trading Fear for Faith

How do you normally react to 'storms' in your life and why?

Read: Mark 4.35-5.43

Reflect:

- 1) When life crowds in with all its storms and pressures, there is still room for us to go directly to Jesus or creep up behind him and reach out to touch him, in the odd mixture of fear and faith that characterises so much Christian discipleship.

What storms and fears of life would you like to bring to the Lord?

Tuesday – Opposition Mounts

If a newspaper reporter were interviewing you, what aspect of your spiritual life might he or she be interested in and why?

Read: Mark 6.1- 29

Reflect:

- 1) By encouraging his disciples 'to shake the dust off their feet' in towns where they are not welcomed, Jesus is sending out a message – the kingdom of God at hand, there is no time to waste. Part of Christian discipleship is the spiritual sensitivity to know when there is an emergency on and what steps to take.

What situations now need our urgent attention as agents of God's kingdom?

- 2) After reading of Herod's scandalous birthday bash which culminated in the beheading of John the Baptist (vv. 14-27) – consider the following.

When does the pressure to please people override our desire to do the right thing?

Wednesday – Amazing Compassion

When have important plans you've had been interrupted and how did you respond?

Read: Mark 6.30-56

Reflect:

- 1) *When have you seen God use meagre resources to meet a challenging situation?*
- 2) Notice that this chapter closes with a rerun of events. People were drawn to Jesus for healing, and he didn't turn them away even though that wasn't his primary reason for being there.

How can you show compassion and help others even when people interrupt your plans?

Thursday – The Heart of the Matter

What were you taught about cleanliness when you were growing up?

Read: Mark 7.1-37

Reflect:

- 1) Jewish people in Jesus' day are not the only ones who let traditions that maintain their identity get in the way of other people experiencing a right relationship with God.

Can you think of any ways in which the Church does things that might actually make it harder for you and others to meet God?

- 2) Jesus seems impressed that the Syrophoenician woman refuses to take "no" for an answer.

Is there anything you have been praying for where this could give you some encouragement?

The Third Week of Lent



Monday – Failing the Test

If you have ever been in a position of trying to teach someone something, whether in a school, or at work, or as a parent, how did you feel when your “students” or children didn’t understand what you were teaching? Or if you’ve never taught, how did you feel when you didn’t understand something a teacher tried to explain to you?

Read: Mark 8.1-9.1

Reflect:

- 1) The confrontation between Jesus’ kingdom-mission and its rivals is coming up fast. He is anxious that the disciples should understand what’s happening. He wants us to do the same today.

What would make Jesus groan today? What is it about us that would make him say “You still don’t get it”?

- 2) The disciples must have known that by following Jesus they were taking risks. The death of Jesus’ mentor, John the Baptist, will have confirmed that. But now Jesus began to teach them something new, implying that once they’d declared he was the Messiah, they’d need to pick up their own cross (v. 34).

How can following Jesus be risky for us as well?

Tuesday – Faith gets Difficult

Think of a time when you discovered something new in a common experience and how it affected you.

Read: Mark 9.2-29

Reflect:

- 1) As at Jesus’ baptism a voice from the sky speaks, affirming Jesus as the deeply loved Son we should listen to.
How can we listen more closely to Jesus’ voice? And do you find it easy to know that you, too, are God’s much-loved child?
- 2) The disciples have turned a corner in their pilgrimage; now it’s getting harder. People today often suppose that the early years of a person’s pilgrimage are the difficult ones, and that as you go on in the Christian life it gets more straightforward. The opposite is frequently the case. Precisely when you learn to walk beside Jesus you are given harder tasks, which will demand more courage, more spiritual energy.

How have you seen this truth in your life?

Wednesday – The Crisis Looms

Have you ever been involved in or witnessed an emergency where differences of background or race or opinion among those involved suddenly seemed less relevant?

Read: Mark 9.30-50

Reflect:

- 1) *How do concerns for status in the Christian community sometimes get in our way of both understanding Jesus and participating in his mission?*
- 2) *How is the disciples' attitude similar to how Christians react today toward other Christians who aren't part of "our" group?*

Thursday - Rethinking Controversial Issues

What are some of the controversial areas Christians deal with and debate today?

Read: Mark 10.1-31

Reflect:

- 1) Thankfully today, children are viewed very differently to the way in which they were considered in Jesus' day.
How does Jesus' attitude toward children differ from that of his disciples (vv. 13-16)?
- 2) *What characteristic of a child might you want to emulate in your relationship with God?*

The Fourth Week of Lent



Monday – Not what you expect

What pictures come to mind when you think of Jesus' crucifixion, and how does that affect you?

Read: Mark 10.32-52

Reflect:

- 1) *What is unexpected about Jesus' teaching about leadership and discipleship?*
- 2) Imagine yourself as the blind man (Bartimaeus). We all have something, by no means necessarily a physical ailment, that we know is getting in the way of our being the people God wants us to be and made us to be.

What is it you might want Jesus to do for you?

Tuesday – Jesus in Jerusalem

Describe something you've done or a place you've visited that gave you a sense of excitement. Why did it affect you that way?

Read: Mark 11:1-33

Reflect:

- 1) You don't spread cloaks on the road for friends or even for family – especially in the Middle East, dusty and stony as it was. But you do it for royalty.

How does Jesus' kingship call us to put our resources at his disposal?

- 2) *It appears that those who follow Jesus, who are equipped with his Spirit, are themselves given authority, under his direction, to act in his name in the world. How can we do so today?*

Wednesday – Tragedy and Traps

When have you received bad news? What helped and what didn't help in the way that it was given?

Read: Mark 12.1-44

Reflect:

- 1) Jesus commends the lawyer for understanding that following these commandments is worth more "than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices" (vv. 32-34).

When many Christians have strong ideas about what worship should and shouldn't be like, how does this passage reveal that we sometimes have misplaced priorities?

- 2) The great commandments call each of us to love God "with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our understanding and with all our strength" and to "love our neighbour as ourself". Jesus explains how this might work in practice with his teaching about paying taxes and about the giving of a poor widow.

What would be the impact of loving God with your whole being and everything you have? Can you imagine hearing these commandments, not as threatening, but as the key to abundant life?

Thursday – Signs of the End

What examples can you think of in which something new and important happened after a period of significant struggle?

Read: Mark 13:1-37

Reflect:

- 1) Jesus' warnings to his followers are to be taken very seriously by all who are called to work for the kingdom today. *Many* Christians today face persecution every bit as severe as that which the early church suffered; and those Christians who don't face persecution often face the opposite temptation, to stagnate, to become cynical or to suppose that nothing much is happening.

In verse 13 Jesus says we need patience to hold onto our faith in the midst of difficulties. What specific situation in your life right now do you need patience for?

- 2) Jesus says even the Son doesn't know the day or hour of these events (v. 32). A good deal of ancient and modern writing on prophecy tries to figure out precise timing of events, reducing the bible to the level of a horoscope.

What does this passage (vv. 32-37) teach us about leaving such issues to God and trusting him when the future is not entirely clear?

The Fifth Week of Lent



Monday – Prepared for Death

When did you share a meal with others that marked a significant moment?

Read: Mark 14.1-25

Reflect:

- 1) Jesus is anointed by a woman at Bethany (vv. 3-9). Not for nothing is this story often held up as an example of a woman getting it right while all around her men are getting it wrong.

How do we sometimes react when people seem to worship Jesus without inhibition – perhaps in ways we feel aren't appropriate?

- 2) This Passover-meal-with-a-difference (vv. 22-25) is going to explain, more deeply than words could ever do, what Jesus' passion the next day really meant; and, more than explaining it, it will enable Jesus' followers to make it their own, to draw life and strength from it. This meal was Jesus' primary means of enabling his followers not only to understand his death but to let it do its freedom-work in their lives and in the world.

How does this meal help us to make sense of Jesus' death and his kingdom that will come?

Tuesday – Forsaken and Rejected

When did a strong person in your life become weak and how did you respond?

Read: Mark 14.26-72

Reflect:

- 1) Three times Jesus prays for rescue. Three times he appears to receive the answer, "No" (vv. 34-41).

What can we learn if even Jesus received such a response to one of his most heartfelt prayers?

- 2) *Which person or group in this garden scene (vv. 32-51) do you identify with most? Why do you think this is?*

Wednesday – Condemned and Crucified

In what situation have words failed you or someone else in trying to express something important?

Read: Mark 15.1-39

Reflect:

- 1) *What is ironic about the taunts people make to Jesus as he hangs on the cross (vv. 29-31)?*
- 2) While 'Son of Man' has been the common title Jesus uses for himself, another title has made a few appearances also: 'God's Son' (1.1), 'God's beloved Son' (1.11). Then the high priest asked if he was 'God's Son' (14.61).

Why is it significant that a Roman Soldier (rather than, say, a Jewish civilian) now gives him this title?

Thursday – Victory Over Death

When you have made a surprising discovery, whether it was finding an object, understanding a new truth, getting to know someone in a new way or something else: how did that discovery affect you?

Read: Mark 15.40-16.20

Reflect:

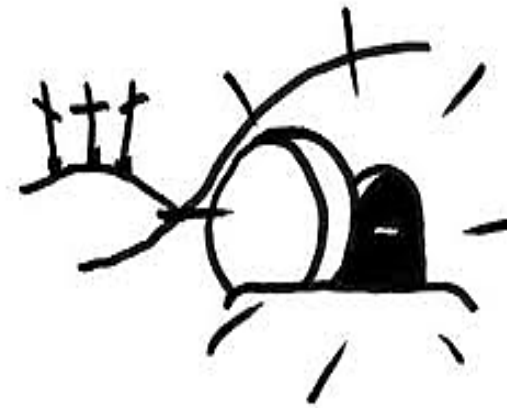
- 1) Mark finishes his account of the burial with a feeling of eager impatience. He has set everything in order for the next stage, but now it is the sabbath, and everything must rest, including the body of Jesus himself.

What are the women expecting when they go to the tomb?

- 2) In the ancient world any witness statements given by women were not regarded as legally valid.

Why does Mark's mention of them here actually affirm the validity of this story rather than call the events into question?

- 3) *What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection for you?*



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