

2008 Preaching Series
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
Introduction

For nothing is impossible with God. – Luke 1:37

Once again in our church calendar we come to the weeks of Lent, a time for reflection and meditation as we focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, who was "crucified, died and was buried...and on the third day He rose from the dead..." In our year long study of Mark we jump ahead to those last chapters which focus on the week of Jesus' life before His crucifixion, and then on Mark's account of both the crucifixion and resurrection. Because the segments for each study are such long scripture passages, everyone is encouraged to complete all the sections of the study on their own during the week, while group leaders are asked to select portions of the study which might best address the interests of their small group.

We are fortunate in our church, under the leadership of Dr. Hansen, to set apart this entire period of Lent as a time for deeper spiritual pilgrimage. Many other Protestant churches limit their focus to Holy Week alone. However, in our congregation in the seven weeks leading up to Easter, we hope all believers, whether they are participants in a small group or not, will find time to open the scriptures and ponder in new ways the love of God as expressed in His beloved Son. Thus, the study has several parts to it.

Warming Up: These personal questions are designed for partners in small groups, but also can be answered in journaling fashion by individuals.

Scripture Encounter: Within groups, these questions are both for the whole group discussion and for partners in some of the more personal topics. Space is provided for written responses both to prepare for a meeting ahead of time, or for people to complete as Bible study on their own.

Concluding Discussion: Groups can use these topics to reconsider the many dimensions to the scripture which have been raised during the evening. Individuals can turn to journaling again as they ponder just how the Lord has been speaking to them in the various passages.

A Lenten Challenge: Each week participants will be encouraged to do something with what they have been learning. The challenge will be directed toward serving others, often behind the scenes, in small gestures of love to the Lord and to others. These challenges can be read aloud to small groups, but each person must take the time to respond in his or her own private dialogue with Jesus throughout the week.

My Gospel Prayer: These are written to express some of the emotions and realities of grappling with the challenge of living the scriptural truths. Groups may read them in closing a meeting, and individuals may want to pray them as an impetus to further prayer.

The closing words of a great hymn of the church says, “Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living just because He lives.” As the studies culminate in resurrection Sunday, may these words take on even deeper meaning in each of our lives.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Sunday, February 10, 2008
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"A Grand Welcome?"
Mark 11:1-12:12

Jesus begins the final week of His ministry as He rides into Jerusalem to the shouts of praise and adoration of the crowds. He views the temple with its exploitive money changers, spends the night in nearby Bethany at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and returns on Monday to rid the temple of those who misuse the house of God. When confronted by the angry religious leaders, He tells them the parable of the tenants.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Can you recall a time when you entered a particularly hostile emotional environment, that is, a place where people with whom you were in conflict were gathered? What happened?

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 11:1-11.

- a. How does Jesus' triumphal entry further polarize His enemies?

- b. In verse 3, Jesus says of the colt, "the Lord has need of it." What else has the Lord "borrowed" in each of the following references? How does each of these objects carry symbolic qualities of who Jesus is, or what His mission is? The second scripture may help you understand the symbolism.

- Luke 2:7 Philippians 2:6-7
- Mark 1:29 Revelation 3:20
- Mark 4:1 Mark 6:51, Psalm 107:29
- Mark 8:6 John 6:35

➔ **With a partner:** *In Luke's version, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, predicts its destruction, and says in verse 44, "you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." Has this ever been true in your life? Have you had a time when you did not recognize "God's coming to you"?*

c. Verse 11 summarizes what Jesus does on this Sunday before His crucifixion. What do you think is going through His mind as He is...

...entering Jerusalem _____

...looking around in the temple _____

...walking the two miles to Bethany? _____

2. Read Mark 11:12-19.

a. To what does Jesus object with the fig tree?

b. Jesus enters the temple where His behavior becomes quite dramatic. The cleansing occurs in the court of the Gentiles. How does this location underscore His mission? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Imagine yourself as a patron of the temple money changers and sellers of the sacrifices. How would you feel believing that your only way to spiritual cleansing was through a corrupt system of manipulative "holy men"? How would you feel about the radical behavior of Jesus? Have you ever had a time when you were at the mercy of those you knew were cheating you?*

c. Read Revelation 6:15-17. What similar emotions of the Lord are revealed? What is righteous anger? How might it differ from a victim's anger, such as discussed in the "➔ With a partner" question above?

d. Reread Jesus' words in verse 17. The purpose of the temple is as a house of _____. Those for whom it exists includes all _____. Those running it have made it into a den of _____. How is the robbery more than financial? How is the temple being robbed of its divinely designed purpose? _____

e. Reread what Jesus says to the fig tree in verse 14. How might His words apply to the temple courts? What “fruit” is missing from the temple?

f. Reread verse 18 carefully. Why do the chief priests plot to kill Him?

3. Read Mark 11:20-25.

a. How do you explain what has happened to the fig tree?

b. Looking at verses 12-14, 20-21 as a whole, what do you discover about Jesus? Why might Peter be inclined to remember this event in his preaching, and why might Mark have chosen to include it in his gospel?

➔ **With a partner:** *Jesus seems to respond to Peter on a separate topic, prayer. What do you learn from Him about prayer, faith, forgiveness? Which teaching of Jesus touches your heart the most today? Why? How can your partner pray for you to “have faith in God”?*

4. Read Mark 11:27-33.

a. What similarities do you discover between the Pharisees in their fear and blindness and the words of Jesus in Mark 3:28-29?

b. What parallels can you see between the fig tree’s appearance and its lack of fruit and that of the chief priests’ appearance and lack of fruit?

– Read John 15:1-2. Jesus speaks these words on Thursday evening, only 3 days later. How might His encounter with the fig tree have prompted His remarks at the Last Supper?

5. Read Mark 12:1-12.

a. What images in Isaiah 5:1-7 provide a background and setting to those listening to this parable as Jesus teaches?

b. In the parable, what final choice of the tenants is the heart of the story?

c. The chief priests know the parable is “against them.” How are they like the tenants? You might want to review verse 11:18.

d. What will happen to Jesus, the Son, in three more days? What will happen to the very temple in which this conversation occurs in 70 AD?

➔ **With a partner:** *Rejection is always a choice. Such choice results in behavior. Have you known someone who rejected God in some conscious choice? What behavior demonstrated that choice?*

e. Read Matthew 21:41. What additional information does Matthew offer? How does this verse further underscore the image running through all of these verses “by your fruits you will recognize them”? (Matthew 7:16)

Concluding Discussion

Jesus has repeatedly predicted His own death, in spite of the disbelief and misunderstanding of the disciples. Now, He has entered Jerusalem with its fickle crowds and powerful enemies. How is Jesus confrontational in these passages? How does He reveal His authority? Considering what you understand of Middle Eastern behavior, how is Jesus moving “into the vineyard” itself in these scenes?

A Lenten Challenge

What object are you willing to loan to the Lord during Lent, so that at least once a week, it is being used directly to support His work in the lives of others? You might consider your house, car, garden, kitchen, computer, etc.

Bring this offering prayerfully to Jesus, even as the colt was brought to Him so long ago. Ask Him what to do. Listen as He opens your heart to something new. Praise Him for the privilege of having Him use your meager gift as He makes you a partner in His work.

My Gospel Prayer...

Lord, as Lent begins with the sign of the cross in ashes on my forehead, as I hear the words “ashes to ashes and dust to dust...” I know that my created self exists at

Your word. You desire holiness in my innermost being. You desire that I live without guile or deceit, and that I produce much fruit for Your good pleasure. Keep my heart from fickle praise which delights in You when You meet my needs, but turns quickly when the way grows dark. As I am a tenant in this body, so let me live that when My Master returns He will be pleased. Guard my every choice. Empower me to follow even through the “valley of the shadow of death” knowing You are going before me, and will “satisfy my soul.”

Notes:

Sunday, February 17, 2008
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"Put To The Test"
Mark 12:13-40

These incidents in the temple courts reveal the ever-deepening level of animosity of the Jewish leaders.

- *Pharisees: Believe in life after death, and that authority comes from both the Torah and oral tradition. Concerned about ethical behavior based on the law*
- *Herodians: Influential Jews who supported the Roman rule of the Herods*
- *Teachers of the Law: Pharisees who believe God's grace extends only to those who keep the law*
- *Sadducees: Powerful upper class religious and political leaders who focus on life in the temple. Do not believe in a resurrection or an afterlife, and do not give authority to the oral law*

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Questions can be asked from all kinds of motivations: as social exchange, out of genuine concern, in curiosity, for entrapment, to request, in need, etc. Share a time when you were asked a question which turned out to be very important to you, because it sent you on a quest of discovery or became the impetus for a turning point in your life or because it had some other significance. What do you think motivated the inquirer?

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 12:13-34. For each of the segments (13-17, 18-27, 28-34), briefly answer the following:

a. What are the basic questions being asked?

b. What is the purpose behind each question?

c. How does Jesus answer each challenge?

d. If you were keeping score, who wins each round?

2. Reread Mark 12:13-17.

- a. What is ironic about the comments of the Pharisees and Herodians in verse 14 prior to their question to Jesus?
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- b. The word “tax” often triggers deep and emotionally strong opinions in twenty-first century Americans, especially during the spring months prior to April 15. How would you feel if the taxes you paid went to a foreign occupying nation instead of to the U.S. Treasury?
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➔ **With a partner:** *How do you feel about Jesus’ answer to His inquisitors? Read Romans 13:6-7. Is there a conflict for you between your own values and beliefs and what scripture seems to be saying? How can you bring this conflict to Jesus to let Him sort it out?*

3. Reread Mark 12:18-27.

- a. What two things do the Sadducees NOT know according to Jesus in verse 24?
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- b. How are these two things central to the life of believers today? Is it possible to have Sadducees today, religious people who still do not know the power of God and do not know scripture?
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➔ **With a partner:** *In your life, which do you know better?*

- c. What do you learn from Jesus about Heaven in these verses?
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4. Reread Mark 12:28-34.

- a. What evidence can you find that this teacher of the law may have different motivations for asking questions of Jesus than do his colleagues?
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- b. Jesus answers with the familiar “Shema,” the words from Deuteronomy 6:4 which every Jewish believer recited daily. He links this commandment to one in Leviticus 19:18. What connection do you see between the two?
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c. What does this teacher of the law get right? Why is he right?

d. How do you suppose his colleagues can presumably know these two laws and yet demonstrate the very opposite of love in the conduct of their lives? _____

5. Reread Mark 12:35-40.

a. In what way might Jesus be having fun in this short monologue (verses 35-37)? _____

b. How many levels of irony do you discover in these 3 verses?

c. About what specifically does Jesus warn His listeners regarding the teachers of the law? Read Micah 6:8. How might these teachers have a different personal agenda than that which the Lord “requires”?

d. To what extent do you think they are influenced by their close knit group of peers, peers who can reinforce their own lifestyles rather than letting God challenge them to live the greatest commandment?

➔ **With a partner:** *Warning: The following questions are tough, requiring an honesty which challenges the Pharisee in all of us. You may want to ponder them without answering specifically unless you feel so inclined.*

- *Do you ever find yourself wanting to walk around in the mall or some other public place and “be greeted,” to have “the most important seats” at concerts or ball games, or to have “places of honor” at social functions?*
- *As a Christian, are your motives concerning social prominence different than that of these teachers of the law?*
- *If you feel you have no motives like the Pharisees, how do you think God has brought that about in your life?*

Concluding Discussion

How does each of these incidents reveal the divine authority and wisdom of the Son of God? Why does each one propel Jesus closer to the cross?

A Lenten Challenge

The familiar words of I Corinthians 13:4-7 amplify the kind of love expressed in the two greatest commandments of which Jesus and the teacher of the law speak in verses 28-34. M. Scott Peck, in The Road Less Traveled, observes that love is a decision, and not merely an emotion. Think of a situation in your life where you want to choose to love more deeply. Prayerfully consider which phrase from I Corinthians 13:4-7 best captures the way love needs to be expressed by you in this relationship. Write this phrase on a 3 x 5 card, and place it with your devotional materials. Make it a book mark in your Bible and pray this scripture every time you bring this relationship before the Lord. Look for opportunities to express your love in this particular way throughout Lent.

My Gospel Prayer

Lord, you choose to enter freely into the temple courts of my life. You choose to dialogue with me, and answer my questions. You know my heart, when I am sincere, and when I am playing games. I want so much for there to be no trace of the Pharisee in me or in my motives. Yet, when I am fiercely honest, I detect the pride and hypocrisy of false humility, of the need for public praise, and sometimes even the need to be right no matter what Your word says. Teach me how to live these two great commandments with all my “heart, soul, strength, and mind” and thus to love you purely and humbly. Let the motivation behind my questions always be to know You, and thus become a person of integrity, not “swayed by men” but living “the way of God in accordance with the truth.”

Notes:

Sunday, February 24, 2008
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"Two Cents' Worth"
Mark 12:41-44

In these few verses, Jesus reveals the meaning of sacrifice and elevates an unknowing woman to great esteem.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Do you ever like to "people watch"? Where is your favorite place? What do you watch—appearance, behavior, relationships? Why? What have you learned from people watching?

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 12:41-44.

- Identify all the people in this short scene. _____
- Other than the widow, what reasons can you infer are motivating people to put "their money in the temple treasury"?

- What do you think motivates the widow?

- Currency is used, by definition, as a "medium of exchange." Its worth exists only because it can provide something of direct value to its owner through exchange, or through anticipated exchange. What do you think those bringing their money to the temple treasury are receiving in exchange for their offering? _____

➔ **With a partner:** What do you receive when you add to the offering plate in worship?

- Reread Jesus' words in verses 38-40. What parallels do you discover between His comments about the teachers of the law and those described in verses 41-42? _____

- f. How do you explain the comment “they devour widow’s houses” as you see this widow offer her “two very small copper coins” in the trumpet shaped receptacle used for collections? _____
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2. Read II Corinthians 8:1-12.

- a. What miraculous portrait of the Macedonian churches emerges in verse two? _____
- b. What does verse three reveal about their motivations? What do you suppose they have received in exchange for their generosity? _____
- c. In verse 12, Paul talks about “willingness.” Why is attitude more significant than amount? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Share an experience of receiving a gift which was not worth a great deal in dollar value, but which touched your heart deeply because of the intention of the giver.*

- d. Reread verse nine.
- What does grace mean? _____
 - How was Jesus rich? _____
 - How did He become poor? _____
 - How did His poverty make us rich? _____
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3. Return to Mark 12:43-44.

- a. The widow is giving out of her poverty. Why does her gift become so rich, so lavish, so costly in the eyes of Jesus? Dig beneath the surface in your responses. _____
- b. As Jesus is watching and teaching, is He rich or poor at this point in time, the Tuesday before Good Friday? _____
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- c. How do you think He feels about this widow who may starve because of her sacrifice as He faces His cross and “gives everything,” “all He has”? _____
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➔ **With a partner:** *If you were in this scene, where would you place yourself: as one of the disciples, one of the rich people, the widow's friend, an on-looker...? How do the words of Jesus touch you?*

Concluding Discussion

What does sacrifice mean?

A Lenten Challenge

Find a way to give a quiet, unassuming gift, maybe even anonymously, which is costly to you in some way personally. Pray about this opportunity. And enjoy knowing that the Lord is sitting in the temple court of your world and watching you as you drop your small copper coins into someone else's life. Praise Him for the privilege of the "grace of giving" as you experience living in 'rich generosity.'

My Gospel Prayer

Lord, You know that I never want to be selfish, and certainly not stingy. Yet, in my most honest moments, I am often calculated in my giving. I weigh what I think I can afford against what seems right and just, and then I factor in the opinions of others. Shame touches my heart when I realize I am telling this to You, who emptied Yourself, who made Yourself "nothing" for me. I learn from this poor widow that it's not the amount that matters to You, it's my heart, Lord. As I face the reality of Your cross, freely chosen for me, may my heart "well up in rich generosity" of spirit in all that I do. May my only calculations be how my choices may glorify You, My Savior.

Notes:

Sunday, March 2, 2008
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"Jesus and the Temple of Doom"
Mark 13:1-37

As the Tuesday before His crucifixion continues, Jesus and his disciples leave the temple and wander over to the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley where they have a view of the whole city of Jerusalem. His teachings turn to the future, not just the immediate future for Himself, but rather the future for all mankind until He returns again.

Warming Up: (partners, 5 minutes)

- If you could know something about the future, what would you want to know? What would you not want to know? Explain.

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read all of Mark 13 slowly. In one sentence, how can you sum up what Jesus is telling His disciples? _____

2. Reread Mark 13:1-3.

a. Because Jesus and the disciples move to the Mount of Olives, their view of the temple expands to encompass the entire edifice. Some of the "massive stones" mentioned were 37 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet wide according to Josephus (NIV Study Bible). How does Jesus help the disciples see that the future will bring change? _____

b. Why does the perspective of distance help them accept Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple, which does occur in 70 AD? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *How are we inclined to be fooled by the appearance of permanence with huge structures? What did the impact of the fall of the Twin Towers have on you, in terms of the buildings themselves? How did witnessing that horrific event shake up your sense of the future?*

c. As Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple, how might He also be talking about Himself? Read John 2:19-22.

d. Read Ephesians 2:19-22 and I Corinthians 3:16-17. What else happens in the disciples' future to the concept of "temple"? How does the word "temple" apply to us as believers today? _____

3. Reread Mark 13:5-13.

a. Jesus names many difficulties believers must endure as the future unfolds. Which ones seem the worst to you? _____

b. According to verse 11, who will empower you to "stand firm to the end"? _____

c. Read II Corinthians 11:23-27. How do Paul's experiences exemplify that which Jesus is predicting for believers? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *If the event is not too difficult to talk about, share a time when the Holy Spirit guided you through the adversity of natural disaster, war, accusation, or relational grief.*

4. Reread Mark 13:14-25.

a. What does "abomination" mean? What does desolation feel like? _____

b. To understand more about "the abomination that causes desolation" read Matthew 24:15-16, Daniel 11:31-32, and Revelation 13:14-15.

c. How does this "abomination" demand or force sacrilege? How does such sacrilege generate desolation within? _____

d. Is it possible that the false gods of our world today are such an abomination that the empty, desperate despair of many exemplify a small version of this very prediction? _____

e. What does verse 22 reveal about the goal of false Christs?

f. Referring again to I Corinthians 3:16-17, how do you find protection from an “abomination” or desecration which would desolate you and the Holy Spirit who lives within you, the new temple of God? _____

5. Reread Mark 13:26-31.

a. What does Jesus tell the disciples about His return?

b. How does Paul add to this information in II Thessalonians 1:5-10?

➔ **With a partner:** *What does “the second coming” mean to you? What emotions come to mind when you ponder the Lord’s return?*

6. Reread Mark 13:32-37.

a. About what is Jesus very clear regarding all these events in the future as He concludes His comments? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Verse 34 is a short parable about a man who leaves his house in the care of his servants, “each with his assigned task.” What do you think your task is, as a servant of the Master who will come again?*

b. What is His final word? This word or the phrase “be on guard” is used 6 times in chapter 13. What is the difference between watching and predicting? _____

Concluding Discussion

In each of the segments of this chapter Jesus forewarns His disciples about different dangers which the future holds. Review what those dangers are. How do these warnings apply to believers in the twenty-first century? How does what you *really* believe about the future affect how you live today?

A Lenten Challenge

Through the internet, magazines, news or other sources, learn about the persecution of Christians in a *specific* repressive society right now. Through prayer and meditation imagine yourself worshipping with these individual brothers and sisters in Christ. If possible, learn the names of one or two of the people about whom you are thinking. Obtain photos which can be put up on your refrigerator or next to your mirror. Pray daily for these people who are a part of God's "elect" that they will be given strength to "stand firm."

My Gospel Prayer

Lord, it is both comforting and beyond comprehension to know that You hold the future in Your hands. Many of the terrible images You shared with Your disciples are already vivid realities in today's world. And, my mind is filled with them: starving children, brutally beaten men and women, famines, earthquakes, rumors of wars. While I worship freely and open my Bible whenever and wherever I want, others are persecuted and killed because they have chosen not to deny Your name. I pray for these courageous ones, O Lord. My heart cries out, come soon, King Jesus. But, I also confess that part of me is frightened of change, and I know that with Your coming again, this world will no longer be the same. And so, most of all, may I please put my hand in Your very strong one? Will You please lead me into the future, whatever it holds in my own lifetime, that I may fulfill my "assigned task" even as I keep watch for You, my Lord.

Notes:

Sunday, March 9, 2008
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"Abandoned by All"
Mark 14:1-72

In this chapter, Jesus moves from beloved Lord and friend to captured criminal on trial for blasphemy. The unfolding scenes are laced with the taut emotions of loyalty, betrayal, animosity, fear, sorrow, brutality, and love.

Warming Up: (partners, 5 minutes)

- Share an experience where the quality of loyalty stood out to you: a time when someone stood up for you, or a time when you made choices to be faithful in spite of adversity, or a time when you witnessed fidelity through someone else's commitment.

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read all of Mark 14 slowly and thoughtfully as one piece.

2. Reread verses 1-11.

- a. This incident is the final recorded event which occurs on Tuesday before the crucifixion. How do these verses reveal the polarized views people have of Jesus? _____
- b. The rebuke, according to John 12:4-5, is expressed by Judas, with perhaps the agreement of the other disciples (Matthew 26:8). How do these comments distress Jesus? _____

- c. John 12:3 identifies the woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus has recently raised from the dead (John 11:1-44). How does Jesus interpret her action? How does it comfort Him? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Jesus knows He is about to die. Share the impact on you that He chooses to face this death for you. What kind of courage is required to choose death for another when the option to escape is available?*

d. What does Judas decide about his immediate future?

3. Reread verses 12-26.

- a. The setting is now Thursday evening, but the Bible does not record how Jesus has spent the intervening time. In the Upper Room, over the meal, Jesus says, "One of you will betray me." Scripture offers several clues about the motives of Judas (Matthew 26:14-16, Luke 22:3, John 13:2), but why do YOU think this man, "one of the Twelve" does what he does?
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- b. Why do you think each of the disciples says, "Surely not I," when Jesus tells them of the betrayal?
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➔ **With a partner:** *What does communion mean to you today? How do you explain the mystery of the impact of the bread and wine in your life?*

4. Reread verses 27-31.

- a. Peter pledges his loyalty "emphatically," even to death. Why is this not an idle boast? What evidences can you recall about how dangerous it is for the disciples to be identified with Jesus?
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- b. Jesus predicts the future in a variety of specific ways during this last week of His life: the location of the colt (11:2), the fall of the temple (13:2), the availability of the upper room (14:16), the betrayal of Judas (14:8). How might His prediction concerning Peter, who is certain He is wrong, end up being a comfort and a hope to Peter after the crucifixion?
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- c. In Mark 8:31 and 10:33-34, what other events has Jesus predicted?
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- d. Why is it important for the disciples to know Jesus knows the future?
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- e. What is the difference between the predictions of Jesus and the predictions of men who are interpreting scripture?
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5. Reread verses 32-42.

a. Why might these be some of the most sorrowful verses in all of scripture?

b. How do they reveal both the courage and loyalty of Jesus?

➔ **With a partner:** *Have you ever had a time when you wept alone in the night, “overwhelmed by sorrow”? How does it comfort you to know your Savior understands?*

➔ **With a partner:** *Have you experienced a time when Jesus might say to you, “the spirit is willing but the body is weak”?*

6. Reread verses 43-52.

a. Jesus moves from the support and concern of His friends to the hostility and arrest by a “crowd armed with swords and clubs”. What do you discover about Judas and Peter in this scene? (See John 18:10)

b. How does verse 50 fulfill verse 27? Is this betrayal?

c. In verses 51-52, the young man, usually thought to be John Mark the author of this gospel, flees naked. How does desertion leave one “naked” in the soul? _____

7. Reread verses 53-65.

a. The Sanhedrin is the “highest Jewish judicial council in Jerusalem, under the leadership of the high priest,” according to the NIV Archeological Study Bible. How are the methods of the Sanhedrin a travesty of justice? Read Exodus 20:16. _____

b. If you were there, would you have done what Peter does in verses 54-55? _____

c. How does Jesus handle the false testimony? What is the prophecy contained in Isaiah 53:7? _____

d. According to the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, the high priest was “the supreme pontiff and the representative of the nation before Jehovah.” In verses 61b-62, Caiaphas, the current high priest, directly interrogates Jesus, “the Christ.”

- Read Exodus 3:14. How does God reveal to Moses who He is? What name does He give to Himself? _____
- On the deepest spiritual level here in the council of the Sanhedrin, what is really happening between the priest and God? Who is really blaspheming? _____

e. Why do you think Caiaphas tears his clothes? Why should he tear his garments? What do you imagine are his deepest emotions? Looking ahead, what else is torn at the time of Jesus’ death? (Mark 15:38). What is happening symbolically to the traditions of worship?

- Read Hebrews 7:23-28 slowly and with reverence.

f. In verse 36, Jesus has begged His Abba to remove “this cup.” What do you learn about the contents of the cup in verse 65?

- How do you think His Abba is feeling?

➔ **With a partner:** *Have you ever begged your Abba to remove suffering from your life? What happened?*

8. Reread verses 66-72.

- Why does Peter weep? _____
- Read Matthew 27:3-5. What is the reaction of Judas when he sees what his betrayal has caused? _____
- How do you feel about these two men who are part of the Twelve?

Concluding Discussion

Many of the lines in this chapter are overflowing with poignant emotion:

- You will not always have Me...verse 7
- One of you will betray Me...verse 18
- You will all fall away...verse 27
- My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow...verse 34
- Abba...take this cup from Me...verse 36
- Here comes my betrayer...verse 42
- Then everyone deserted Him and fled...verse 50
- They all condemned Him...verse 64
- And he broke down and wept...verse 72

What touches you the most about the blanket of sorrow in these last hours of Jesus' life?

A Lenten Challenge

Deep grief creates an emptiness which is isolating and terribly lonely. As the world around moves forward, the grieving person lives in a prolonged sadness which permeates all areas of life. Choosing to stand beside one who is suffering demands great energy, love and compassion. Ask the Lord to use you specifically in the life of someone who is suffering from loss. You might especially consider those whose loss has experienced the passage of some time, who may be quietly grieving while putting up a brave front to the world. Find a way to offer small acts of kindness and nurturing to this person who is still in private moments "overwhelmed with sorrow."

My Gospel Prayer

Lord, the verses in this chapter of Your holy word tear at my heart. As I ponder all the ways You have suffered for me, I don't know how to respond. With Peter, I want to pledge undying loyalty, and yet with all the disciples, I tell myself, "surely not I" at the thought of letting You down. You ate with Your friends. You broke bread with them, and You loved them, knowing they would be weak. Did You love their spirits, even though their bodies betrayed them? Can You see that my spirit wants so much to give You everything, but I too am weak? The tenderness of Your love, and the courage You show as You drink Your cup alone draw me to You in humble adoration. You are my God, Jesus, You are my God. Fill me with Your courage that I may remain faithful in my obedience.

Sunday, March 16, 2008
Palm Sunday
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"Darkness"
Mark 15:1-47

The events in this chapter take place on the Friday we now call "Good." After being up all night, interrogated, and brutalized, Jesus receives the sentencing of Pilate, is executed, and is buried.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- When was the last time you stayed up all night? Why did you? Are you a night person? Have you ever had to stay up all night against your preferences, such as with a sick child or to finish a college paper, etc.?

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read all of Mark 15 with reverence.
2. Reread verses 1-15.
 - a. Pilate is the Roman governor of Judea, and is the one able to issue orders of execution to carry out the wishes of the high priest. How is Pilate caught in a political dilemma because Jesus has been brought to him?

 - According to Luke 23:6-12, how does Pilate try to get out of his dilemma? _____
 - b. What does the Apostles' Creed say about Pilate? Do you agree?

 - c. The passage in John 18:28 to 19:16 reveals the encounter between Jesus and Pilate with many more details.
 - What weaknesses do you see in Pilate?

 - What evidence do you discover that Pilate realizes that he is also caught up in a spiritual battle? How is he also on trial?

➔ **With a partner:** *If you were in Pilate's shoes, how would you handle the situation? What evidence do you have from your own personal history which validates your answer?*

➔ **With a partner:** *Have you ever been in a situation where someone in authority turned his/her back on innocence by not standing up for an injustice, or by ignoring "someone else's problem"?*

d. How does the situation with Barabbas further reveal corruption in the justice system of both the Romans and the Jews?

– How do you think Barabbas feels, suddenly released from a death sentence? _____

– How are we just like Barabbas? _____

3. Reread verses 16-20.

a. In verse 15, Pilate orders that Jesus be flogged before he is crucified. According to the NIV Study Bible, "The Romans used a whip made of several strips of leather into which were embedded pieces of bone and lead," a treatment which many did not survive. What else does Jesus endure at the hands of the "whole company"? _____

b. How do they bully Him? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Read Isaiah 53:3. Christians often say "Christ died for me." "Jesus died for my sins." How do you feel when you read of the brutalities before His death? What does it mean to you that He was "despised and rejected" for you?*

4. Reread verses 21-32.

a. Roman citizens who were sentenced to death were beheaded. Only slaves and the lowest criminals were crucified. Simon is conscripted to participate in the execution of this man, Jesus, whom he may or may not have known. How does he take on the public humiliation of Jesus?

– Why do you think Mark mentions his sons? _____

- b. Earlier, Jesus has said more than once to His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34) What key word does Luke add in his version in 9:23?
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➔ **With a partner:** *How do you volunteer or choose to take up your own cross? What does this statement of Jesus mean to you? Has it ever led you into humiliation?*

- c. Read the beginning of verse 24.

...THEY CRUCIFIED HIM.

Two pronouns and a verb... Sixteen letters... Pray over these words. Ponder the enormity of what they mean.

- If you want to understand these three words more, you might consider reading “The Physical Death of Jesus Christ, Study by the Mayo Clinic.” The web site is <http://www.frugalsites.net/jesus/crucifixion.htm#23>

- d. Name the ways His humiliation and suffering continue in verses 24-37.
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5. Reread verses 33-41.

- a. In the Garden, Jesus begs His Abba to remove this cup. On the cross, he feels His Abba has forsaken Him as He cries out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” How does His crucifixion also cause Jesus excruciating emotional pain? _____
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➔ **With a partner:** *Have you ever witnessed the suffering of another through illness or injury? If you can, share what it is like to watch and care helplessly.*

- b. Read Matthew 27:50-54. What events in Matthew’s version and in verses 38-39 of Mark reveal the presence of the Father as He has watched and waited? _____

- c. How do you interpret the centurion’s statement? _____
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6. Reread verses 42-47.

- a. Joseph is a “prominent member” of the Sanhedrin and thus has witnessed all that has taken place in the past 24 hours. Why do you think he does what he does? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *With whom do you most identify today?*

- *Pilate, a person struggling to avoid the truth*
- *Simon, a person pressed into service for the Lord*
- *The centurion, a person with sudden spiritual insight*
- *Joseph, a person willing to stand up for Jesus against a hostile world*
- *Mary Magdalene, a person who has followed Jesus and “cared for His needs,” who has witnessed the crucifixion to the end*

Concluding Discussion

In the Upper Room, Jesus makes a powerful promise to His disciples right before He is arrested. He says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27) Read Isaiah 53:3-5 slowly. After pondering all that you have studied in Mark 15, how can you explain Isaiah’s comment, “the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him”?

A Lenten Challenge

Every part of Jesus’ body was severely brutalized in the whole crucifixion process and in the events leading up to it. Think for a few minutes about one part of His body, His hands. Contemplate all the beautiful ways His hands ministered to others. His touch brought sight, cured leprosy, drove out evil spirits, and even raised the dead. Those same hands were stretched out on the cross beam as the executioner drove spikes through His wrists to impale Him and to bear the weight of His body. His hands served Him up as sacrifice, as Isaiah has foretold when he wrote, “See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

During this Lenten week, think how your hands might serve the Lord by caring for others. Consider writing on your hand the initials of a person whom God lays on your heart, temporarily engraving his or her identity into yours. Find ways to take your hands, whether they are youthful and beautiful or old, crippled and arthritic and quietly use them with the sacrificial love of Jesus before you. Secretly serve this person by meeting physical needs. If opportunity arises, listen to and minister to his or her emotional needs. Put your hands together and pray for this person

every time you see the initials, and every time you rewrite them after they have faded. Offer your hands as a “living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God,” in gratitude for your crucified Savior.

My Gospel Prayer

O Lord, surely You are “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” What woe engulfs my heart as I read these terrible verses of Your suffering. My eyes fill with tears so that I can barely see the pages before me. You are so alone. The cup You have chosen to accept should be my cup, Lord. I need not even dig deeply to see all the dark edges of my heart, the sin which encroaches daily. As I weep at the utter cruelty of your dying by those who take pleasure in torture, I know that this punishment should be mine. Yet, like Barabbas, miraculously I am freed. I, the guilty one, feel the chains fall off, my heart is free. And then I feel it...the peace. My soul is at peace. The peace You give, the peace You chose to give on that cross. You absorbed all the hatred, all the punishment, even the abandonment of Your Abba, took it in and took it from me. You bought my peace with Your love. Greater love has no one than this. And by Your wounds, I am healed.

Notes:

Sunday, March 23, 2008
Easter Sunday
The Gospel of Mark
Part 4: "Jesus Confronts His Cross"
"He Is Not Here!"
Mark 16:1-8

In these eight short verses, Mark records the most significant event in the history of humankind. It is, in the words of Madeleine L'Engle, "the glorious impossible" come true.

Warming Up: (partners - 5 minutes)

- Share about one of the most meaningful Easter experiences in your personal spiritual journey.

Scripture Encounter: (group and partners integrated)

1. Read Mark 16:1-8.

- a. Mary Magdalene appears in all four gospel accounts of the resurrection. To learn more about her, read Luke 8:1-3. She is not, as some have mistakenly believed, the prostitute who anoints Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee, described in Luke chapter 7. What do you discover about her and the other women who are followers of Jesus?
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- b. Review Mark 40-41, 47. These three women, who journey together "very early" to the tomb, have already been through a great deal. What is it? How would you feel if you were in their position? _____
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- c. How much courage do you think it takes for the three women to go to the tomb? _____

– What has Pilate done to secure the place? (Matthew 27:65-66)

– What do you discover about when the women become alarmed and afraid? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *On the way, they ask each other, “who will roll the stone away?”*

- *What stone needs to be rolled away in your life for you to discover resurrection power?*

➔ **With a partner:** *The women ask this question on the way, before they see that it is already moved. Have you ever anticipated an impossible obstacle which the Lord removed before you even encountered it?*

d. As a lovely scriptural aside, review in your mind the following people:

- Who is the earthly father who welcomes Jesus at His birth? (Luke 2:4-5) _____
- Who is the compassionate follower who cares for His body in death? (Mark 15:43) _____
- Who is the young virgin entrusted to be the mother of Jesus? (Luke 1:26-28) _____
- Who is it to whom the Lord first appears? (John 20:1, 15-16) _____

e. The word “angel” is both the Hebrew and the Greek translation of a word which also means “messenger.” The birth of Jesus is announced to a woman by an angel. The resurrection is announced to a woman by an angel. Why do you suppose women are entrusted with two of the most significant revelations in all of scripture? _____

f. Why does the angel mention Peter specifically in verse 7? _____

- Why will it be important to him personally to hear the angel’s message? _____
- How does Peter’s experience in Mark 14:66-72 help validate that all of the predictions of Jesus will come about “just as He told them”? _____

➔ **With a partner:** *Reread Mark 14:28 and then 16:7. Eugene Peterson, in his book, Living the Message, writes of the prevenient grace of Jesus. “He is going ahead of you” into your day, your work, your play, your suffering, your*

relationships. What does it mean to you that He is always going before you in your life that where ever you are going He is risen and you will see Him there, at work in the lives of those with whom you will interact? How can you pause and look for Him now?

- g. Reread verse 8. Brennan Manning shared in his talks that the Biblical definition of fear is “silent wonder, radical amazement, and affectionate awe at the infinite goodness of God.” How does this explanation of fear add to your understanding of what the women might be feeling as Mark concludes his gospel? _____
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Concluding Discussion

Matthew 28:8-10 portrays a different reaction of the women than does Mark in 16:8. Considering the intensity of their grief, how do you explain the plausibility of both versions? Madeleine L’Engle reverently calls the life of Christ “the glorious impossible.” How does the experience of these women echo an “Amen” to L’Engle’s phrase?

A Lenten Challenge

In the Russian Orthodox Church, the Good Friday service begins in the evening. There are no pews; everyone stands in a closely packed congregation as the choirs sing antiphonally across the sanctuary. The air is palpable with grief. And, weaving among the worshippers are priests, carrying an icon of the crucified Christ in a horizontal position as if His body is suspended above everyone. People reach out to reverently touch the image, as if touching the casket holding the body of a beloved friend or family member. Everywhere, the flickering candles offer the only light. After several hours, the service ends, and people depart in silence, or quietly weeping. Their grief continues, as believers relive the dark hours between the crucifixion and Easter morn. Little is eaten, no one socializes, and prayer vigils are held silently. Then, at about 2:00 a.m. prior to Easter morn, the worshippers gather once again, filling the church to overflowing. The candles glow, the music echoes, and the atmosphere is filled with anticipation. At the first light of dawn, the priest, with hands raised, shouts in joy, “Christ is risen!” And the congregation responds with deafening unity, “He is risen indeed.”

Within western churches, traditional Lenten disciplines often focus on such practices as fasting, prayer vigils, meditation, and service. However, the intervening time between Friday and Sunday is often filled with the routine, or even hectic components of daily living. During this Holy Week, consider a private observation

of these precious hours of Jesus' absence. Begin by acknowledging the death of Jesus in some observable way, such as the black draped cloth which covers the cross in our sanctuary. If possible, worship between 12:00 and 3:00 p.m. on Friday. Continue to live with the death of Jesus on your heart during this time. Choose some observance such as fasting or prayer which will provide an avenue for grieving as you meditate on your suffering Savior. If possible, consider living with the cross before you. And, early on Easter morn, before the sun rises, slip out of bed, light a candle, and await the dawn. Listen for the voice of your risen Lord as He calls your name, as He promises always to go before you and meet with you in the world where you live.

My Gospel Prayer

Lord, when I survey the "wondrous cross," my heart fills with grief so deep I have no words. And then, the "glorious impossible" happens, and I hear your voice call my name. You are alive, you are alive. And because You live, I too will live. There are still no words, but this time for the joy, the joy which overflows in praise and adoration, and with Mary, I fall at your feet and call out Rabboni, Master, Savior, Lord.

Notes: