

Walking with Christ through Lent

Week 2 (Mon. Mar. 13 – Sat. Mar. 19, 2022)

Opening Prayers

O Lord, open our lips
And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Blessed are you God of compassion and mercy, to you be praise and glory for ever!
As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help, sustain us with your bountiful Spirit
And open our lips to sing your praise, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:
Blessed be God for ever! ¹

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy: O come, let us worship.

Song of Thanksgiving (Isaiah 12:2-6)

Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defence, and he will be my Saviour.
Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say, Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name;
make his deeds known among the peoples; see that they remember that his name is exalted.
Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things, and this is known in all the world.
Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy,
for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.

Reading (See following pages for the Reflection on each Scripture reading)

Monday	Mark 3:7-19a (<i>"a" refers to the first phrase of the verse</i>)
Tuesday	Mark 3:19b-35 (<i>"b" refers to the second phrase of the verse</i>)
Wednesday	Mark 4:1-20
Thursday	Mark 4:21-34
Friday	Mark 4:35-41
Saturday	Mark 5:1-20

Prayer

Cast your burden upon the Lord; and he will sustain you.

Create in me a clean heart; O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Give me the joy of your saving help again; and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day; the God of our salvation, who bears our burdens.

(Personal prayer)

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross, we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ¹

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray as our Saviour taught us:

(contemporary)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

(traditional)

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

May God our Redeemer show us compassion and love. Amen.

Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Reflections

After reading the Scripture for the day, in order to prepare to reflect, quiet yourself with a few deep breaths. Then take time to read the passage again, slowly, making note of what stands out for you, and what catches you about Jesus' words or actions. After completing the Reflection, you may wish to write a few notes about your responses to the questions, and/or go for a walk to further ponder your responses.

Monday (Mark 3:7-19a)

Mark summarizes Jesus' growing popularity and reports of his amazing acts of healing that spread well beyond the northern region of Galilee and his hometown. As with his earlier encounter with an unclean spirit (demon) Jesus refuses to allow them to reveal his identity as the Son of God – likely to avoid false assumptions about his role as Messiah. Jesus finalizes the appointment of 12 disciples/apostles who will form his inner circle.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be one of those in the region of Galilee clamouring to get close to Jesus in order to ask him to meet your need? Would you have gone to meet him? And if it were happening today, what need of yours would you want to ask him to "touch"? Knowing that the Risen Christ is as present to us now as then, can you, in prayer, present that need to him now?

Tuesday (Mark 3:19b-35)

Not unlike the rise to 'stardom' of a contemporary performer (i.e. singer, actor, etc.) Jesus and his "band" have to deal with the pressure of notoriety – both the accolades and the negative criticism. When challenged with using demonic power to exorcise demons, Jesus doesn't defend himself but instead shows how illogical that would be. Reflecting back to a passage of God's deliverance (Isaiah 49:24-25) Jesus explains his actions to free people from evil power. The sin (blasphemy) against the Holy Spirit has long been debated (and feared) but perhaps the most accessible interpretation is simply that the Holy Spirit is the one who prompts us to seek forgiveness, and if one shuts out that 'spirit' and labels it as evil, that person has removed from themselves the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. The closing section on who is Jesus' real family is a tough one – especially for those of us who are parents.

Unfortunately, Hollywood movies have painted for us some bizarre (and unhelpful) images of demonic power. Have you ever felt trapped in a pattern of destructive behaviour, or an uncontrollable response of anger, or a self-condemning sense of depression? These kind of experiences can be viewed as conditions having an evil influence on a person because they rob that person of the abundant life that God intends for them to have. And in our contemporary world, God's "deliverance" from these ailments can come in many forms – prayer, therapy, medication, etc. Without becoming "spooky" or surreal about these kind of 'dis-eases', it is helpful to view them as being "not from God" and deciding to seek forms of treatment that will free us from their hold. Can you think of examples in your life (past and present) where this has been the case?

Wednesday (Mark 4:1-20)

Mark introduces us to a favourite teaching tool of Jesus – the *parable*. This was a common form in 1st century Israel. The authentic form of parable uses an experience from common everyday life to illustrate a basic truth. In this case, Jesus compares the experience of a hand-seeding farmer to one attempting to spread the message of the Gospel to a wide audience. It will be met with a variety of responses but the key thing to realize is that it will bear much fruit in those who receive it. Verses 10 – 20 explain the parable as an *allegory* where each aspect of the story corresponds to a particular person or object. In this case, it explains the early church's experience of both rejection and acceptance as it shares the gospel of God's Word in Jesus.

Have you felt the discouragement of trying to share God's love and truth and having it ignored or rejected by many? Did you feel like giving up because the majority did not respond? What does this parable teach us to focus on instead?

Thursday (Mark 4:21-34)

This section continues with parables – in particular about the Kingdom of God. (Kingdom of God doesn't mean 'heaven' – it refers to the emerging reign of God which Jesus has initiated.) The first section is an admonishment not to hide away the gifts God has given you to live as Christ's disciple – gifts that will become inoperable if not used. The other two 'seed' parables help us to

accept that we can't always see or understand how our efforts bear fruit for God, but God does indeed use them even if their beginning seems insignificant.

The life of discipleship in God's Kingdom is a little like rowing upstream – the moment you stop you actually go backwards! Are there times in your life (past or present) where you stepped back from actively living as a disciple? Are there times (past or present) where you simply couldn't see or understand how your efforts made any perceptible difference in another's or your life? Can you look back now and see how those efforts have born "fruit" even if not in the way you expected? Give thanks!

Friday (Mark 4:35-41)

This is a story of one of Jesus' "nature miracles." Mark uses it to continue to show how Jesus' disciples gradually receive the revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. While Jesus does quickly respond to keep the disciples safe, he also challenges the shallowness of their faith – not trusting that the God of creation will actually look after them.

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Have you ever had that question in your mind and heart – "God, do you not care about what is happening to me?" It is a good question because it is both honest ("I'm having trouble believing in your love and care for me right now, God!") and it is faithful because it is directed to God as a plea for help. Think of times when you have experienced and expressed these kinds of thoughts and feelings, and how you experienced God's response.

Saturday (Mark 5:1-20)

This is a much fuller description of Jesus encountering a man tormented by an evil force. Jesus demands to know the force's name since in his culture it was thought that knowledge of another's name gave one some influence over that person. The key piece here is that Jesus refuses to be threatened by this dangerous person, nor to reject him. He is intent on helping him regain the humanity that God has blessed him with. Note that Jesus insists that the man remain in the community that had rejected him – as a witness to his deliverance and healing.

Again in this instance, we see Jesus being able to separate the evil power and its dangerous manifestation from the human person who it's affecting. The community, out of fear, had effectively banished this person from their midst. In addition to freeing him from the grips of this evil power, Jesus restores him into the fellowship of his community. Can you think of persons that you have felt threatened by, or whom you completely misunderstood, and therefore attempted to banish them from your life? Can you now ask God to help you view them as God does – and attempt to separate the negativity in their life from the human person themselves? Is there now an opportunity for you to attempt to restore some kind of (safe) relationship with them?

¹ From *Celebrating Common Prayer*, Society of St. Francis, published by Mowbray, London, 1992