

Mark *Devotional*

The Gospel According to Mark



Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." –Mark 1:14-15

Dear friend,

As the new year begins, I hope you'll join me in reading and reflecting on the gospel according to Mark, with this devotional book. Members and staff of Covenant wrote these reflections, to help lead us through Mark.

Get the new year off to a good start by joining in spirit with other Covenant folks and taking some time each day to reflect on the life and teaching of Jesus. Make a commitment to daily reading for the month of January. You can do it! And please make sure you read the Bible along with the devotions printed here! Maybe now is a good time to get a new Bible, or to learn how to use an online Bible, like www.biblegateway.com.

Before you read each day, pause and take a few deep breaths. Ask God to show you something new, to encourage you, to challenge you. There are wonderful insights in these reflections, but the purpose isn't simply for us to get smarter. My hope is that we can learn from the reading so that we can live more sincerely as Christians, as people of faith, hope, and love. My hope is that by reading and praying, we can live in new ways and make a difference in the world.

Happy 2018!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charlie".

Charlie Berthoud, Pastor

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Mary-Beth Rolland

Monday, January 1, 2018

Have you ever seen the play Godspell? At the beginning, John the Baptist comes down the aisle of the theater with a shofar trumpeting and then begins singing, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord!” So the play begins and so the Gospel of Mark begins. Mark quotes the prophet Isaiah telling of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. And, so it happens. John comes preparing the way and baptizing all who believe. He makes the way straight for the Lord. This is a new way, a new life. This is the Good News indeed.

So as the New Year begins, think of the new way you can show your belief in Jesus. Prepare your heart for Jesus. Make the path for Jesus straight. Spread the Good News of Jesus!

Holy and Loving God, This New Year help me to remember your way and follow the path straight to Jesus. Amen.

Clara D. Thompson

Tuesday, January 2, 2018

From the very beginning of Mark’s Gospel we hear a sense of urgency. Even in our brief reading for today, the word “immediately” appears three times in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible; four times in the Revised Standard Version. At his baptism, “immediately (Jesus) saw the heavens opened” (1:10). “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (1:12). When Jesus called Simon and Andrew, “immediately they left their nets and followed him” (1:18). And when Jesus saw James and John, “immediately he called them” (1:20). “The time is fulfilled,” Jesus says, “and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news” (1:15). There’s an urgency to that message as well! Do it now!

Dear God, help me to be more faithful in all aspects of my life. And when that work is hard to do, please encourage me so that I really can try to do it now. Amen.

It’s January 2nd; a whole new year is before us. What in your own life requires a greater sense of urgency?

- Following Jesus more completely?
- Strengthening your relationship with someone in your family?
- Being kinder to yourself?
- Cutting back on your alcohol consumption?
- Getting your finances under control?

A new year gives us a fresh start. Whatever it is you need to work on this year, I encourage you to do it now.

Melissa Hardy

Wednesday, January 3, 2018

I try to imagine myself living in the time of Jesus as news of his teachings and miracles spread across Galilee. Would I believe what I was hearing or go about the daily routine of my life unchanged? Would I seek him out, give him my full attention and really listen to what he had to say, or would I discount him because he didn't have the proper credentials?

Fast forward to Madison in 2018; it is relatively easy to be a Christian. Our churches are well established and plenty of documentation and analysis exists that we can fall back on for proof of God's love and the teachings of Jesus.

2000 years ago, it wasn't easy. Jesus and his followers were shaking things up, contradicting what religious authorities had been teaching and challenging the norm. Would I have had the courage to leave the life I had established to follow Him? The truth is, I don't know.

Jesus never gave up. He used every interaction to teach others and share God's love. He showed love and compassion for all, sought out those who were shunned, and regularly healed the sick.

However, in the middle of all of this activity, Jesus gets up early one morning, and leaves to be alone so he can pray. I find this to be very poignant. Jesus takes a break from healing people

and spreading the word of God's love, so he can be alone to pray and recharge.

This passage in Mark left me with a renewed appreciation for the difficulties Jesus and his followers faced in those early years. It has made me look inward and really ask myself what is important to me. Do I use every opportunity to show love and compassion for others? Do I take time to pray and recharge especially when I am busy? The answer right now is “no,” but I am challenging myself to do better, one day and one interaction at a time.

I hope you will join me.

Beccah Raciti

Thursday, January 4, 2018

In Mark 2:1-22, Jesus encounters three different situations in which the scribes ask questions of him. When Jesus heals a paralyzed man, they challenge him, asking whether his forgiving the man for his sins is blasphemous...despite the man's demonstration of persistence and faith to reach Jesus. In the next story, the scribes ask Jesus why he spends time with sinners and tax collectors. Then, they ask why Jesus' followers don't follow the letter of the law when it comes to fasting.

In each case, it seems that the purpose of their questions is not to learn from Jesus, but to challenge and trap him, thereby validating their own self-righteousness. They seem to miss the point, which is the spirit of discernment in decision-making. Jesus patiently and repeatedly teaches them to identify, discern, and address the underlying human need; instead of worshiping the rules as a means of imposing their judgement upon others.

When reflecting on this, I reminded myself how easy it is to ask questions not out of curiosity, but out of a desire to validate my own beliefs or to pass judgment on another. I find hope in reframing my questions to serve others, instead of to reinforce my own self-righteousness. Imagine what might shift if we collectively challenged ourselves to do the same.

Dear God, Please help us to ask the right questions for the right reasons, so that we may bring about your love and see you more clearly in each other. Amen.

Helen Madsen

Friday, January 5, 2018

This passage contains two stories from Mark on the Sabbath –the first tells about Jesus going through a grain field with his disciples and the disciples plucked heads of grain to eat; in the second Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in the Temple. The Pharisees were watching and concluded that he was violating Sabbath laws- in the first they accused Jesus of harvesting on the day of rest and in the second, after Jesus healed the man, they went and plotted how to destroy Jesus. The Pharisees were a religious and political party in Palestine in New Testament times known for insisting that the law of God be strictly observed. Yet they felt justified to go out and conspire to destroy (kill) Jesus that day.

In the first story Jesus responds that it is lawful for people to eat on the Sabbath (implication- they were not “harvesting food” in the sense of doing work). In the second he tells the Pharisees that it is lawful to do good and save a life on the Sabbath (implication- the law of God is to love your neighbor as yourself and show compassion by healing a sick man regardless of the day of the week.)

For me, this passage raises questions for our lives here in our Madison community. Are we judging certain people unfairly, like the Pharisees did Jesus, based on our concepts of what the Bible or civil law means (concepts

which may be too narrow when viewed in light of Jesus’ teachings) and therefore seeing these “others” as “different?” Or, are we able to see all these people as God’s children, our brothers and sisters, who need our compassion? Can we reach out to them as a church or individually to provide support, showing them God’s love?

Dear God, we know that showing compassion to God’s children, who are hungry or in need or may not look like us, is the right thing to do on the Sabbath and on all other days. Help us, as guided by the Holy Spirit, to seek new ways to “do justice” and to oppose injustice directed toward our neighbors in this community. Amen

Laurie Jones

Saturday, January 6, 2018

In this section of Mark, Jesus, having begun his healing and miracles, has made quite a name for himself. He's named his apostles and took the 12 up the mountain with him. People followed him wherever he went, even to his home, creating a crowd control problem. The religion scholars from Jerusalem spread rumors about him and his family tried to protect him. Jesus gave a warning about slandering against God's Holy Spirit when he was accused of being in league with Evil. Then, Jesus declared that those who followed God's will were his mother, brother, and sisters, not just his blood relatives.

Wow, that's a lot! Mark really covers ground fast! Among all the themes, I was drawn to this passage: "Listen to this carefully, I'm warning you. There's nothing done or said that can't be forgiven. But if you persist in your slanders against God's Holy Spirit, you are repudiating the very One who forgives, sawing off the branch on which you're sitting, severing by your own perversity all connection with the One who forgives." He gave this warning because they were accusing him of being in league with Evil. Mark 3:28-30 (*The Message*)

How many times have I kept stubbornly moving in a direction that is against God's will, making life miserable for others and myself? How much better would life be if I focused instead on what direction the One who forgives wants me to go?

There's no mention of doing things perfect, that's impossible! The promise is that "there's nothing done or said that can't be forgiven." With this in mind, I will move forward knowing that I will make mistakes and say the wrong thing, that's inevitable as a human. But, because I believe in and follow Jesus and try to follow God's will for my life, I am forgiven, and doesn't that make life a little sweeter?

Dear Lord,

Thank you for sending your forgiveness when I make mistakes. Protect me from the dark times and keep me safe as I try my best to find your will in my daily life. I'm trying hard, really, I am! Amen.

Steve Veazie

Sunday, January 7, 2018

Jesus used many parables in his teachings. In Mark 4:1-20, Jesus teaches from a boat to a large crowd that has gathered on the shore to listen. Jesus spoke about a farmer scattering seeds on the ground to describe faith. Seeds planted on hard ground or shallow soil cannot develop roots and grow. Planting seeds in hard or shallow ground is a parable for shallow faith, which is easily shaken. Similarly, planting seeds among thorns is like having too much desire for material things or being overwhelmed with earthly concerns, which can choke off a person's ability to understand and follow Jesus' teachings. Seeds sown in good soil will bear fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold or a hundredfold. Jesus said: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Dear Lord, help us to follow Jesus and have the insight to understand parables, which set forth the path to salvation. Teach us to listen to and accept the words of the Lord, which like seeds planted in healthy ground, will multiply 100 fold in living by Jesus' example. Amen.

Ernie Perry

Monday, January 8, 2018

“It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

Mark’s writings in this section of the Bible contains three major parables that are familiar with many: The parable of the Lamp on a stand that should not be hidden, the growing seed that thrives or dies depending on the soil, and the mustard seed that grows to fill the valley. While I generally thought of these in a personal light-work hard, plan and harvest; after a discussion with family I was open to the idea that this is about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit coming to us, available to us, bigger than us, and calling us to be part of the growth. As we open ourselves to this growth and love, becoming a seed of God, we can grow and become part of the Savior’s world.

We need to be open and receptive to this Love – we need to be the good soil that supports the seed, we need to help shine the light on the beauty and power of the Lord, and we need to become part of this branching and awesome tree that is God, reaching out to share love and help all that need it.

Dear God, in the name of Jesus we pray and ask for forgiveness of our sins. Please help us know You, please help us find Your plan for us. Please help us love each other and serve each other more. Thank You God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ann Perry

Tuesday, January 9, 2018

“...And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him...”

This scripture, to me, is so relevant to many people today. Those people who are broken. Broken hearted, suffering with mental illness, addictions and just daily struggles. If you aren't one of these people, you have certainly encountered someone. That someone who crosses your path and during the interaction, you see the sadness in their eyes, the crack in their voice or the slumped body language. You begin to realize (or recognize) the retreat, the shutting out of those who can help and the loneliness that is being felt. It's hard to include Jesus- too much to handle, yet Jesus is already there, waiting with healing love. The message for you or those you can encourage: Run forward- as fast as you can- to embrace Jesus and the healing love that awaits.

Our Heavenly God, help us to open our eyes to help those near us and open our hearts to your healing love. Place peace in our hearts and may we continue to run toward you as fast as we can.
Amen

The woman with a hemorrhage barely comes into Jesus' presence and is healed. The synagogue leader comes before Jesus with a formal request to come to his home to heal his dying daughter. The woman's secret act and the man's public declaration are equally beneficial. The woman and the synagogue leader's daughter are gloriously and completely healed. Faith, a courageous trust in Jesus, has brought restoration.

Not all will find such complete healing in this life, but all with the faith demonstrated by these two desperate seekers after Jesus will find it in the life to come.

In this life many things come before us almost daily to weaken our faith. May the stories we have of the work and words of Jesus continue to strengthen our belief in His love for us, that we are His forever.

Dearest Lord Jesus, may we always depend on you, regardless of what comes our way. Amen.

Donna Monson

Thursday, January 11, 2018

Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He sent them off with these instructions: ‘Don’t think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment. Keep it simple.’ Mark 6:7-9 from *The Message Bible*.

Gracious God, be with us on the journey which only requires trust, simplicity, and our faith in you. We know you will equip and empower us to share the Good News to all who will listen. Amen.

Did I hear correctly, Jesus? You are sending me, a modern day disciple, on a journey to preach and teach and pray without any electronic devices or books or money or food? You want me to trust that all I need will be provided? This is 2018 where simplicity is an antiquated, old-fashioned word. Yet, the challenge of this assignment is refreshing. This is a chance to grow and learn outwardly and inwardly. If keeping the discipleship journey simple means building relationships while talking about the Good News; eating and breaking bread together while sharing ideas and insights about love, grace, justice, and peace; praying with others for forgiveness, healing, and comfort; singing glorious songs with all ages; listening and sharing faith stories - face to face- about life’s anxieties and God’s blessings; and most importantly, being kind to everyone everywhere because we never know the struggles they are facing, then count me in.

As of this writing, my daughter requires two naps a day. The first nap comes around 9:00am and usually lasts an hour and a half (if we're lucky). The second nap starts around 1:30pm and hopefully ends no earlier than 3:00pm. If she misses those naps, then all bets are off for how our day goes. We end up with a cranky, sad, whiny baby. If she misses those naps, we also end up with a cranky, sad, whiny dad. There is nothing in this world more rewarding than spending time with my daughter, but even the best parent needs a moment of quiet. Mark 6:31 says that Jesus “said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while’”. My guess is that Jesus didn't want cranky disciples. We can all take a lesson from Jesus here. In the midst of busy lives and stressful days, it can be enormously refreshing to just take some time to breath, to refresh, and to reflect on God's call on our lives towards seeking God's kingdom.

God of sabbath, give us the strength of will to stop doing so much. Grant us the ability to take a step back. In our busy days, in our busy lives, in the midst of all the hubbub and hustle, we ask that you give us the ability to listen for your voice, as it whispers ‘rest for a while’. Amen.

Grady Brown

Saturday, January 13, 2018

What does it mean to be religious? What does it mean to have a relationship with God? I often ask myself these tough questions on a routine basis. I don't think there is a handbook or a Christian how-to guide laying around (at least I haven't found one yet). But reading this passage really made me think about what is truly important in building a relationship with God.

In the later section of this reading, Jesus is telling his disciples that nothing that enters the body can defile them because it doesn't touch their heart. Instead, it is what comes out of a person's body, leaving the heart, which can defile them. I think the inverse is also true, in that what comes out of our hearts, through our thoughts and feelings, is how we honor God's teachings. What matters most is not necessarily aligning our traditions to what we believe are the teachings of Christ, but thinking and reflecting on what proceeds from our hearts.

I think what is most meaningful is trying to relate to God on a personal, individual level, but sometimes we get distracted or overly focused on adhering to or following particular religious traditions, in an attempt to get closer to God. I also think that this is easier said than done. Indeed, I find myself feeling a sense of satisfaction by following what I perceive to be religious traditions, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. But I

challenge myself to reflect more on what is coming from inside the body to the outside world and how I can try to give more of my heart and my soul in order to build a deeper relationship with God.

Lord, help us to feel your presence in our hearts, so that we work to show others your love and your spirit. And all God's children say, Amen.

Marilyn Unruh

Sunday, January 14, 2018

Jesus has come from a confrontation with religious leaders in Jerusalem who just didn't get it, that it's the heart that needs cleansing, not hands and utensils. He goes to Tyre and Sidon, largely Gentile territory, seeking to get away from it all and hide.

But a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit comes, imploring him to cast the devil out of her daughter. Jesus' answer might seem dismissive were it not for a larger implication. When Eve, “the Mother of life,” ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil she gave the devil a foothold in the human heart to deceive us into thinking this tree is our source of life. In a larger sense, this woman is asking Jesus to reverse the course of her daughter's life from a false source to our true source, the tree of life.

Jesus knew this mother's heart, that in her love for her daughter she would persist. Jesus is also making it clear that cleansing the human heart would be on his terms.

Jesus moves on to Decapolis, where a deaf and mute man's friends bring him to Jesus for healing. With this man Jesus' healing was through physical touch, also opening the man's ears and tongue to hear and speak the truth Jesus brings.

This was not a performance. In taking the man aside to heal him, Jesus makes it clear that he is not a publicity-seeker. Nevertheless, his reputation continues to spread.

Lord, we ask that you cleanse our hearts and lead us to our true source so that we may hear and speak your truth. Amen.

Betty McMurry

Monday, January 15, 2018

This is the story of feeding the multitude. You know, dividing the loaves and fish to feed the huge, starving crowd gathered around Jesus, filling everyone’s tummy with just crumbs of food.

Hey—wait—didn’t we just have that story three days ago? Let me see—yes, Mark chapter 6, verses 30-44. Well, the numbers are different. In that story the 5000 were fed by five loaves and two fish. Two chapters later, now the story speaks of 4000 fed by seven loaves and a few small fish.

What are we to make of that, two different stories of the same event? I suppose you could say it means, don’t get hung up in the literal. What difference does a little change in numbers make, it’s still the same story. And furthermore, maybe let’s allow a little latitude toward interpretation of all numbers in the Bible.

But the interpretation I prefer is this. Tell me the old, old story. And tell me that story again. How many times in my life have my old ears heard that story? How many more times do I need to hear it to chew up the meaning of the loaves, digest the fishes, and go forward in filled-up faith.

How many times do we need to repeat the old stories to our children, our grandchildren?

How many times do we need to hear and sing the old hymns before they become integral to our being, before we wake with their song on our lips, their message in our hearts?

We live in a changing world, but we thrive when we live with the backbone of the old, old story.

Dear Lord, May I read again the old stories and sing again the old hymns with deeper meaning, more fulfilled each time. Amen.

Sylvia Poppelbaum

Tuesday, January 16, 2018

This section of Mark 8 caught my attention, both for a story that puzzled me, and because it described a dramatic turning point in Jesus' time on earth.

First, the puzzle, in verses 22-26: Why did it take two touches for Jesus to cure this man of blindness? Was it because the blind man had too little faith? Was Jesus distracted by what he foresaw ahead of him? Perhaps, but after some thought and research, I see the story also as Mark's metaphor for the disciples' blindness to who Jesus really is and what that means.

Second, the turning point, in verses 27-30: The turning point (and partial clearing of their eyes) came as the disciples journeyed with Jesus toward another village. As they traveled, Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” They responded with the names of several Biblical figures. Then Jesus asked the key question, “But who do you say I am?” And Peter's sight is partially cleared and he responds, “You are the Messiah.”

It is only later in the journey to Jerusalem that the disciples' sight becomes completely clear, and, with Jesus' second touch, they understand his prophecy of his coming death and resurrection. Only then will they truly see who this Messiah is.

O God, touch my eyes so your gift of your Son, and his gifts to the world, will become clear to me. Thank you for leading me in your way and showing me how I can serve you and this world you created. Amen.

Melissa Hinz

Wednesday, January 17, 2018

Verse ³⁴ Jesus then told the crowd, “If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me. ³⁵ If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me and for the good news, you will save it.”

Lord, help us to see beyond ourselves, our wants, our desires, our plans, our selfish ways and our faulty understanding of what makes our lives successful. Grant us the faith and the courage to trust in Jesus and follow him. In his precious name, Amen.

This is a familiar passage to me - and to many - and a challenging one. How do we follow Jesus? By giving our life to him. By taking up our cross and following him. By forgetting about ourselves. Easily said - not easily done.

I long to be that Christian who focuses on following Jesus and letting go of my own needs - trusting that he will provide. I long to be unconcerned with what others will think, or to be unashamed when professing my faith, speaking the name of Jesus freely in conversation. I long to have the courage to show Jesus' love and compassion to all, whether friends or strangers, allies or enemies. Even more, I long to feel the peace that comes from being right where God wants me to be - and to know that I am following in the path that has been set before me.

The promise is that if we give up our life for Jesus and the good news, we will save it. In focusing on and serving others, in following Jesus, in spreading the good news and in forgetting about ourselves, we become true disciples. May it be so.

“Everything is Possible for One Who Believes” Mark 9:2-29

Carrie Sanders

Thursday, January 18, 2018

In verse 14 of Mark, Chapter 9, Jesus approaches his other disciples and notices a large crowd around them and teachers of the law (scribes) arguing with them. Jesus learns that there is a child who is possessed by an impure spirit. The child's father was angry because Jesus' disciples were unable to drive out the spirit. A frustrated Jesus responds, "You unbelieving generation. How long shall I put up with you?" (Mark 9:19)

The father describes the child's condition and implores Jesus, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." To this Jesus asks, "If you can? Everything is possible for one who believes."

After reading this, I began to think about all of the God-sized things going on in my little corner of the world. Often, I find myself trying to take control to solve a problem, forgetting to pray first. For example, if I just read enough expert opinions on this, I think I can figure it out. Or, if I watch a YouTube video about this could I do it myself? For those, really hard, emotionally devastating issues can I just take a break, take a deep breath, and fix it?

This passage reminds me that everything is possible, but only if one believes in the power of God to carry out his perfect will here on earth. In Mark 9:29 Jesus replies to the disciples' question

about why they were unable to drive out the impure spirit from the child. He responds, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

Dear Father-God, I confess that too often I have doubted your power to redeem a person or a situation. Lord help me overcome these doubts and please reveal yourself in these situations to bring about renewal and healing. Amen.

“Hearing Jesus’ Call to Follow Him on ‘The Way’” Mark 9:30-37

Doug Poland

Friday, January 19, 2018

A new calendar year is an opportune time for each of us to hear Jesus’ call with fresh ears. That call is for us to follow Jesus on a path of personal transformation that involves dying to a life stuck in and constrained by values and culture created by humankind, and to be reborn to a way of life lived in accordance with God’s vision for our world as a place of peace and justice - the kingdom of God. In Chapter 9, verses 30-37, Mark tells that as Jesus traveled through Galilee with his disciples, he taught them but “they did not understand what he was saying.” Mark also tells us that when Jesus and his disciples arrived at Capernaum, Jesus questioned the disciples about what they were arguing about “on the way,” and was told that they argued about “who was the greatest.” Although this story might be viewed as one about a physical journey, it also should be read metaphorically for its meaning about our call to discipleship. The disciples’ failure to understand Jesus’ significance, and their arguments about which of them was the greatest, reveal that they had not yet transcended the culture and values of this world; they were still on the way to their own personal transformation. Jesus attempted to correct their course by pointing out that to be truly great in God’s kingdom means to be a servant to others, and to put ourselves last rather than first. As Jesus modeled through his own life, that is the way to God’s kingdom.

Lord, help us to hear with new ears your call to follow Jesus on the way, the path of personal transformation that leads us to live into God’s vision for our world as a place of peace, justice, and service to others. Amen.

Paul Melrose

Saturday, January 20, 2018

I begin this text where my scripture passage ends: “And he put his arms round them (some children) laid his hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16, New English Bible). I am a grandfather; kids have been the center of my life, again, for the last 10 years. In the middle of the battleground of Mark and his Gospel, where all of these serious issues exist, and Mark spells out so clearly the danger of living for Jesus, as an old Gospel hymn advises, Jesus lifts up children, and becoming childlike, perhaps again if we lost that capacity, as a reminder, as a possibility, as an enduring way the Kingdom of God is alive and well, even in the midst of all of the aforementioned dangers.

“All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once you grow up” (Pablo Picasso). Living life is an art, as each moment is so different. Grace is there but it can be so hard to find. Hence the artistic piece. And with art can also go creativity, spontaneity, a good eye and ear, even imagination. One author I like refers to imagination as one of the capacities that contributes to a fulfilled Christian life. If we look at our lives, the church, all around us imaginatively, what are the possibilities for seeing the Beloved Community we might not otherwise see? Thank God for children.

God, thanks for the kids who keep us young, make us smile, challenge us to open our minds and hearts, where they might be closed. As we clean up with them and after them may we so be committed to cleaning up in the world and our lives, even as Jesus sought and found the life He gives us, even in and through death. Amen.

“Double Check the Math & Recalculate Priorities” Mark 10:17-31

Steve Whayland

Sunday, January 21, 2018

What could Jesus have possibly meant when he responded to the one who came running to see him, asking how he may inherit eternal life... “Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” Jesus surely couldn’t have been talking to someone like me or you, right?

What could our Lord have been trying to teach his disciples when he told them: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” and “In the world to come, eternal life, many that are first shall be last; and the last first.”

We all seem to have so many things in life, and we seem to struggle with knowing how much is enough in our bank accounts to provide for ourselves and our families, and feel that we are safe in life.

Sometimes we might think that security and happiness in life comes from how much we have financially and materially, rather than trusting in our Lord and in ourselves for our security and peace of mind.

If we can focus our priorities and our best efforts a bit more on humbleness, gratitude for what we do have, and compassion for those that have less than us, rather than trying to always better our

own situation financially and otherwise, maybe then our lives have the potential to be truly so much richer.

Maybe Jesus was saying that if we can have faith in God, in our Lord and in our best self; this is what will bring us a true and everlasting wealth of goodness in life and beyond.

Take a moment right now and look around. What do you see? Chairs and tables? Trees and birds and sky? Words on a page? What a blessing vision is, enabling us to function more fully and appreciate life more deeply.

In the middle of Mark’s gospel, Jesus has several teachings on discipleship, on what it means to follow him

- Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow; lose your life to save it (8:34-35)
- Whoever wants to be first must be last and servant of all (9:35)
- How hard it is for those with wealth to enter the Kingdom (10:24-25)

This section on discipleship (8:22-10:52) begins and ends with Jesus healing people who are blind. The clear implication is that we need to open our eyes (and our hearts and our lives) to live as faithful disciples, to really see the new reality that God is bringing to the world.

Every day, I put on my glasses, and I try to remember to pray something like this:

Dear God, open my eyes to see what you want me to see. Show me your way. Amen.

Mary Kieta

Tuesday, January 23, 2018

Indeed it was a triumphal entry to Jerusalem – the common folk, among them the lost and forgotten, were learning, loving, and seeking to live a new way; following a king who humbly rode a donkey among them.

That evening, as Jesus viewed the “goings on” in the temple, due to the hour he decided to retreat with his disciples to rest, pray, and, no doubt, ponder. The next morning, fueled with a bit of human frustration, he let the fig tree have it, and then strode to the temple to clear it and let those disrespectful of the house of God have it, too; and, at the same time took this opportunity to drive home again to the disciples the importance of prayer and strength of faith needed in both the hard work that lay ahead and, in particular, needed in the days to come. But, while the common folk “got” his message, the chief priests and scribes were only threatened by his ministry and show of support; thus challenging him, demanding his credentials, and plotting to kill him.

Dear Lord, help us, your disciples in 2018, when we’re frustrated and challenged by a world of hunger, pain, injustice, and war, to remember your teachings and example, even at the most difficult time of your life, to pray ceaselessly and stand strong in our faith; to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Amen.

“Sadducees came to Jesus with questions...” Mark 12:1-27

Barbara McCall

Wednesday, January 24, 2018

Recently I woke up to a ringing telephone and the news that our daughter's mother-in-law had died unexpectedly in the middle of the night from a massive heart attack. As the sun rose that day our daughter and her husband in Colorado faced the sorrowful task of telling their three young children, ages three, five and seven, that 'Granna' had passed away. I prayed in my heart that the Holy Spirit would give them wisdom and guidance as they faced this sorrowful time in their lives.

It's a simple explanation... a childish one... but this grandmother still finds it very comforting.

1) John 14:2

Jesus often spoke of his death and resurrection as he journeyed toward his cross. Still his followers had many questions about death and eternal life. The Sadducees asked empirical and factual questions. The disciples asked spiritual and eternal questions. Little children ask fearful and personal questions and are all too often just left to wonder, "What happens when I die?"

The most comforting answer I know is the one that I received from my father when I was a very young girl. He said, "You know how on Saturday night we always have popcorn and watch the late movie on TV and you'd often fall asleep. Then I'd carry you up to your bedroom where your bed was already turned down awaiting you and you'd wake up the next morning safe and sound into a place that has been prepared for you¹ by your loving Father."

Kenneth Hindman

Thursday, January 25, 2018

We are living in a violent, vulgar, and disintegrating culture. The truth is that we do not know where we are going or why we are going there. A beautiful, and very ancient Hebrew prayer provides us as Christians with insight into the spiritual dilemmas of our time as it did for Jesus of Nazareth. I have chosen to center this commentary on this prayer, and to leave the rest of the assigned passage to you.

The text of the prayer is as follows:

“Hear, Oh Israel: The Lord is our God, The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul and with all your strength.”

Note that Jesus quotes this and then goes on to quote another ancient Hebrew core belief.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

For both the Hebrews who pray this prayer today and for us as Christians, *The Shema* is not a means of earning the love of God. It is given to us as a means of expressing our gratitude to God for all God had done for us, both delivering the Hebrews from the land of slavery, and delivering us from slavery to sin and death. In the life, the death and the resurrection of our lord, Jesus Christ.

The beginning of our recovery of hope and some sense of direction in this culture will take place when we are bed rock honest with ourselves about loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as our self.

God of mercy and love, my heart I give you eagerly and sincerely. Guide me by the power of your Holy Spirit and your word as I seek to walk the way of Jesus and thus glorify and praise your holy name. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Sue Ellis Melrose

Friday, January 26, 2018

Wars and rumors of wars. Famine. Persecution. All we need to do is open the news and it all is before us. This seemingly perpetual list of troubles, it rings so very true in particular moments of our lives. It is then we wonder who and what will endure.

Everlasting God, guide us when troubles beset us that we do not seek escape, but are alert and aware, waiting patiently and acting hopefully confident in your everlasting presence. Amen.

Often I try to escape such thoughts by seeking anything that seems like it will last. Recently for me, a very sturdy antique table. But as Jesus reminded the disciples admiring the large stones of the temple, this too will fall to ruin.

In these verses often called “The Little Apocalypse”, Jesus gives us help for troubled and troubling days. Beware: Use your head and do not be gullible to whoever promises the next wonderful solution to what ails you and the world. Be patient: Step back and take the long view. Look at the forest, not the tree. Be hopeful. When the world seems to be falling apart, remember Christ will come again.

God in Christ is who and what lasts. That knowledge empowers us to enter into the midst of the troubles – to strive for peace, feed the starving, and bring justice for the persecuted. We actively wait and hope.

Marcia Lund

Saturday, January 27, 2018

Jesus remembered names.

Jesus remembered personal encounters he had with men and women, especially when he healed them.

One of the main themes in the gospel of Mark is “Change your life.” Jesus did this countless times. Tucked inside this passage is an event that explodes off the page with a fragrance that calmed and healed Jesus.

While Jesus and his disciples and guests were eating at Simon the Leper’s home, a nameless woman approached Jesus, opened a jar containing an ointment, and anointed Jesus’ head and hair. Once she opened the jar, the aroma of the contents spilled into the room and filled the nostrils of all those present. Imagine a vapor rub or menthol scent or pine trees only more exotic-earthy and musky. This ointment came from the Himalayan mountainsides in India, and it cost a year’s salary for this jar. The woman was focused on Jesus’ needs, not the cost.

This was a stressful time in Jesus’ life -- the chief priests were plotting to kill Jesus, he was going to be betrayed, arrested and denied. Yet, this moment of kindness and generosity would be something he could remember. It was a balm for

him. The nameless woman gave, on an impulse, her love in an unselfconscious, extravagant, risky way. And when others in the room condemned her, Jesus said her story, even though she was nameless, would be remembered always for her lovely deed.

Lord, Let us learn how to anoint those in need with the fragrance of a lovely deed. Amen.

I had to read this passage several times before I felt like I had finally “gotten it” I spent time rereading it until I felt I understood a little bit more than what I did the first time. And with each reading I gained a little more clarity about what was actually happening, it was after the fifth or sixth time I read it that I started to break down the meaning of each verse and God’s word within it. I think in life many of us experience trials and tribulations that test not just our strength but our faith and we must turn to prayer as Jesus did in the garden. Our prayer, just like our faith should be consistent even in the midst of trials and betrayal. But as Jesus states in Mark 14 48:49 he is with us always and we must live by the scriptures. We are children of God, the almighty, and my favorite way of approaching him, the Heavenly Father and with the Heavenly Father there is nothing that we, as his children cannot accomplish, survive or face. That became clearer to me each time I re-read the passage, even more so in verse 61 when the high priest asked Jesus again “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed”. So are we, we are the children of the most high blessed and able to give blessings and all we have to do is open up our lives to him and not deny him as Peter did. Reflecting on what Mark 14 32:72 meant to me brings me to my prayer for others, and it is one of increased faith, strength and peace.

My prayer is that others will see the good works of the Lord from how we live and mediate on his word, not just speaking it, that we will continue to be witnesses and give our testimony of just how wonderful and forgiving our Lord is. As our beliefs and prayer continuously grows it increases our faith, gives us strength and provides peace. Amen.

Dick Lovell

Monday, January 29, 2018

In August, a few days after the Charlottesville tragedy, I found myself amid a large counter protest against neo Nazis who were rallying in downtown Seattle. A long line of Seattle police officers separated the two hyped-up groups. As the rally speakers spit their venom, the counter protestors responded with chants like “love, not hate” and “Nazis go home.” Then, at one point, a counter protest leader shouted: “Cops and Klan go hand in hand.” Sure enough, bit by bit, a good half the crowd joined the chant, which seemed totally off topic and inappropriate.

Social scientists will recognize what happened that day in Seattle as crowd psychology, where folks get swept up in the moment and act differently, often more crudely, than they would as individuals. In Mark 15, crowd psychology helps send Jesus to the cross. Pilate seems to recognize Jesus’s innocence, but asks the crowd what to do. The crowd, whipped into a frenzy by the chief priests, cries “crucify him.” Pilate complies and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

Crowd behavior can sometimes be fun, such as cheering “Let’s Go Red!” As Christians, however, we more often are called to do the opposite: Ignore the crowd and live in the loving, redeeming way of Jesus, who was jeered by the crowd and went all the way to the cross for us.

Loving God, help us to be wary of the lure of the crowd. May we instead follow humbly and lovingly in the footsteps of your son and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Donita O’Donnell

Tuesday, January 30, 2018

I remember a Good Friday service when more than half of the people in attendance fell to tears during the shared reading of the crucifixion. Why would people who have heard this story for years suddenly find their sorrow beyond control? I was one of them, and I hope this meditation will help us remember the loving gift of the crucifixion.

When Jesus bore all our sins at once, he learned for the first time, the sorrow of separation from God. We hear the pain in his cry, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” It is the pain we experience when our own sins cause us to feel separated from God.

In announcing his pending death, Jesus assured us that God would not forsake us. He told us that his crucifixion was the beginning of a new covenant with God. William Barclay explains the new covenant as “forever within the love of God.” (New Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark, p. 396)

In my favorite meditation from Frederick Buechner’s *Listening to Your Life*, (p.67) Buechner recalls a day when he was overwhelmed by his sinfulness and felt that separation from God. Seeking refuge under a large tree, he noticed what appeared to be a face in the leaves above him. The lips, though voiceless, seemed to speak

his name. He knew it was the Savior whose face he saw, and he knew our God of Love had not forsaken him. Transformed, he closed with, “When I deserved it least, God gave me most.”

God of love, may I always recognize my sins, and may I humbly shed a tear of thankfulness for Your grace. Amen.

Eric Wendorff

Wednesday, January 31, 2018

The Gospel of Mark -- whose first words proclaim “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God”-- appears to end rather bleakly. Like the male disciples who abandoned Jesus in Gethsemane, the women, who had faithfully remained with Jesus on Golgotha and had come to anoint his broken body, flee the empty tomb in mute terror, despite an angelic promise that the risen Jesus is going ahead of the disciples to Galilee, where they will see him.

The objective evidence of the empty tomb and angelic testimony that Jesus was raised from the dead did not inspire the women with faith, but they must have overcome their fear for Mark to tell their story. The narrative suggests that only an encounter with the Risen Christ could have emboldened them.

Mark, however, directs our attention beyond the empty tomb and vivid Easter morning encounters with the Risen Christ to Galilee.

Galilee is where the disciples were living when Jesus began his ministry and called them to follow him. Galilee is where we live – where we go about our everyday lives, and where we, too, may see the Risen Christ.

We see the Risen Christ when we go about doing what Jesus did in Galilee: sharing the good

news of God’s love and forgiveness and showing compassion toward those we meet.

We encounter the Risen Christ when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, and welcome a stranger or a little child in Jesus’ name – when we see and love Jesus in “the least of these.” For, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”

Lord Jesus Christ, may I see you in the faces of those I am called to love in your name and moved to love by your love for me. Amen.

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