

WE SOURCES



A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

GOSPEL OF
Mark

ADULT STUDY

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE

Lesson 1

RESOURCES

- Device to show video links (computer, tablet, projector)
- Hymnal
- Bible
- Journals/or writing pad & pens

GATHERING

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you

in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.

Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Mark 1:12-20

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Mark 2

13 Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. 14 As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Lent is about going to the wilderness and facing your mortality, your shortcomings, and finding the spiritual resources to overcome this world. Jesus models this for the disciples he will be calling to follow him. For a more in depth reading of Jesus's time in the wilderness you could read Matthew 4:1-11.

Again, I would encourage everyone to understand our Lenten journey in the context of Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus was tempted with food (security), fame, and power. This story of Jesus is important because it is these same things that we struggle with in our culture. Satan tempted Jesus with the false reality of materialism and worldly trappings, but Jesus refused to fall for it. Instead, Jesus worshiped the Creator and not the created.

Paul writes in Romans 1:24-25 (NRSV)

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Some of us are better than others, but we all struggle with the carnal inside of us and Lent is the time to go in the wilderness and reflect deeply on who we are, what we are not, and also on what we can become. And this is where we want to focus today. God does not look on the human race as a faceless mass. Nor does God simply view the redemption of God's people as a cosmic game of got ya' with Satan.

God calls us, you and I, as beloved children into a relationship in Christ. You, me, that person

sitting next to you--every hair on your head is numbered. One of the most powerful passages in all of Scripture is Isaiah 49:14-16 (NRSV)

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

The Gospel is not simply about passing from hell to heaven--it is a call to life in Christ. A life that is joyful and abundant. We live in this world and we consume more and more, we take as much as we can, but we find that we are still empty! God desires to fill us with life and purpose.

Using the temptation narrative of Jesus, let's reflect on Jesus's calling of the first disciples and how we can reflect on being a disciple of Jesus Christ. I have said, that the temptations Jesus faced were:

1. Food (Security)
2. Fame
3. Power

Mark 1:16-20 (NRSV)

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

FOOD (SECURITY)

Jesus went 40 days with no food or water (Fasting is a key discipline often associated with Lent for this very reason) Jesus was hungry for sure, maybe to the point of death. Satan comes to Jesus at His lowest moment and says--turn those stones into bread. Satan was tempting Jesus to become his own sufficiency with no dependence on God.

Remember, having food was security for the people of Jesus's day. It is not a coincidence that part of the Lord's prayer is to ask for daily bread, because not everyone was able to eat each day. Food was security.

Another wilderness wandering you may know from Scripture is from the Exodus. During the Exodus the Israelites began by crying out to God. God delivered them from their troubles. They became complacent. God withdrew God's providence, they cried out for grace. They became complacent. Whenever they believed they could live in their own strength, they did. They created for themselves a life filled with material security, but soon found themselves empty and in great need. We do not have to live this way--Jesus calls us into a life with much more meaning and purpose. Security is found in the will of God, not in our earthly possessions.

This principle is illustrated in the response of the first disciples. Our Scripture text purposefully repeats the word "immediately" to emphasize the importance of the response of the disciples. The verse could read "immediately they left their earthly security to find security in the will of God."

Discuss: The western world is in an unprecedented moment (and not in a good way.) For the vast majority of human history malnourishment was a leading cause of death in many societies. We live in a world where eating too much is the greatest health risk in our society--obesity, diabetes, and heart disease can be attributed to our diet--because we eat too much, and we eat fantastically fried meals. We spend more money on dieting plans--42 billion dollars in 2018--that is more than the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of 100 countries around the world.

How do you think our struggle with food exposes our lack of spiritual concern?

What about our spending? Saving? Giving?

What about our time? Serving Christ in greater ways?

Read and Reflect: Read Matthew 6:25-34. Take time this Lenten Season to think about your attitude toward security on this earth or your calling to follow Christ.

FAME

Mark 2 (NRSV)

15 And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples--for there were many who followed him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

The second temptation of Christ was to fame. Satan takes Jesus to the holy city and places Him on the pinnacle of the temple--If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. God will save You! What is not in the text is that this event would cause quite the stir. Why not shortcut the cross, and have people believe because God rescued Jesus in sight of all people. Jesus fame would spread, and He could sit on the throne without the agony of the cross.

Fame, popularity, recognition? Anybody in the church you know ever get caught up in the need to be known? How often do people in the church think that to be seen as important is more important than the ministry?

I have personally experienced the frustration of people in the church when importance and fame is more important than the people we are called to serve. Don't you think those kids could eat at home and we wouldn't have to buy so many donuts? "Preacher, I don't think we have the resources to do a homeless ministry" (this means we don't want to get involved in that type of ministry. That would dirty up the church.)

This was the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees when they saw Jesus associating with tax collectors and sinners. He was demeaning their fame by doing ministry to those who most needed it. Being an elder or a preacher comes with some fanfare. Washing clothes for the homeless or ministering to drug addicts takes a lot of work and many times people would rather ignore these problems.

Often the church is scared to have certain types of

WeSources Gospel of Mark - Lesson 1 3

ministries or people in their church. They want the church to stay clean. They want the church to have the best of everything; the best preaching, the best music, the best youth ministry. The church will use its resources to project a certain image, but sometimes the church doesn't want to do the dirty work of ministry. We must remember--No Cross, no salvation.

Discuss: Social media has created a world in which being seen is more important than doing and being. In what ways does your church worry more about its image than its ministry?

Read and Reflect: Read Matthew 23 (you can select verses for the class, or this could be homework) During this Lenten Season think about how your need to be recognized has overtaken your desire to sacrifice to do God's work?

POWER

Matthew 23:1-11 (NRSV)

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. 6 They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. 9 And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father--the one in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

The final temptation of Christ was the temptation of power. This could be about shortcutting the cross as well, but I think this temptation is about

settling for less than God offers. The offer from Satan was to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would only bow down to Satan. Christ had set his mind in serving and worshiping God alone. In staying faithful to God Jesus not only became ruler of the Earth, but He is the King of kings and Lord of lords over all the universe and sits at the right hand of God Almighty.

C.S. Lewis wrote in his collection of essays, "The Weight of Glory," a profound illustration. "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

How often we strive after the less important things thinking they are the important things. I think of these scribes and Pharisees mistaking earthly power and influence for spiritual gain. Seeing a person healed is much greater than sitting at a place of honor at a banquet. Our culture has saturated our minds with the thought that to be able to have anything you want, whenever you want it is power. Not so in the kingdom of God. Power in the kingdom of God is giving up of self, so that God can raise you up to all the purposes God plans for your life.

Discuss: In what ways have you settled for the lesser good? Maybe you have kept yourself from a deeper relationship with God, because the things of the world still draw your attention more than God's love for you. What is it that you could give up now in order to be more faithful to God's calling in your life?

Read and reflect: Read Luke 22:24-28. In what specific way could you voluntarily give up power, so that God could do a greater work in your life?

Remember this Lenten Season, God is calling you. None of the disciples were all that important. They were ordinary people who committed their life to following Christ. My prayer is with you as you journey this season.

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GOSPEL OF
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ADULT STUDY

JESUS FEEDS THE CROWD

Lesson 2

GATHERING

God of healing, God of wholeness, we bring our brokenness, our sinfulness, our fears and despair, and lay them at your feet.

God of healing, God of wholeness, we hold out hearts and hands, minds and souls to feel your touch, and know the peace that only you can bring.

God of healing, God of wholeness, in this precious moment in your presence and power grant us faith and confidence that here broken lives are made whole.

Take time to share any observations or new understandings of the class's spiritual journey as they have observed the Lenten Season.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jesus Teaches and Feeds the Crowds

Teaches by the Seaside 3:7

Feeding of Five Thousand 6:30

Feeding the Four Thousand 8

Mark 3:7-12 (NRSV)

7 Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; 8 hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. 9 He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; 10 for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. 11 Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" 12 But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

Mark 6:30-31 (NRSV)

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. 35 When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said,

"This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat."

³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And all ate and were filled; ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Mark 8:1-10 (NRSV)

⁸ In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ² "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." ⁴ His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" ⁵ He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶ Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. ⁷ They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. ⁸ They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹ Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰ And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Today, for our Lenten study we continue our discussion of food, security, and motivations.

Mark 3:7 (NRSV)

⁷ Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸ hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹ He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; ¹⁰ for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.

These verses are very interesting in that they examine the motives for people who are following Jesus. In our last lesson we read that Jesus called ordinary people and we see the response from the first disciples. It says "Immediately" they left everything and followed. We are left with some admiration for the early disciples in that Jesus had not yet started his ministry. He did not have a long resume in which the disciples would have been chomping at the bit to follow. James and John were called before any miracles were recorded in the Gospel of Mark and they simply gave up their security and by faith "immediately" followed Christ.

In chapter 3 we see a little different motivation for the crowd to follow Jesus. The text said there was a great multitude which followed, so much that there was danger in being crushed by the crowd. What was their motivation? Surely there were some who sought Christ because they wanted to connect in a deeper way with the life and power of God, but the text makes it clear that most had less noble motivation.

The crowd had heard all that Christ had done. By this time in the Gospel of Mark Jesus had healed a man of an unclean spirit. He healed many at Simon's house. He had cleansed a leper. He had made a paralytic walk again, and to top it all off he was preaching against the established authority--for sure these are all things that will lead to a popular uprising of people.

In verses 11 and 12 of Mark 3 we read about the "Messianic Secret." This was a term first used by a theologian named Wilhem Wrede. Wrede hypothesized that the reason for Jesus commanding demons and people not to share his true identity was because the author of Mark had to explain why so few Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Wrede believed the stories of Jesus had been sensationalized by the early adopters of the faith.

That of course is an example of a theologian who had too much time on his hands. Another theory, and the one that I subscribe to is that Jesus's time had not yet come. Just as he rebuked Satan for tempting him with the shortcut to fame by jumping off the temple, so Jesus was downplaying his identity as the "Son of God," so that the people's motivation would be to follow God, not simply desire to be healed of earthly infirmities.

Lent calls us to examine ourselves and the motivations we have for following Christ. I took an online course on spiritual direction facilitated by Larry Crabb. In that lesson he said it is the spiritual director's job to connect people with Jesus and to help them develop that as their greatest desire. While that might sound like a "no duh" kind of statement, in reality it is very difficult.

Too often we relegate Jesus to the cosmic Santa Claus. We don't do it on purpose; it is our human nature. The greatest motivation must be a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, with no thought to what we get out of it. The vision of the Christian life is to find our sufficiency, love, and purpose in being in union with Christ. Everything else, while good, is a sideshow.

John 6:26-27 (NRSV)

26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

Discuss: What is your motivation for following Christ. In the Western church we have put

much emphasis on redemption from sin and therefore, no hell. No hell is a great thing-- but that is secondary to love of God and life in Christ. How does motivation inform our decisions in our faith journey?

Read and Reflect: Read: Philippians 3.
Reflect: Say you are having a rough time raising one of your children. You stay up late at night and wonder if they are going to make it home safe because they are out "living the life." You have reasoned with them, you have tried to correct them, but they keep on heading toward a path of destruction. You would give your soul to make sure your kid is going to be ok.

Maybe your marriage is on the rocks and every day is a struggle because you and your spouse are always fighting. You would give everything in your body and soul to have just one good day with your spouse.

Maybe you have lost your job and you can't find another one and you are on the brink of bankruptcy. You would exchange your prized possession just for the chance to work.

Life tears us away from the one motivation of love of God and life in Christ. Even when any of these circumstances happen, our main focus and goal must be a deeper more intense pursuit of God. Love of God must be our motivation in this life.

Now you may say this is all well and good talking in a Bible study, but what about real life? I believe the next passages of scripture helps us understand that when we put our trust wholly in God and our greatest motivation is to love God, then God cares for God's own.

Mark 6:30-31 (NRSV)

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they

were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And all ate and were filled; ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Mark 8:1-10 (NRSV)

⁸ In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ² "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." ⁴ His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" ⁵ He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶ Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. ⁷ They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. ⁸ They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹ Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰ And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

The purpose of these passages is to show first the disciples (12 baskets left over) and second, to prove to the crowd that God can more than supply the necessities in our lives. (7 loaves turned into 7 baskets after 4,000 had been fed)

During this Lenten season we seek to find where we have reversed the order of living in the light of God's grace. We try to fix all the things that need fixing then we turn to spiritual pursuits. Scripture states that we must first seek God, then God in God's providence cares for our needs in abundance.

Matthew 6:33-34 (NRSV)

³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Proverbs 3:5-8 (NRSV)

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
⁸ It will be a healing for your flesh
and a refreshment for your body.

Discuss: Are there times or areas in your life where you find it easier or more difficult to trust God for provisions? Money? Relationships? Professions?

Read and Reflect: Read: 2 Kings 6:8-23

Reflect: When has God surprised you with resources you never knew were available to you? Has there been a time where you were blinded but others around you were able to help you see more deeply in the spiritual realm?

Remember in this Lenten season God is teaching us that our motivation should not be one of reward or physical security, but our motivation is to love God in Jesus Christ knowing God has all the resources that we need to flourish.

WEsources:



A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

GOSPEL OF
Mark

ADULT STUDY

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jesus Teaches with Parables

Mark 4:1-9, 30-32

Mark 12:1-17

Mark 4 (NRSV)

¹ Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching, he said to them: ³ "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." ⁹ And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

³⁰ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown

PARABLES

Lesson 3

GATHERING

Creative, passionate God, you delight in shaping the world in beauty and harmony. You invite us to participate in the balance of creation. We grow in wisdom as our experience unfolds; we take good learning out of difficult situations yet find our well-meant endeavors leading to unintended consequences.

Too often we give in to temptation that disrupts the joyous, chaotic order of the universe. We cannot undo all our mistakes, but we can turn once more to the living presence of Jesus and find new ways to live and love each other and the earth.

Do not let our hearts be fearful, but let us in silence acknowledge our sin and seek the forgiveness that restores your peace. Amen.

Take time to share any observations or new understandings of the class's spiritual journey as they have observed the Lenten Season.

it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Mark 12 (NRSV)

¹ Then he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ² When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. ⁵ Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. ⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this scripture:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

¹¹ this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes?’”

¹² When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

¹³ Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. ¹⁴ 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 the emperor, or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.”

¹⁶ And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

I found out early in my seminary journey that parables are tricky to figure out. One of the reasons for this is because they are grounded in a culture that I know very little about, but at the same time, they are completely relevant to my life. I shared classes with people from other cultures and was often amazed how their cultures understood a parable different than the dominant interpretation of my culture. Their interpretation wasn’t right or wrong. Instead, it added layers of understanding to what I had understood in the parables. Lent is the perfect season for studying the parables because they often resist clear cut interpretation; instead they are offered as ways of meditating on God and searching more deeply God’s character and love for us.

Mark 4 (NRSV)

³ “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

Lent is the perfect time to think on this parable because it doesn’t necessarily teach anything! Instead, it invites the reader/hearer to examine themselves in light of planting and growing.

In this parable the sower is God and the seed is Jesus Christ and his message of Good News.

The soil is the people who experience Jesus in some way, and it describes the different ways. In this parable there are four types of soil:

1. The path—If you have ever fed birds or ducks you have experienced the quickness that these animals snatch up anything they see.
2. Rocky Ground—This provides opportunity for growth, but no depth of soil to take root.
3. Thorny—There was a large tree in the yard of a home we purchased. It had vines running all up the trunk. During a heavy thunderstorm the tree fell. It was rotten on the inside because the vine had sapped its nutrients. It was dying because of the weeds.
4. Good soil—The seed is able to take root and be nourished by the soil.

Discuss: How did you receive the Gospel? What type of soil are you? One way to think about this is also to think about the stages in your own spirituality. When in your spiritual life were you any of these soils? Could this be talking about spiritual maturity?

Can you prepare yourself to be good soil or is that a work of God?

Read and Reflect: Read John 3:1-21. Reflect: The Cumberland Presbyterian Church has been known as the "Whosever Will" church. How does this parable reflect God's attitude toward spreading the Gospel and the responses of people to the message?

The next parable is the parable of the mustard seed.

Mark 4 (NRSV)

30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Here the kingdom of God is compared to the smallest of seeds, but when given proper growth

it becomes the biggest shrub to the extent that it gives aid even to the birds. The reason Christ compares the kingdom of God to a small seed is because it is not forced from the outside, but in every single human heart it is planted, and God can grow that seed of faith into concrete acts of grace in our lives. God grows holiness in us as we receive a message such as the Gospel.

Discuss: What ways has your faith become a shelter for people to build upon, as the birds found a place to create a home in branches of the mustard bush?

Mark 12 (NRSV)

13 Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. 14 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 the emperor, or not? 15 Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." 16 And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." 17 Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.

Strictly speaking this is not a parable, but it brings out a truth and we are supposed to be digging deeper in the season of Lent. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Many of our churches observed Ash Wednesday. During that worship service ashes are placed on our foreheads and we heard the words "From dust you were created, to dust you will return."

The Pharisees were simply trying to ignore the implications of Christ's teachings. My children do this with me when we are talking about responsibilities of life. I want them to do a certain task and they don't do it. I want to address the situation and all of a sudden, we are talking about some hypothetical situation they may encounter one day in their lives. I then turn the conversation back to their lack of responsibility.

Jesus was illustrating to the Pharisees that this worry about taxes misses the point completely. The material things of this world will pass away. Who cares if you give a coin to the emperor which is obviously his because it is stamped with his image. Are you not going to give yourself to God? You obviously belong to God because you are created in God's image. Give to God what is God's; give to the emperor what belongs to the emperor.

Discuss: In what ways do you ignore the importance of being created in the image of God?

Mark 2:23-28 (NRSV)

²³ One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his

companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

In what ways do you ignore God's purposes for humankind in order to practice your desires and preferences? How about at a governmental level—are there policies in your community or national government that conflicts with Jesus' teachings?

Remember this Lenten season that God is teaching us to go deeper than surface level teachings. God wants us to deepen our relationship with God in Christ.

WEsources:



A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

GOSPEL OF
Mark

ADULT STUDY

JESUS HEALS AND CARES FOR PEOPLE

GATHERING

Lesson 4

Hear us, Almighty and most merciful God and Savior; extend your goodness to your servants who are grieved with sickness. Visit them, O Lord, with your loving mercy, and so restore them to their former health, that they may give thanks unto you in your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Book of Common Prayer

Take time to share any observations or new understandings of the class's spiritual journey as they have observed the Lenten Season. Explain that today's lessons will focus on select healing stories in Mark.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jesus Heals and Cares for People

Mark 1:40-45 (NRSV)

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his

hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Mark 2:1-12 (NRSV)

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he

said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." 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!"

Mark 8:22-26 (NRSV)

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

When I read these stories of healing in the book of Mark, I think about the difference between faith healers and how they act and contrast that to the way Jesus performed his healings. It seems Jesus was motivated by something greater than the healers we see on TV. On TV it looks like a production. Jesus seemed overcome with love and compassion for those people that were broken.

Lent began with the recognition of our mortality. We repeat the line from Genesis after Adam and Eve sinned. From dust you were created to dust you will return. From that time forward our bodies were subjected to the effects of sin. It would be good here to have a talk about sin and how it relates to our observance of Lent.

Sometimes in church we talk about personal sin. However, sin is much bigger than our personal choices. In the fall of Adam and Eve sin entered the world and effected not only Adam and Eve, but also subjected all of creation to the effects of sin. Adam and Eve's sin allowed sin to enter the

world and it became a "fallen creation." We are fallen creatures living in a fallen world. Everything was corrupted in the sin of Adam and Eve. You have probably heard the phrase, "We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners." This means that our very natures are corrupt, from our mother's womb we are sinful. (Psalm 51:5)

We see the effect from the fall of Adam and Eve in creation through those natural disasters that cause havoc on the righteous and the wicked. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, droughts, floods, mudslides and all the other disasters that effect the earth are evidences of the fall of creation. In response to Adam's sin, God cursed the earth saying that it would be through the sweat of our brow we would bring forth food. This means that humans' relationship to creation would be one of striving to bring it under our management.

We see the effect of sin in humanity through illnesses and diseases. We see sin's effect as our bodies grow older and our knees begin to pop and backs feel like they are going to break even when we do the most menial tasks like getting out of bed. One of the most distressing diseases that I have observed was Alzheimer's Disease in my grandmother. My grandmother was the closest thing someone could get to sainthood. Each year she became a little less than herself until she forgot all the names of the people close to her and she began to get mean and on occasion say words that I would not have said when I worked in a restaurant. I hated (and still hate) that disease. There is no cure, no one deserves it, but we live in a fallen world.

There are sickness and troubles that befall people that can be linked directly to sin and to bad choices. We do, often, reap what we so. People who smoke a pack a day for years have a better chance of throat, lung, and heart issues that can debilitate them. Drug use leads to crimes and deaths. Stealing hurts communities.

During Lent, be mindful of both your personal sins and your faithfulness to God, but also to the "falleness" of our creation. Lent is a time that we mourn not only for our personal sins that grieve God's heart but also the effects of sin that cause

torment in our lives. This will help to remind us that this world is not our home and we are seeking a transformation of the world and the people in it.

This becomes the background of the healing miracles of Jesus. These miracles were not magic shows and demonstrations of Christ's power for the sake of amazing the crowd. Jesus performed these miracles because he had compassion on a broken people living in a broken world. Jesus performed miracles so that people could be whole as they were intended to be from creation. Jesus' miracles were not physical only, but they were spiritual as well. They connected people with God.

The marks of a miracle are (1) God intervenes in the life of God's creation (2) the effect can be contributed only to God (3) its purpose is to connect people to God. In the book of John miracles are understood as signs pointing to God.

John 20:30 (NRSV)

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Discuss: What does it mean to be healed? Shalom is a Hebrew word that is usually translated as "peace." A better translation might be "whole." What do you think it means to be whole? What would the world look like if the world was whole?

Read and Reflect: John 9:1-12. In 2008 Hurricane Ike wreaked havoc on Cuba. I remember one of my church members saying, "Well what do you expect? All the ungodliness they practice down there." Yet, when the Paducah area experienced flooding the same church member asked for prayers and expressed the thought "I do not know how this could happen to us."

We will look at three of the miracles in Mark and take note of the purpose of the miracle.

First, God intervenes in the life of God's creation

Mark 1:40-45 (NRSV)

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

As we continue in our journey of Lent we recognize the need to be humbled. To understand that we are mortal and the only hope we have for healing and for eternal life is to submit to, in faith, Jesus Christ is of greatest importance. We cannot rely on our own strength, because our strength will weaken. Lent is a reminder that no matter how healthy we are now, no matter what material resources we have we will come to a time when nothing but God will be sufficient. We are like the leper, begging and kneeling before Christ and in faith we seek with confidence, "If you choose, you can make me clean."

The amazing moment in this passage for me is where Mark notes that Jesus is moved with pity. The God of all creation, the king of heaven cares about common, ordinary people like you and me. I believe that is the greatest miracle.

Read and share: Psalm 8:4-6. Throughout the Bible we are reminded of God's special love for humanity. Share with one another a moment when God demonstrated great love to you.

Second, God is the only source of a miracle

Mark 2:1-12 (NRSV)

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to

them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"— he said to the paralytic— "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." 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!"

The purpose of the Gospel of Mark was to demonstrate that Christ was the Messiah and the Son of God. In this miracle we begin to see the battle between the Pharisees and Jesus. You may remember that ultimately Jesus was condemned for blasphemy. I believe this passage speaks to the question of wholeness or shalom that we talked about in the discussion question. Jesus made this man whole. The paralytic was healed physically and also spiritually. Jesus does not half heal. This parable helps us to understand wholeness in the greatest sense is spiritual, physical, and I would include emotional completeness. This parable serves to illustrate that God is the only one who can heal us.

Share: For whoever feels comfortable ask students to share a moment that could have only come from God and what was their reaction—the crowd that saw Jesus heal the paralytic simply said "We've never seen anything like this." They were in awe of Jesus.

Third, Miracles connect people with God.

Mark 8:22-26 (NRSV)

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

This is the only miracle unique to the Gospel of Mark. It is also the only miracle that occurs in two steps. In the first step the blind man can see, but he can only see blurry images. Then Christ lays hands on the man and then he sees clearly.

The context of this miracle is very important and we do a disservice to the story if we do not know the context. Mark 8 begins with the feeding of the four thousand. It continues with the Pharisees asking for a sign from heaven about Jesus. The discussion follows among the disciples about bread. Jesus ends the discussion by asking, "Do you still not understand?" After, Jesus' question, this miracle takes place. Directly following the miracle in chapter 8 is the great confession of Peter. In verses 8:29-30 Jesus ask, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Messiah." So Mark uses this miracle to illustrate that one can be healed physically, but still not see God clearly.

Understand that Christ demonstrated through the healing of the blind man that to be completely healed, one must see clearly. One has to be connected to God through Christ. A miracle leads someone to declare Jesus Christ as the Son of the Living God, the Messiah.

Discuss: One purpose for Lent is to intentionally clear away the clutter that keeps us from seeing God clearly. Share with one another times when, though you were a believer, your understanding of God deepened and you were able to see more clearly God's majesty or love.

WE SOURCES:



A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

GOSPEL OF
Mark

ADULT STUDY

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT AND WHO IS THE GREATEST

Lesson 5

GATHERING

We pray to you, O God: be our helper and protector. Save the afflicted, have mercy on the lowly, raise up the fallen, help the needy, humble the proud, return the lost, feed the hungry, release the captive, heal the sick, revive the weak, and comfort those in fear. All this we ask for the sake of the world you love, and in the name of the one you sent to save us: Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Prayer of Clement of Rome

Take time to share any observations or new understandings of the class' spiritual journey as they have observed the Lenten Season. Today our lesson explores the great teachings of Christ.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jesus Heals and Cares for People

Mark 12:28-34 (NRSV)

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing

that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Mark 9:33-37 (NRSV)

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name

welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Hebrews 11:13-16 (NRSV)

¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

A theme in the Bible is that we are sojourners, foreigners and exiles, pilgrims, citizens of heaven, and people who long for a better country. This is another theme of Lent. Ash to ash, we are dying, and this world can not be our home because we and creation are passing away.

This forces us to be foreigners in this world. If we are foreigners and exiles, it means that we are different than the dominant culture of this world. We speak differently, with words of grace and faith. We have different values which lead us to turn the other cheek, we seek to treat others better than ourselves, greatness is based on servanthood, we seek for God and not money or power. We have a different purpose, which is to lose our life to God and not save it with the trappings of this world.

Ultimately, for us to live as strangers and foreigners in this world, we must have an overwhelming vision of God and God's love for us. This vision must inspire in us a passion for God that is greater than the cravings of our primal selves. If we are not careful, we can fall in love with this world, and we begin to make it our home.

Discuss: How is your life fundamentally different as a Christian as opposed to those you know who are not?

Is the difference simply one of intention and belief, or is the difference manifested in the way we prioritize our life and the actions we perform each day?

Read and Reflect: 1 Peter 2:9-11

In what way has God's grace to you in Christ informed your living in a world that sets itself against the ways of God?

That brings us to our first scripture lesson which we often hear called the Greatest Commandment.

Mark 12:28-34 (NRSV)

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

The first thing to note in this scripture passage is that in the Gospel of Mark the scribe who came to ask Jesus a question did so with humility. In the Matthew version of the Great Commandment story, the scribe asks the question to "test Jesus." In the Mark passage, the scribe affirms Jesus' answer and adds the phrase, "these are more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus encourages the scribe to keep going toward the truth because the scribe was almost there.

This scribe came to Jesus with humility and genuine intrigue. This is the attitude we observe during Lent. Lent is a time to humble oneself and learn. We ask questions in prayer, and we study to edify ourselves.

The Greatest Commandment is to love God—passionately, with all of your being, with abandon. This love is the key to being able to live in holiness and compassion in this world. But, how do we become passionate about God? I believe that the only way we can become passionate about God is to step out in faith and begin to walk intentionally with God in our everyday life. Our faith can not be cultivated for an hour on Sunday morning and expect our passion for God to be aroused. Here are three ways you can deepen your passion for God.

(1) We must develop a personal relationship with God—in other words, we must become intimate with God. If not careful our faith can be only what we learn about God, our faith can become nothing more than ritualism. I find myself sometimes in the study of scripture and in prayer going through the motions. I make myself stop and say, Hello Lord. I love you. And I simply stay still, not praying, not studying. Sometimes I will sing a hymn. Trying to hit the reset button and reconnect. God is personal and not an idea or a set of principles that we try to achieve or satisfy.

(2) Remember God's faithfulness in the past—While we may have a Damascus Road experience at our conversion, developing a relationship takes time. God has proven to be our great reward and shield. Take time to reflect on God's goodness and faithfulness. As the old hymn says, "count your blessings, name them one by one." One thing that has strengthened my blended family is the trips we take together and my wife's and my insistence that we eat together at the dinner table as often as possible. These become memories I cherish, and I think about these memories from time to time just to refresh myself on how much I love the people God has brought in my life. These memories set fire to my love for them.

(3) Turn your relationship and memories into actions—Take marriage for example—we make

vows to one another that go something like this, "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself to you."

Now imagine a marriage that didn't take these vows seriously (unfortunately this happens too much.) Love develops between spouses over time. The faithfulness and acting out of these vows over time creates a deep love between spouses.

This passionate relationship with God then leads us to love God's creation. When we fall in love with God, we fall in love with all God loves. We begin to view all people in love because that is how God sees people.

In fact, Jesus equates loving people with loving God. You might also remember Jesus' teaching about "whatever you have done to the least of these, you have also done to me." God takes our treatments of other humans very serious.

Read and Discuss: 1 John 4:19-21

Probably every one of us has had issues with prejudice or people in your life you find it very difficult to love or even like. How do you reconcile your thoughts of that person with our lesson today?

Share: Give the class a time for testimony. Ask them to share how their relationship with God has deepened as they have grown older.

Our second lesson for today focuses on applying the Greatest Commandment to our everyday living and attitudes about how to live. If we are overwhelmed with a passionate love of God, then being the greatest in the world just does not matter as much to us any longer.

Mark 9:33-37 (NRSV)

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a

little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Our *Confession of Faith* contains a statement about being able to serve all people in freedom. (COF 6.01)

6.01 Through Jesus Christ, God frees persons from the shackles, oppression, and shame of sin and sinful forces, from the guilt and penal consequences of sin, and enables them to have free access to God. *This freedom, rooted in love, not fear, enables persons to become who God intends them to be, to bear witness to their Lord, and to serve God and neighbors in the vocations of their common life.*

This is a beautiful statement about how we can become a servant of all people without worrying about whether we are getting noticed. We are assured of our position in Christ. We do not need to conflict with others to climb the ladder. What greater position can we attain than a child of God?

Jesus illustrates this point by inviting a child to be amongst him and the disciples. The child is not worried about the position of authority, but I bet the child enjoyed the embrace of Christ. Likewise, a child is to be loved, simply because they are children. Not for their greatness or ability, because children have little greatness and ability when compared to worldly standards.

We can live as aliens and strangers in this world because we have been freed from having to create meaning or importance for ourselves. We can simply live for the glory of God in how to live and treat others.

Read and discuss: John 13:1-20.

Notice how John words Jesus' motivation for washing the disciples' feet in verse 3-5. (NRSV) How does knowing that we have been given all things in Christ allow us to live differently in the world compared to those who do not know their position in Christ?

What areas of life does this conviction affect? Think in terms of relationships, giving of resources, giving of time, or even worrying about the future.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

Jesus was not a king who lorded it over his subjects. He was able to be a servant because he knew his position. Jesus had nothing to prove, nothing to lose so he could practice compassion. He didn't have to protect himself because he belonged to God and God had given him all things.

Discuss: One purpose for Lent is to intentionally clear away the clutter that keeps us from seeing God clearly. Share with one another times when, though you were a believer, your understanding of God deepened and you were able to see more clearly God's majesty or love.

WEsources:



A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

GOSPEL OF
Mark

ADULT STUDY

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Lesson 6

Be prepared this week to speak about atonement theories. There are two videos I have found on youtube that you can show, or if you want to brush up on your knowledge of atonement theories. The first video is a short introduction of all the major theories of Western Christianity. This video is about six minutes long. The second video is from NT Wright when he speaks about the Christus Victor vs. Penal Substitution theories. This video is about four minutes long.

You can also search youtube for "atonement theories Josh Thurow." Or use this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vczyh14yys8>

You can also search for "NT Wright Christus Victor Penal Substitution." Or use this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfnV69nlOrw>

GATHERING

O God our King, by the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ on the first day of the week, you conquered sin, put death to flight, and gave us the hope of everlasting life. Redeem all our days

by this victory; forgive our sins, banish our fears, make us bold to praise you and to do your will; and steel us to wait for the consummation of your kingdom on the last great Day; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Book of Common Prayer

Take time to share any observations or new understandings of the class's spiritual journey as they have observed the Lenten Season. Today our lesson explores Christ's teachings about the resurrection.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Death and Resurrection

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Mark 9:30-32 (NRSV)

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Mark 10:32-34 (NRSV)

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

These teachings about death and resurrection occur like rapid fire in the book of Mark. Mark wants us to take note of this. Also of note are the action verbs that are used and repeated such as: suffering, rejected, killed, betrayed, handed over, condemn, mock, spit, and flog. Mark wants us to understand the seriousness of the situation and not shortcut the passion of Christ.

Mark wants us to understand that Jesus did not haphazardly find himself in trouble because he made the Pharisees angry. Jesus was determined to follow God and to be faithful in all ways to the very end. In other words, this was a choice Christ consciously made. He was not forced into the crucifixion. It was not above his control. It was his loving choice to be the instrument that God used

to defeat death and reclaim all of creation and to set creation free from the bondage of sin and death.

As we have said in the past, context is part of the text. Jesus' teachings about his death and resurrection are book-ended by miracles of healing blind men. This gives us a clue to what Mark is trying to accomplish with these three teachings about Jesus' death and resurrection. Mark wants us to see clearly who Christ is, what Christ has done, and our response. The question for us today is will we stay blind or will we open our eyes to see and follow Christ?

Discuss: Think of some non-believers that are in your life, maybe there is a family member, or co-worker, or a friend, what is their understanding of Jesus?

How do they view his death and resurrection?

Was he just a human teacher or was he a made-up person?

What did his death accomplish?

I want to start with Mark 9 and 10 passages first then go to the Mark 8 passage.

Mark 9:30-32 (NRSV)

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Mark 10:32-34 (NRSV)

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

In all of these passages, Jesus makes it very plain to the disciples what is going to happen to him. He wants them to know that what is going to happen will not be a surprise. He wants them to be prepared. In chapter 8 and 9 Jesus seems to state facts—suffering, handed over, death, and resurrection. Then in chapter 10 Jesus gets more in-depth by explaining that he will be mocked and spit on and flogged. This will be bad.

It would be good to note as well some of the humanness of Jesus during these times. So often we look at Jesus as only divine. While he was divine, he was also born of a woman, being made in human likeness. Jesus was not stoic. He wept, he bled, he had compassion, he had the full run of emotions, yet he did not sin. I make this note because if you read completely chapters 9 and 10 you see this phrase, “They (the disciples) were terrified/scared/afraid.” (9:6, 9:32, 10:32)

I am left to wonder if Jesus was steeling himself for what was to come. I wonder if his face changed, or the tone of his voice changed as he reflected with the disciples what it meant to be completely abandoned to God’s purpose. Maybe there was an edge about him that made the disciples take note that something serious was going to happen. I bring this up because Jesus was no robot sent on a mission where he couldn’t have faltered. Instead, he was human, and God’s will was at the forefront of his mind, but so was the betrayal, mocking, the spitting, the flogging, the death, and the humiliation of being hung on a cross.

Read and Discuss: Hebrews 4:14-16.

How does understanding the human nature of Jesus help you understand better the passion of Christ in his final week of Jerusalem?

Does it help you to know that Christ was tempted in every way that you are tempted?

If so, how does it help you? If no, why not?

Jesus’ teachings to the disciples explore three aspects about his death and resurrection.

1. Christ’s sacrifice was chosen. We began this season of Lent with the story of the temptation of Jesus. At any point and time Jesus could have taken the shortcut and accepted the offers from

Satan, but Jesus would not settle for less than total submission to the will of God. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane to let this cup pass from him, but nevertheless not his will, But God’s will be done.

Jesus was not overtaken or outsmarted by the Pharisees. The Roman authorities had no authority over Jesus. Instead, Jesus was the good shepherd, and he laid down his life for his sheep. God planned to redeem the world, to set all creation free from the devil and from the bondage of sin, to restore all of creation to wholeness. This was the plan of God, and it was the purpose of Christ.

2. Christ’s sacrifice redeemed the world. The death rate is nearly 2 people every second around the world. 151,600 people will die in the next 24 hours. Death happens literally all the time. It is not odd that anyone should die. Why people die can be varied and heartbreaking. People may die because they are victims of crimes, some may die because of natural causes of old age, some due to bad habits, fewer die because they voluntarily give up their life for the sake of others. There are some who do. Soldiers, Firefighters, “good” Samaritans will make the conscious decision to give themselves up for the sake of another person.

Jesus chose to die, so that creation and the people in it could be redeemed. He was not killed because he blasphemed. He was not killed because he was an insurrectionist against the Romans. He was not killed because Judas betrayed him. Jesus Christ died because he was the only person worthy enough to redeem the world.

The early Church father Irenaeus wrote of the death and resurrection of Christ as a recapitulation (recreation) by writing, “Jesus became what we are so that we could become what he is.”

Discuss: Throughout the last 500 years there have been different theories of the atonement of Jesus Christ and what his death accomplished. Broadly speaking there are two categories of atonement. One is an “influence” type of atonement which means the death of Christ was an example for us

to follow. The second broad category is variations of “substitutionary theories.” For the first 1,000 years or so of the church the “Christus Victor/Ransom Theory” was the dominant view. Around 1,000 AD the Roman Catholic Church shifted toward the “Penal Substitution Theory” which is the norm in most Evangelical Protestant churches today. Another major theory in the Western Church is the “Satisfaction Theory.”

The point of this discussion is to get a grasp on what the death of Christ accomplished and how it has set us free from the damage of sin. Be careful because this could get bogged down.

3. Christ’s death was not final; he was raised on the third day. As it was no accident that Jesus would be betrayed or suffer humiliation. It was also no accident or surprise that Jesus would be raised on the third day. The disciples in Mark 8-10 couldn’t comprehend what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of death and resurrection. In chapter 8 Peter begins to rebuke Christ for talking in such a manner. In chapter 9 the disciples did not understand and were afraid to ask Jesus any further questions. In chapter 10 the response to Jesus’ teaching on death and resurrection was James and John arguing about who would be on the left and right side of Jesus.

Now we can begin to understand why these teachings about Christ’s death and resurrection are enclosed with two miracles of blind persons receiving sight.

When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, it brought everything into clarity. Everything made sense. Jesus Christ died, but he was raised and defeated death and sin. The Gospel is that we believe that Christ’s death and resurrection bring life. We find ourselves like the blind man in Chapter 10. Jesus tells the blind man, “Go, your faith has made you well.” We have the same offer today—our faith can make us well.

Now we turn to Mark chapter 8 and how the death and resurrection not only redeems us but calls us to live differently in response to Christ’s sacrificial act.

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The season of Lent is a time when the Church allows us to focus on what it means to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Christ. Everyone has a different context by which they live out their calling before God, but everyone is called to pick up their cross and follow.

Read and Discuss: Mark 9:33-37, Mark 10:35-45. In chapter 8 Peter begins to rebuke Jesus for talking about Jesus’s death. Then in chapters 9 and 10 notice that after Jesus tells the disciples about his coming death, the disciples switch to talking about who will be the greatest, or in positions of authority.

How are we blind to the implications of Jesus’ teachings on his death?

In what ways have you ignored the command of Christ to pick up your cross and follow him?

What ways can you begin today to deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus?

WE SOURCES



A Resource FOR ALL OF US

WRITTEN BY THE Discipleship Ministry Team OF THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church

GOSPEL OF
Mark

ADULT STUDY

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Lesson 7

GATHERING

Dear Lord Jesus, by your passion and resurrection, you brought life to the world. But the glory of the resurrection came only after the sufferings of the passion. You laid down your life willingly and gave up everything for us.

Your body was broken and fastened to a cross, your clothing became the prize of soldiers, your blood ebbed slowly but surely away, and your mother was entrusted to the beloved disciple.

Stretched out on the cross, deprived of all earthly possessions and human aid, you cried out to your Father that the end had come. You had accomplished the work given you, and you committed into his hands, as a perfect gift, the little life that remained to you.

Lord, teach me to accept all afflictions after the example you have given. Let me place my death in yours and my weakness in your abandonment, take hold of me with your love, that same foolish love that knew no limits, and let me offer myself to the Father with you so that I may rise with you to eternal life. Amen.

—The Passion Prayer

Take time to share any observations or new understandings of the class' spiritual journey as they have observed the Lenten Season. Today our lesson explores the Passion of Christ's life.

Most of us have heard the phrase "The Passion of Christ," but we might not know exactly what it means. We speak of passion today as something of an intense desire. We often use it in a romantic context, but it is common to say, someone has a passion for something. The term passion when used in the Christian context means suffering. The term we use to describe Christ's suffering comes from a Latin word "Patior," which means suffering. It has been argued that because of the term "passion" being assigned to Christ's suffering the word has grown to its meaning today. In other words—Christ's great love for God and humanity drove him to endure all suffering to complete his mission. So, someone who is passionate about something will go to the greatest lengths to display their commitment to that which they are passionate about.

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

There are a lot of scripture readings for this week so the format will be a little different. We will not be able to cover every scripture. I've included a chart of each day of the final week of Christ so that you can share them with your class and

encourage them to read through Mark's account of the final week. Our goal is to have a grasp of why Christ endured this week and to understand how we respond in faith to the passion of Christ.

THE FINAL WEEK/THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Mark 11:1-11 (NRSV)

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "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!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The final week of Christ begins in faith, expectation, and joy. It seems the whole of Jerusalem is celebrating Jesus. Even the owners of a colt were silenced and assented to Jesus using their property. The crowds were charged up celebrating Jesus and making way for him praising him and the coming kingdom of David.

One of my favorite shows while I was in college was "House." House was a medical doctor and Sherlock Holmes rolled into one person. He often

had to investigate people's lives in order to find out what medical condition they were suffering from and how to heal them. Many times, people lied about taking drugs or doing embarrassing things that may have brought on their suffering. Dr. House's standard line is "Everybody lies."

Discuss: Maybe not everybody lied, and maybe no one lied on purpose, but these shouts of praise turn into shouts of condemnation by the end of the week. Why do you think opinion changed so quickly about Jesus?

What type of faith is displayed by the people in Jerusalem?

Have you seen this type of faith in your life or in others or in the church?

MOTIVATION FOR THE PASSION

In these two passages one from Mark and one from Luke we can ascertain the motivation of Jesus' passion.

Mark 11:15-18 (NRSV)

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?

But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.

In the Mark passage Jesus became righteously angry about the condition of the Temple. In the Gospel of John, we read that zeal for God's house consumed Jesus. Jesus had an absolute devotion to seeing God glorified. In this passage Jesus saw God and God's purposes being subdued for human gain. Jesus would not be deterred or allow people to misuse God's name or temple. The first motivation for the passion of Christ was devotion to God.

The second motivation is found in the Passion narrative from Luke.

Luke 19:41-44 (NRSV)

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

Jesus knew the fate he would suffer at the hands of those who disagreed, or better to say despised him, but he loved them. He loved this city which was wrong in so many ways, and opened himself up in vulnerability for their sake, because of his great love for them, knowing he would be rejected and killed. Jesus had compassion because even the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law were his people and as he said, "I have come to seek and save the lost. God was shown to be loving, to "Whosoever Will," and God was glorified in Christ by having a deep compassion for all people.

The motivation for the passion of Christ was twofold, an overwhelming sense of God's glory and an overwhelming compassion for God's people.

STRENGTH FOR THE PASSION

Mark 11:27-33 (NRSV)

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'"—they were afraid of the

crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Mark 12:35-37 (NRSV)

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.'" David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?" And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

The strength for the passion came from being God's chosen one. Jesus was not simply a human teacher or a sage counseling people to a better way of life. Jesus Christ did not come only to teach, but to act. He came to accomplish what God had sent him to do and that was the redemption of the created order. All of this was being done by the direction of God under the authority of God.

The Pharisees were used to having authority and now this Jesus came marching to the beat of some other drum. Jesus began to sway people away from the Pharisee's teachings and Jesus did not conform to their prescribed traditions. The Pharisees and the Scribes were blinded and could not understand Jesus was the Son of God and that the kingdom that Jesus was bringing was a spiritual kingdom. They could not understand that salvation was not by human effort or keeping regulations.

Jesus had the authority and commission from God, not humans. Jesus' power came from God, not human customs or rituals. Jesus could not have endured the passion or conquered death without the strength and authority of God. In the Gospel of John we read:

John 10:17-18 (NRSV)

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own

accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

The strength for the passion came from being the Son of God and the authority God gave to Christ over creation. Jesus was no simple teacher, and His authority came from above not from humans or human traditions.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE PASSION OF CHRIST?

Faith and Fruit

Mark 11:12-14 (NRSV)

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.

Mark 11:20-25 (NRSV)

In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its root. Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

Mark 13:28-31 (NRSV)

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The teaching of the fig tree and its context is

very important to understanding the events that surround the passion of Christ. On first reading, it is a very strange story. The text said there were leaves on the tree, but that there was no fruit, because it was out of season. The Christ curses the fig tree because there was no fruit. Why?

If you get nothing else from these studies in Lent, I do hope you get one lesson which will help you study your Bible. Context is part of text! You will notice that the story of the fig tree is interwoven into other teachings, stories, and parables. To be faithful to the text and interpretation, make sure that you account for the stories in the middle of the overall story.

Immediately following the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus goes to the Temple. He finds the Temple, which is supposed to be a “house of prayer” has been “turned into a den of robbers and thieves.” There is no evidence of fruit in the Temple. It is all show, only leaves. There is nothing of substance and the season is near.

Evangelical scholar Craig S. Keener makes the following observation:

“At Passover season in late March or early April, fig trees are often in leaf on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. At this time of year, such fig trees contained only green early figs (Arabs call them taqsh), which ripen around June but often drop off before that time, leaving only green leaves on the tree. A leafy tree lacking such early figs, however, would bear no figs at all that year,” (Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, July 1999], p. 504)

Jesus says the Temple should be a house of prayer, but instead it had become a market place. Jesus then teaches the disciples what should have been happening in the Temple:

1. Faith in God, not human tradition
2. Fervent prayer to God
3. Forgiveness

Temple worship should bring about glorification of God, a faithful relationship with God in prayer and communion, and the Temple was the place of atonement, so it should bring about peace and forgiveness in the faith community. Also, notice that all of these things are intended to bring about spiritual fruit. The Temple worship no

longer brought fruit from the faith community.

Discuss: How do churches get off track?

Would you describe your church as one that glorifies God, encourages a relationship with God, and (this one is difficult) does your church encourage forgiveness and peace among its members? (or is it a battlefield for power grabs?)

The passage continues with various teachings and stories of conflict until it reaches the final passage about the fig tree in Mark 13. The final teaching of the fig tree is that now is the time to get your house in order. When you see the signs of the season, then be ready! Which leads us to the next response we learn from Passion Week.

URGENCY

Mark 13:32-37 (NRSV)

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Paul picks up this theme of the fig tree and urgency when he instructs Timothy,

2 Timothy 4 (NRSV)

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

When something is deeply important to you, then you give it the greatest priority in your life. This is what Jesus was trying to teach. In his final week, he continually warned of the time being near, be ready, be watchful, attend to your spirituality now,

for soon the time will be over. If something is important, then you will tend to it, if it is not that important then time will wear down the passion. Lent is the season when we look within ourselves and examine whether we really prioritize Christ’s message, or have we fallen asleep at the door?

Discuss: In what ways do we lose our sense of urgency?

Why do we lose our urgency?

How can we keep ourselves watchful and faithful?

DEVOTION AND IMITATION

Mark 14:3-9 (NRSV)

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

I cannot point to a single statement from St. Augustine, but the whole thrust of his writings on Scripture and spirituality is this: You become what you love.

Reflect and Discuss: In this passage we have the woman who is deeply in love with Christ, and Judas who seems deeply in love with money, or at least the proper use of it. Discuss examples in your life, or things you have seen which show that “You become what you love.”

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be

rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed,

what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

We have reached the end of the series. It has been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I believe it is a true statement. Jesus essentially says that if you love him, be like him. I've included a chart which shows the final week of Christ through all the gospels. I encourage you to read through these stories each day. This chart comes from Peter Forbes. May God bless each of us on our journey to the cross and to the resurrection.

Six Days Before The Passover						
Events as recorded in gospel	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Time of day	Place
Jesus arrives in Bethany				12:01	afternoon	Bethany
Five Days Before The Passover						
Events as recorded in gospel	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	time of day	Place
Triumphal entry into Jerusalem	21:1-11	11:1-10	19:29-44	12:12-19	Morning	Outside Jerusalem
Jesus wept over Jerusalem			19:41			
Jesus looks round		11:11				Temple
Returns to Bethany with disciples		11:11			Evening	Bethany
Four Days Before the Passover						
Jesus curses the barren fig tree	21:18-19	11:11-18			Morning	Mt of Olives
Cleansing of the temple	21:12-13	11:15-18	19:45-48			Temple
Some Greeks desire to see Jesus				12:20-36		Temple
Jesus responds to unbelief of the crowd				12:37-50		Temple
They return to Bethany		11:19			Evening	Bethany
Three Days Before the Passover						
The disciples see the withered fig tree	21:18-22	11:20-26			Morning	Mt of Olives
Priest's question Jesus' authority	21:23-27	11:27-33	20:1-8			Temple
Which son did his father's will?	21:28-32					Temple
Parable of the vineyard	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19			Temple
Parable of the wedding banquet	22:1-14					Temple
Paying taxes to Caesar	22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26			Temple
Sadducees question about resurrection	22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40			Temple
Which is the great commandment?	22:35-40					Temple
Which is the first commandment?		12:28-34				Temple
Whose son is Christ?	22:41-46	12:35-37	20:41-44			Temple
Woe unto you ... hypocrites	23:1-39	12:38-40	20:45-47			Temple
The poor widow's gift		12:41-44	21:1-4		late p.m.?	Treasury

Events as recorded in gospel	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Time of day	Place
The Olivet prophecy	24:1-36	13:1-32	21:5-36		evening	Mt of Olives
Watch, days of Noah	24:37-51					Mt of Olives
Ten virgins	25:1-13					Mt of Olives
The man travelling into a far country	25:14-31	13:33-37				Mt of Olives
Sheep, goats and judgment	25:31-46					Mt of Olives
Two Days Before the Passover						
Sanhedrin plot to kill Jesus	26:1-5	14:1-2	22:1-2		Morning	Palace of high priest?
Mary Anoints Jesus for his burial	26:6-13	14:3-9		12:2-8	Evening	Bethany
Judas' agreement to betray Jesus	26:14-16	14:10-11	22:3-6			Temple?
One Day Before the Passover						
Preparation for the Passover meal	26:17-20	14:12-17	22:7-14		Morning	Jerusalem
Disciples strive 'who is the greatest'			22:24-30		Evening	Upper room
Jesus washes the disciples' feet				13:1-20		Upper room
Identification of Jesus' betrayer	26:21-25	14:18-21	22:21-23	13:21-30		Upper room
Last Supper instituted	26:26-29	14:22-25	22:15-20			Upper room
Judas leaves				13:32		Upper room
A new commandment I give you				13:31-35		Upper room
Prediction of Peter's denial	26:31-35	14:27-31	22:31-38	13:36-38		Upper room
Discourses in the Upper Room				14:1-31		Upper room
Then they sung an hymn	26:30:00	14:26				Upper room
Then they leave the Upper Room				14:31		On the way to Cedron
Abide in me				Chpt 15		On the way to Cedrom
I go my way				Chpt 16		On the way to Cedron
Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven				Chpt 17		On the way to Cedron
Jesus prays in Gethsemane	26:36-46	14:26-42	22:39-46		Night	Gethsemane
Jesus betrayed, arrested, forsaken	26:47-56	14:43-52	22:47-53	18:2-12		Gethsemane