

Monday, January 8, 2024

Read Mark 1:1-8

## The Beginning

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Mark 1:1

One description of people and how we talk is that the world can be split up into pointers and painters. Painters luxuriate in linguistic turns of phrase and embellish and mine every bit of minutia, endlessly seeking volumes of verbosity to grasp at the hint of describing the ineffable. In case you're not sure, that's a painter sentence. Painters are wordy and could turn a three-item grocery list into a 57 minute discussion.

Pointers get to the point. Period.

Mark is a pointer.

Right from the start he keeps things brief and straightforward.

This is the “beginning.” Not just the start, but at the outset, you will get the picture of what is to come.

This is “THE gospel” – the singular and earthshattering good news that will change all of creation.

This story is of “Jesus” – His name tells the story. He is “Yahweh who saves.”

This story is of the “Christ” – He is literally the Messiah, the Anointed One who comes to rule God's people in such a way that He brings everlasting good news.

This Jesus is the “Son of God” – He is not just an anointed king like David, He is greater. He is God's Son in human flesh who will bring the very forgiveness of sins that John speaks of, and yet only God can grant.

In 12 words, Mark points us to all that will follow. And in only 12 words, he still paints the whole outline of your salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Prayer: O Jesus Christ, Son of God, as I begin this New Year and this journey through Mark's Gospel, point me again and again to my comfort and hope in you alone. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Read Mark 1:9-11

### Needing God's Guidance and Needing Him

Jesus, as He was among us as "just" another person, depended upon God's guidance for His life, just as I do. Except that I have a much harder time giving preference to God's guidance in the things that I do.

Well, I can be glad that God has sent His Spirit to live with me. I have His assurance that He is here and guiding me. That is good. But I have a problem - I want to listen to my intellect, I want to decide for myself what is best for me, and I want to be in charge. But that way leads to destruction, I know it, but I still keep falling into it.

Sometimes I am afraid, afraid of other's scorn, of other's opposition, of being rejected by others. That fear is supported by my body. I get the chemicals racing, and, boy, is it hard to override them to do the right thing!

Sometimes I am simply greedy. Oh, I don't think of it that way. I think I am just taking (or trying to take) what is rightfully mine, that others are "stealing" from me when they prevent me from exercising that greed. And then I "hate" those others too.

How I appreciate God's Holy Spirit being with me during those strong temptation times. How I benefit when I do listen to Him and turn away from those personal attempts at rebelling against God. Truly His presence is a lifesaver!

Prayer: Thank you, my Lord, for sending me Yourself, Your Holy Spirit, and living with me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

Read Mark 1:12-13

### Jesus is Thrown into the Wilderness

*“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”*

*Mark 1:12*

Jesus has just been baptized by John in the River Jordan, taking our sins upon Himself and revealed as the Eternal Beloved Son of the Father. And now, the Holy Spirit had forthwith/immediately, thrown/driven Him into the desert/wilderness with wild beasts, as Israel reduced to one, tempted for forty days by Satan, and the angels had ministered to Him. As Israel was in the desert for forty years, Jesus was in the desert for forty days, righteously fulfilling what they could not. What we cannot do either.

The Greek word εὐθύς (euthys), immediately, is seen frequently throughout John Mark's Gospel account. And the text in Mark moves quickly, and when we slow down, amazing things are being revealed and happening. Jesus is the center focus and wastes no time fulfilling what sinful man cannot do, fulfilling all righteousness and the holy Law of Yahweh God, in His love and mission to redeem sinners in His life, death, burial, and resurrection from the dead, for you and for me. That is precisely what we have in Jesus: His death, burial, and life! His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Angels ministered to Jesus in the desert, and Jesus trusted His Father. Since you are now a child of God, Baptized into Christ, you have the promise of God's deliverance from evil, harm, and danger and His protection of His holy angels. You have the promised gift of the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ alone, and faith alone trusts in God Almighty, and takes refuge in Him.

**“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence . . . For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways”** (Psalm 91:1-3, 11). Reread and reflect Mark 1:1-13, and then read Psalm 91.

Prayer – I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.  
(*Luther's Morning Prayer*)

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, January 11, 2024  
Read Mark 1:14-15

### Slowing Down to Hear His Promises

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

The Scriptures are a unique type of literature. No other text is so familiar to us, no other characters so seeming predictable that we would read like we do in the Gospels. Mark's Gospel tempts us more than the others with its fast-moving, plain-faced narrative. Our challenge is to slow down and appreciate the details and ask questions we otherwise might not worry about.

In our text for today, John is arrested, and Jesus moves and begins His ministry all in the same breath. This is surprising, the public arrest of an outspoken preacher is not an occasion that would move me to take up where John left off and double down on his message. Jesus though, knows this is the perfect time. John has prepared the way faithfully and all the region is humming about his message. Jesus knows that some will accept the gospel, many will reject it, and ultimately He will be put to death on account of it.

Nevertheless, Jesus has come to proclaim and proclaim He does. He says that now is the time. God has come to rule over His people and over the whole world. The Kingdom of God is present wherever God is at work fulfilling His promises and Jesus' bold message is that the time had come. The time had come and the people were to drop whatever they had been doing and turn to God, trusting that He would do just what He had claimed.

Though Jesus ministry began in a very different time and place, it has by no means ended and the words that He first spoke are as real and pressing for us today as they were for the people who heard them from Jesus' mouth. The Kingdom of God is at hand for us today. God is present, doing everything He has ever promised to do, even if it seems quite the opposite. Our reaction must be to drop everything we are doing: forget every impulse we have to consider anything more important than the Kingdom, reorient our priorities, repent of our wayward ways, and turn again to God, believing the He is faithful to keep every promise He has made.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, teach us each day to repent of every sin and distraction that would pull us away from the Kingdom of God. Make us believe the Gospel: the good news that God's Kingdom is at hand and in our Lord Jesus Christ, every promise ever made will be fulfilled. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, January 12, 2024  
Read Mark 1:16-20

### Brothers and Fishermen

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’”  
(Mark 1:17 ESV)

I have been at home with my family for the last couple of weeks and one of the biggest blessings that has come from this has been the time that I have been able to spend with my brother. He is four years younger than I am and is a freshman at the University of Kansas. Being four years younger than I am we haven't always seen eye to eye on everything but in general, we get along well.

Our text for today reminded me of my brother because of the two sets of brothers that show up there. The fact that the text demonstrated not just one, but two pairs of brothers agree to do something without debate is a miracle in itself but what caught my attention was the thing that they decided to do. In both cases, the pairs of brothers are called by Christ to come after Him and in both cases, these men obey without question.

It seems amazing that these guys who have lives and jobs are so willing to drop everything to follow someone they've never met. I have heard the joke many times in church that the disciples were a bunch of bumbling idiots when they were following Christ and there are times when that is probably true, but we do them a disservice when we forget just how amazing it was that they followed Him in the first place. These men gave up everything and trusted the word of Jesus and followed Him not knowing what might happen to them and this is what we are called to do as well. This doesn't always look the same for everyone. We are not first-century fishermen called to leave behind our nets, but we are called to trust in this Christ in all things and perhaps we can learn from the disciples.

Prayer: Father, help us to follow You when You call and to trust in Your words of promise for us. We commend to You all things and it is in Jesus name that we pray.  
Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, January 13, 2024

Read [Mark 1:21-28](#)

### “Authority”

I checked the internet to see what it had to say about “authority”. It would seem this is a favorite topic that people have studied, written about, and pontificated on for all of human history. You can look at the “13 different kinds of authority”, the sources of authority, proper and improper authority, the differences between authority and coercion, and more.

Someone might claim authority over their car because they own it – it’s theirs. Teachers, employers, and governments are given authority in order to help others. A bank robber uses his authority – the power of his gun – to convince bank employees to “give them all the money”. Authority can be used for good and for bad – a government can use its authority to provide for the victims of a hurricane, while another government (or the same one on a different day) might use its resources to encourage people to kill babies.

In today’s reading, the people in the Capernaum synagogue were “astonished at Jesus’ teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” It’s interesting that someone speaking with authority over the things of God would draw such amazement. In this context, though, it becomes instantly clear that this kind of authority is unmatched. While a school crossing guard may have authority that people respect, it is astonishing to even imagine Godly authority.

Jesus (of course) would later describe it best: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” You might ask the policeman who stopped you for a traffic violation, “do you have jurisdiction on this road?” But if you ask Jesus if He has authority over life or death, believers or unbelievers, the answer is “Yes”. He has authority over all the universe and every life within it. He authored life and rules over it.

But, unlike the criminal with the gun, the caveman with the club, or the dictator with mighty armies; Jesus’ most powerful weapon is love. At the moment when He could have called upon legions of angels to rescue Him from the hate-filled crowds, Jesus said nothing, opened His arms, and was nailed to the cross.

Before doing this, though, Jesus explained to His disciples that the Church – the body of His followers – are given His authority to declare His forgiveness of sins (or withhold the same) to those in their midst. When Pastor stands before us on a Sunday morning, he speaks with God’s authority. Jesus tells us, through Pastor’s mouth, that He has paid for our sins and that we are righteous.

Later, before ascending into heaven, He commissioned His disciples – and you and me – to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We speak a similarly astonishing message when we speak His Word to our neighbors.

We pray: King of the Universe, keep us in Your authoritative Word to strengthen our faith and to inspire us to reveal Your love to others. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, January 15, 2024

Read Mark 1:29-34

Come All

“The whole city was gathered together at the door.”

Mark 1:33

That’s quite a picture: the **WHOLE** city. Granted, the whole city of Capernaum at the time of Jesus numbered only about 1500, but imagine what it would look like if 150 people swarmed around your front door!

This is more like if every inch of your front yard was covered with people, your house was about the size of two guest bedrooms in your average American house, and no one is leaving until they have a chance to see Jesus.

Talk about overwhelming!

It’s little wonder why people look at their own problems and those around them and decide that God must be too busy. There must be greater needs to be met.

Jesus gives no such indication. Those with diseases, demons, depression, or doubt are welcomed on the lawn. No one is turned away.

Jesus invites you to lay your burdens before Him also. And He promises relief for His people. It may be healing immediately. It may be healing eventually. It may mean the peace of His presence and the comfort of His forgiveness.

But be assured that even as the whole *world* gathers together at the door, Your Lord who created You uniquely, who has suffered and died for you, and who knows Your every care and hurt and joy wants you to come and let Him handle your burden.

Prayer: O Jesus Christ, Son of God, I am burdened in so many ways. You know what weighs heaviest on me today. Thank You for inviting me to cast all my cares upon You. Help me to do so, and according to Your good will provide relief and strengthened faith. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Read Mark 1:35-39

### Needing Help and Receiving It

God has generously given me work to do in His Kingdom. Sometimes it is telling about His love; sometimes it's enduring sickness; sometimes it's being kind to someone who doesn't deserve it. What a privilege I have! And how much I fail at it.

The problem comes when I try to do it myself. It is not my work, it is not what and how I think it should go, nor am I responsible for its success. But how I find myself trying to do it all. I even flog myself for my failures, when others don't respond with Christ's love in their actions. I need to do things in His power, in His ways.

In spite of being God, Jesus didn't rely on Himself, He constantly turns to God for help. He tells me to pray and shows me that that is where my successes will be found. They will not be my successes but His, just as failures are not His fault but mine. So I am called to pray before and during my activities.

I pray - for the people I deal with, that they may respond to God and not to my sinful errors. I pray that God will guide my actions in the proper direction for His Will. I pray that He will continue to change me so that my automatic reactions to life will be pleasing to Him.

And He listens and acts. I do get the privilege of not only acting for Him but seeing His actions on others, myself, and the world.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for changing me. Thank you for reminding me to pray. Thank you for what I see you doing around me. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*



Wednesday, January 17, 2024

Read Mark 1:40-45

### **Jesus is Doing What Jesus Does**

*“And a leper came to [Jesus], imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean. Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” Mk 1:41.*

Jesus is moving from town to town in all of Galilee, healing people and proclaiming the Good News of God that the time is fulfilled. Jesus is proclaiming the rule and reign of God at hand in the synagogues and expelling demons, and *immediately/εὐθύς* things are happening in John Mark’s account of Jesus. And here, a leper comes to Jesus pleading and kneeling before Him, saying that he really desires Jesus, if He is able, to make him clean. Jesus is moved with deep compassion for the leper and desires to heal him, so Jesus heals Him with a word of power, “Be clean,” *immediately*, his leprosy leaves him, and the man is made clean by Jesus. Then Jesus said to the man will dismissing him *immediately/at once/εὐθύς*, to say nothing to anyone and to show himself, as to the command of Moses to the priests that he is cleansed from leprosy as a witness to them. But the man proclaimed his healing by Jesus all over, so now Jesus cannot enter a town openly but travels and stays in the desolate places outside the towns.

The people kept coming to Jesus from everywhere. And rightly so! Jesus is healing and expelling demons and proclaiming the time is fulfilled, and the rule and reign of God is at hand, and of repentance and to believe the Gospel. So yes, this is the Good News of God. And for you and me, the Good News that Jesus’ death and resurrection is given for us, and we die to sin and rise to life in our Baptism into Christ, the power and wisdom of God are revealed and given to us as His Baptized children, saved from eternal damnation because of our sin to everlasting life in Jesus Christ through the gift and means of grace through faith. This is what Jesus does for you. Alleluia!

Prayer – “Lord Jesus, thank You for Your healing power. Hear our cries for help, heal us according to Your wisdom, and then move us to tell others what You have done. Amen.”  
(TLSB)

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, January 18, 2024  
Read Mark 2:1-12

### We Never Saw Anything Like This!

This story of the paralytic lowered from the roof is wondrous and it is familiar to us. We know all about the loyal and faithful friends who were willing to do whatever it took to bring their friend to Jesus. We know how Jesus sees their faith and forgives his sins. We know the scribes' surprise and Jesus' proving His words by healing the paralytic man. What is easier to forget is the scribes' reaction to the healing.

For a minute, let's put ourselves in their shoes. Here near the beginning of Jesus, I think there's a good chance that their surprise was real and their questions genuine. It has been a long, long time since a genuine prophet has come to Israel. Jesus' teaching alone was completely unlike anything they had ever seen, when He began to forgive sins, they had plenty of good reasons to assume that He was another false prophet like so many before who had led the people astray in the past.

Jesus takes away all their reason for doubt, though, when He heals the paralytic man, and at least for a moment, the scribes know that a miracle from God has truly taken place. They glorify God, but in their hearts, they are still uncertain what all this could mean. Many of the scribes, of course, do follow Jesus and become truly faithful. Others, although they had seen Jesus do this (and who knows how many more miracles), still turn away and decide that their initial judgment was right, that Jesus is a false prophet who must be put to death. Whatever their reasons, it's clear that faith does not rest simply on seeing the wonderful things Jesus has done but it comes as a gift. We know this from seeing people who have known the faith and eventually go their own ways, deciding that there's nothing to see with Jesus.

For our part though, we are blessed to be among the number who see things as they are. We know what Jesus has done and what that now means for us.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, uphold us in the faith. Remind us of all that Jesus has done so that we never turn away from believing that the Son of Man has authority over sin and even over death. Strengthen us so that we may continue in faith until He returns on the Last Day. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, January 19, 2024

Read Mark 2:13-17

### The Sick

16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'" (Mark 2:16-17 ESV)

Last week I talked about how amazing it was that two pairs of brothers were able to give up what they were doing in order to follow Jesus when he called them. In our text for today, we see something similar happen. Just like with the brothers from last week Levi is working when Jesus comes to him and just like with the brothers all it takes is two words from Christ and Levi is willing to leave his work and follow after Jesus.

I think that these similarities are worth noting as we see what else Jesus says in the following verses. While Jesus is eating with Levi and other tax collectors and sinners Jesus makes the famous remark that, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." This statement by Jesus gives a clear answer to the question that the scribes put forward, but it also tells us something about those who follow Jesus.

In both Levi's case and the case of the brothers from last week they were all willing to give up everything to follow Jesus which says something about the way that they think. These five men knew that they had a need that wasn't being met and when the one person who could meet that need came, they followed. If a man is sick but won't admit it, he isn't going to go to the doctor and the disease will kill him but if he admits that he is sick he will go to the doctor and live. Jesus is the physician that we all need because we know our sin and we know that we need the medicine that only God can provide which is given to us in the person of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord be with us in our sickness and help us to know and believe that You have taken our sickness upon yourself and died in our place so that we might live. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, January 20, 2024

Read [Mark 2:18-22](#)

### “Fasting”

Fasting is a practice that Jews have followed since early times (and some Christians today). The faithful would fast, or refrain from eating, to express contrition and sorrow for their sin, as did the Israelites many times. They’d fast to focus on God and His gifts. They would fast as an offering to the Lord, as King David did after his first son became ill. Fasting helped prepare people’s hearts for prayer to God.

In Jesus’ day, some still fasted faithfully. Others, like some of the Pharisees, fasted much more frequently than the Law directed, and did so publicly. Their reason for fasting wasn’t to show contrition; it was to show everyone how righteous they were. They fasted to look good.

Now, I’m really not one to be saying much about fasting. The extent of fasting for me occurred yesterday, when I began my annual fast from Christmas cookies until next December. Oh, that last one was good!

But in Jesus’ day, people were shocked to see that Jesus’ disciples didn’t fast when both the Pharisees and John the Baptist’s disciples did. “What’s the story?!” “Why are your disciples breaking God’s commands?”

Simple. When you go to a feast, do you eat? Name your favorite food – Red Lobster, Imo’s, Texas Roadhouse, White Castle. When you go there, do you just look at the menu and leave? Or, do you dig in? Do you satisfy that craving?

Jesus was there – right in their presence. The Bridegroom of the Church was figuratively feasting with His followers. How could they fast at such a time?! This was “Fat Tuesday”, where they should indulge themselves in as much Jesus as they could. Ash Wednesday would come, when Jesus would be taken from them; when He would die and be buried. They would fast then. The feast would end on that day.

But this was a New Testament Jesus spoke of! A new teaching that overthrew the old commandments. New teachings don’t live in old hearts, but He has given us new ones through baptism. And, starting with that first Easter morning, the Bridegroom has been with us and will be forever. Jesus lives! Today is the wedding feast!

Sometimes though, even for faithful Christians, we still feel distant from Jesus. We know He lives, but He seems far away. Fasting can still be used to draw us closer to our Provider. It still can lead our prayer. And we can express our sorrow for sin in this way. But then, lifted up by the Spirit, we come back to the feast.

We pray: Lord of the Feast, indulge our spiritual hunger through Your Word and Sacraments. And bring us one day to Your heavenly feast with Your Son Jesus. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, January 22, 2024

Read Mark 2:23-28

## Sabbath

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

Mark 2:27

The Sabbath, the weekly day of rest as built into creation (Gen. 2:1-3) and established in the 10 Commandments, is a common point of debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees held to a tradition that had built up all sorts of additional regulations to prevent any work whatsoever, even plucking some heads of grain to eat while walking by (as the disciples did in our text).

Jesus speaks against such regulations that would ignore the physical well-being of people, so He tells the story of David (see 1 Samuel 21), but Jesus doesn't abandon the Sabbath. He is Lord of the Sabbath. He Himself IS our everlasting rest as He has fulfilled all that God has commanded. He is also Lord of the Sabbath in pointing us towards a better way to see it.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Instead of being consumed by rules and regulations, we are to receive the Sabbath as a gift, as intended in creation. A time for rest and to reflect on what our God has done. This is why the early church began gathering on Sunday (the day of resurrection) instead of the traditional Saturday. But even then, the purpose was not that it MUST be Sunday, but that Sabbath is to be received as a gift from God – a time to rest our bodies and rest in the forgiveness of Christ, our Sabbath rest.

I hope that you see each opportunity to worship in just this way: receiving rest from the Lord of the Sabbath. Being renewed and enlightened by His Word, healed by His forgiveness, fed at His table, restored in the peace that He gives. This is the essence of worship: we come weary and in need, and the Lord of the Sabbath gives us these precious gifts He has promised.

Prayer: O Jesus Christ, Lord of the Sabbath, let me see worship correctly – as the time when You promise to meet me and all Your people and comfort us with Your gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Let me see the Sabbath as a gift from you that I joyfully use. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, January 23, 2024

Read Mark 3:1-6

### His Ways and My Ways

It is difficult to follow God's ways. I keep wanting to make them my own, to do them my way. Surely, I think, God couldn't be thinking that way! But then I remember God told me in Isaiah 55, "My ways are not your ways." Well, that is true, that's my problem.

God tells me something and then when I try to follow that something, He tells me "You don't understand." So why try? And yet ... I am God's child, I want to do things His ways. That comes with the territory. So, I turn my back on my ways, and listen to God.

It's not just a matter of doing things differently. It's a matter of living with God so that I automatically do things His way. Trying to do things my way was the problem with Adam and Eve and the famous "apple". They tried to think better than God. It just doesn't work that way.

So when I find that God seems to want me to do things two different ways at the same time, then I know that I am not understanding things rightly. God never contradicts Himself, nor does His way of life contradict God. So I need to go back to God. I need to admit to myself that I am not so smart. I need God's Word to educate me. I need God to straighten my thoughts out.

And He does! I am never left forlorn, wondering. No God tells me in my heart with His Word! Well, when I listen.

Prayer: Oh Lord, don't let me forget You when I am eager to show my adherence to You. Forgive me, and teach me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, January 24, 2024

Read Mark 3:7-12

### Jesus, The Son of God

*“And whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” And He strictly ordered them not to make Him known.” Mk 3:11–12.*

Jesus withdraws to the sea with His disciples after upsetting the Pharisees, who want to destroy Him for healing on the Sabbath. And a great number of people from all over Galilee and Judea and beyond are following Jesus and coming to Him. So Jesus needs a boat to not be squeezed by those from the numerous crowd. He told His disciples to have a boat ready because Jesus healed so many, all the people with great distress from illnesses and afflictions began to press/push against Him so that they might touch Him. This was quite an intense scene! It is astonishing to say the least, and to appreciate the presence of Yahweh God, the Eternal Son of God in flesh, among the people, right here, and throughout this Gospel narratives. Truly amazing!

The demons/unclean spirits saw Jesus and would fall down before Him and would cry out, **“You are the Son of God”** (v. 11). So Jesus strongly rebuked and warned the unclean spirits to not make Him known. It is easy to overlook this last verse in the text today, **“And [Jesus] strictly ordered them not to make him known”** (v. 12). Certainly Jesus authority to control and allow the spread of Himself is His will to do, and Jesus does here what God does.

For Jesus is the Eternal Son of God: The Word of God incarnate, Who, came to save us from our sins, defeating the power of sin, death, and Satan. Jesus took our punishment for sin on a cross, atoning for our sin, bleeding for us, dying the death we earned and deserve, and rising for us victoriously. Forgiveness and salvation and life eternal are given freely by God to all who are Baptized and believe in Jesus Name. Justified by Grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You have given us Your life for the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Grant us faithfulness and discernment to live our lives pleasing to Your will and love as You love. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, January 25, 2024  
Read Mark 3:13-21

### Why Follow *Him*?

And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him,  
for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

Jesus is out of His mind. All his family knew that things had gone too far. Jesus' religious streak was getting out of hand. They had seen Him grow up and grow into a wonderful young man, but there was no indication that Jesus was going to be crazy. Evidently, we live in a world so sinful that a sinless man can go decades without raising any red flags because we wouldn't know a perfect life if we saw one. Instead, piety looks like insanity.

Imagine what the families of the disciples thought. They've walked away from jobs and families to follow after this Jesus figure and He has apparently given them authority to cast out demons. On the whole, this scene is preposterous. Who in their right mind would give up everything to follow a religious fanatic like Jesus? Why not find a way to keep up with His teachings while still keeping everything else in your life the same? Why leave your job and home and family for the sake of a prophet who might turn out to be a fraud after all?

Of course, the problem is the same for us today. Why should we change a single thing in our lives over the claims of a man we've never met? Why give up something as small as an hour on our weekend or as big as your whole life? The truth of the matter is that this supposed prophet has risen from the dead and only because of that is He worth listening to. He has proven by any shadow of a doubt that His teachings are not the ravings of a madman but the inspired words of the Son of God and anything given up to follow Him is a mere pittance.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give us faith to hear the words of Jesus as the pure words from the mouth of God. Help us to view all of our earthly life as a gift from God to be offered back for His sake. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*



Friday, January 26, 2024

Read Mark 3:22-27

### The One Who Binds

“But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.” Mark 3:27

I found this text to be very interesting in the way that it includes two very brief parables that are linked to one another. In these parables, Jesus gives an interesting answer to the accusations that the scribes bring. The scribes accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the devil rather than by the power of God. In the first parable, Jesus defends himself by pointing out how nonsensical it would be for the devil to work against the other demons because they are working toward the same goal. This seems to be a pretty obvious response to the scribes’ claim. I am most interested in the second of the parables because here Jesus builds on the first.

Here Jesus points out the reality that all of the devils are like a strong man who is more than capable of defending his house. This house isn’t divided against itself, it is united in its mission to disobey God and destroy creation which for now is its house. Jesus then presents how He really fits into things. Jesus is the one who is able to bind the strong man and He is the even more capable one who is able to take the goods out from under the dominion of the devil and bring them into His own possession. We are the goods that Jesus came to plunder. Jesus came to bind up the power of sin, death, and the devil and by binding them He is able to rescue us. In His resurrection, Jesus' authority to take possession of what is His is put on full display as it becomes clear that He is not able to be bound but instead does the binding. The last binding that Jesus does is the binding of us to Himself. As His people, His Church, we are bound and will be bound to Him to live with Him for all time.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for binding the strong man of this world and for bringing us into Your own possession. Cause us to rejoice always in Your marvelous work. In your name, we pray.  
Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, January 27, 2024

Read [Mark 3:31-35](#)

### “Family”

What is a “family”? Father and mother, kids, brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents? Some combination of those is what makes up a so-called “typical” family. Many families don’t have all those parts – a single person might say that they and their cat are “family”. Some couples don’t have kids; others have kids and divorce and may remarry. We’ve adopted our kids. The possibilities are endless.

But what makes family special? There’s something about family that brings together many emotions, memories, and other connections. You might be willing to do anything for your spouse or little brother. You might not like your sister, but would hurt anyone who says anything bad about her. You live together, share the bathroom, eat and sleep together.

Christians acknowledge at wedding services that God brought this man and woman together on purpose to recreate in an imperfect way God’s relationship to His Church. To love and honor, to serve and obey. When it grows together under His will and blessings, it’s a beautiful thing!

But, in today’s reading, Jesus redefines family – or does He? He declares that the strangers around Him are his brothers and mother! Mary His mother, and His brothers wait outside for Him. Remember Mary? She “pondered all these things in her heart” when confronted with her very unusual Son. Her pregnancy was unlike any other! She and Joseph had discovered 12-year-old Jesus teaching in the Temple. How could she not be Jesus’ family?!

If you look at the words, though, Jesus never said Mary and His brothers weren’t family. Later, when He hung on the cross, bleeding from a million wounds, mere breaths from death, Jesus ensured that His mother Mary would be cared for for the rest of her life. His brother James would grow to lead the Church in Jerusalem after He ascended to heaven. Of course they were family!

Jesus added this to the definition of family: “whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” When you and I “do God’s will”, meaning acting in faith in God, we are Jesus’ family! We are as close to Him as was Mary and Joseph and His brothers – we are “blood”. We call Church our “Church family” because we’re all brothers and sisters in Christ, our big Brother. We eat together under the same roof every week, we serve one another in love, and we’re treated by Jesus’ Father just as He is – sons and daughters.

As we know all too well though, we’re not perfect like brother Jesus. We hurt our family. We don’t always love one another. But we have a big Brother who has given everything for His family. He gave His life for us and will share His resurrection with us too, and feast together with us, with Dad, and with the rest of our Family forever in His home.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Spirit that we may call Your Son Jesus our Brother. Bless our Family with Hope, in heaven, and around the world. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, January 29, 2024

Read Mark 4:1-9

### Two Ears, One Mouth

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Mark 4:9

Jesus' Parable of the Sower is very familiar, but He saves his explanation for a little bit later when speaking just to the 12. You'll read that tomorrow. So, I'll hold off on any comments about the parable for today.

I want to draw your attention to how Jesus finishes His teaching. After telling the parable, He implores the crowd (and us), “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” It's an old bit of practical wisdom that God gave you two ears and only one mouth for a reason. The implied reason? You should be doing twice as much listening than talking.

Whether we see ourselves as talkers or not, we are often quicker to voice our opinions and ideas than to listen to God's Word. If you're not sure about the extent of this problem, the same basic statement is made by Jesus to each of the seven churches in Revelation (2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22). In other words, it's a challenge and a need to hear God's Word and take it to heart, especially when our typical first impulse to any communication is to shape a reply instead of listening and humbly applying the words.

Yet God has given us two ears and just one mouth for a reason. It's a physical reminder that we need to receive the merciful word of forgiveness and life in Jesus far more than we need to be sharing every thought and opinion that crosses our minds. Besides, only in hearing and receiving the word of life are we prepared to speak that same hope we have in Christ.

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, open my ears to humbly and joyfully receive Your Word, that I might be prepared to speak. Amen.

### **Monday's Prayer for Lutheran Schools Week: Students**

Lord God, I pray for the students of Hope Lutheran ECC. Open their minds and hearts to trust in You as their Lord and Savior. Give them a hunger for learning about You and your world. Help our children grow in compassion, respect, knowledge, and self-control. In Jesus' name, Amen.

(Consider praying for a few of our students each day: Frederick, Hays, Eli, Isabella, Samuel, Axell, Jameson, Madelyn, Noah, Theodore, Hailey, Addison, Henry, Aiden, Greyson, Brooklyn, Josie, Maya, Dakota, Malachi, Andrew, Harlynn, Tyler, Harrison, Lennox, Braelyn, Ivy, Eleanor, Sophia, Sabrina, Connor, Henry, Alyssa, Lucy, Adalynn, Layne, Alex, Cora,

Brielle, Stephanie, JT, Eleanor, Colton, Jewell, Dean, Juliette, Alice, Adriana, Adalynn, Madilyn, Sawyer, Matthew, James, Jayden, Amelia, Everett, Harlowe, Mason, Jameson, George, Bryce, Wesley, Quinn, Kennedy, Lane, Moriah, Miles, Eiley, Eden, Isabella)

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, January 30, 2024

Read Mark 4:10-20

### Good Seeds Bear Fruit

God speaks to me in the Bible, today in the parable of the sower (you could call it “the seeds”). He reminds me that He has placed the seeds of the Gospel in my life. And if those seeds are growing they will reflect a change in my life. In the Parable, the good seeds bear fruit. Do I see those fruits in my life?

I ask myself, am I letting the Words of the Bible simply pass by ignoring them? It happens, even to me, God's Child. The devil continues to torment me. Am I letting the difficulties of the world distract me from my God? Am I more interested in meals and sports than thinking and giving my attention to the needs of others? Or am I worried about politics, afraid of other's reactions to my God's way of life?

Rather, now that I think about it, I would rather be kind and gentle than join in the condemnation of others. There are ways I can help build up the sadness and despair where they are in my friends and acquaintances. I would rather face the disapproval and hatred of “important” people than hurt my God by joining those others. There are children, hurt and afraid, feeling left out of life. Maybe I could help them, at least, be a patient listener.

But the seeds need the soil, the sunshine, the nutrients. And they come from God. He is with me, reminding me, giving me the energy and the courage to continue to show the fruit He has given me to share.

Prayer: Thank you, my Lord, for your Words reminding me to bear fruit. Thank you that You support me in doing that. Amen.

### **Tuesday's Prayer for Lutheran Schools Week: Parents**

Lord God, thank You for the parents who have committed to Hope Lutheran ECC to help

nurture their children in faith and knowledge. I pray that our parents will take an active role in their child's education, serving as a Christian role model in their life and work. Give parents wisdom, patience, strength, and love to deal with the needs and problems as they arise in their child's life. Keep them faithful in worship and in their prayers for our school, teachers, and children. Build the relationships between our parents and teachers to support one another in the shared work of caring for these little ones. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, January 31, 2024

Read Mark 4:21-25

### **Jesus, the Lamp-Light**

*"For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." vv. 22-23*

Jesus' parables are hidden to some, and well, heard by anyone who "**has ears to hear, [Jesus says] let him hear**" (v. 23). So, what is Jesus talking about? After Jesus' Parable of the Sower, He is alone with the twelve disciples, and those with them. Jesus teaches and explains the *secret* of the Kingdom of God in parables and explains the parable. And Jesus continued to speak to them and asked them, "**Is a lamp brought in to be put under a [basket/bushel - μόδιον/mōdiōn - a grain measure, peck measure, a vessel], or under a bed, and not on a stand?**" (v. 21). We say "no" here.

So, then Jesus says, whatever is hidden, is "**hidden except to be made manifest,**" and neither "**is anything [secret - ἀπόκρυφον/apōkryphōs - hidden] except to come to light**" (v. 22). That which has become known and exposed in plain sight. Therefore, Jesus is saying, whatever is hidden, is to be made known by the lamp-light.

Then Jesus says, "**If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear**" (v. 23). These are the ones who *hear the word of God and accept it and bear fruit* (4:20). He says to them to look out for what you listen to or hear; For "**with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you**" (v. 24). And therefore, for he who has, it will be given, and he "**who has not, even what he has will be taken away**" (v. 25). The mystery and Kingdom of God is revealed for you in Jesus Christ, and Him crucified and risen from the dead for you!

Salvation and the forgiveness of sins are made known in Christ alone. Jesus is Life and Light in a dark world of sin, death, and deceptions of Satan, calling for repentance of sins in the darkness.

For Jesus paid for our sins in death for our redemption of sins and reconciliation to Yahweh God. For Christ lives and reigns shining bright in this present darkness!

Prayer – Jesus, you came into this dark world as a shining lamp and light to save us from our sins. By your Word of power and wisdom in death and resurrection, You give us life and faith to believe and see in the darkness and follow you. Grant us the Holy Spirit to hear Your Word and live in Your light of grace and truth and share Your glorious and bright shining lamp-light of salvation for all people. For Your live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

**Wednesday's Prayer for Lutheran Schools Week: Teachers**

Dear Father, I pray for the teachers at Hope Lutheran ECC. Thank You for those You have called to teach our children. Give them insight, endurance, patience, and Your own love for their students. May their words and actions be filled with grace to help our children grow and be strengthened in their faith. Fill our teachers with Your strength so that they may be full of joy and overflowing with thankfulness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, February 1, 2024

Read Mark 4:26-29

The Kingdom of God...in Parables

26 And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.  
27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.  
28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.  
29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Jesus' parables are on the whole opaque, impossible to understand, and interpreting them can be a fools' errand. As a matter of fact, Jesus is even asked why He speaks in such a difficult to understand way and He does not at all deny that these parables are tough for us. Nevertheless, we are asked in this passage to try to understand something that is completely incomprehensible to human reason. Jesus wants us to understand the Kingdom of God, but Jesus is fighting an uphill battle. We don't understand how the Kingdom of God comes, though we work to scatter the seed and we hope and pray for it, we have to admit that we don't understand it. The Kingdom of God comes as it comes, in its own way and own stages and we are given only to sit back and watch the process, trusting that God will get it taken care of. And He does. And when He does, we

do not pause to marvel or discuss how it could be, but we get to work with joy, pulling in the harvest for our dear Lord and Master.

Prayer: Lord God, You have sent us to sow Your seed and harvest Your field and have prepared a bountiful harvest. Teach us to set aside our understanding and take up the tools of the labor we are called to and do it joyfully. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, February 2, 2024

Read Mark 4:30-34

### The Good Gardner

“And (Jesus) said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed...”

(Mark 4:30-31 ESV).

The thing that struck me most in this text was the way that the Kingdom of God is compared to a living and growing plant. I haven't always liked plants. When I was little my dad would have me help him around the yard with yardwork and gardening and landscaping, which I didn't enjoy much at the time. As I have gotten older though my opinion has changed, and I have come to love plants and things that grow. This love isn't just from my dad though, my mom loves to plant flowers and every summer our back patio could rival any “full sun” section at a nursery.

I think part of why I love plants is because as they grow, they become more and more beautiful, especially if they are well cared for, and that was the thought I had when I read this text. Jesus tells us about a growing plant that starts as just a seed but doesn't stay there. This seed becomes greater than all the rest of the plants in the garden and becomes a home for those who rest in its shade. This tree which is God's Kingdom is one that has become more and more beautiful with every new branch and leaf. Through His dying on a tree Christ has now made it possible for all of us to become members of the tree and to be grafted into His kingdom where we now get to rest. The Kingdom of God is a growing place, and we get to delight in the fact that the Good Gardner has seen fit to allow us a place in it as He nurtures and cares for the tree.

Prayer: “Faithful cross, true sign of triumph, be for all the noblest tree; none in foliage, none in blossom, none in fruit your equal be; symbol of the world's redemption, for the weight that hung on thee!” (*Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle. LSB 454*). Lord, lead us always to Your

cross and from Your cross into Your kingdom where we may live with You for all time. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

### **Friday's Prayer for Lutheran Schools Week: Hope Lutheran ECC**

Gracious Father, thank You for the many gifts You give to us through Hope Lutheran ECC. May the faith of our teachers and children be strengthened and nurtured, and excellence abound in all areas of the school. Strengthen the bonds between home, school, and church as we work together. Above all, help us to keep Jesus as the focus in this school. May He be the unseen but ever-present teacher in our classrooms. May His love and joy be evident in our teaching and learning. Grant faith to those who do not yet know Him and encourage the faith of those who do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, February 3, 2024

Read [Mark 4:35-40](#)

“Scared?”

Last month an Alaska Airlines aircraft, loaded with passengers, took off from Portland for a flight to California. Shortly after takeoff, at 16,000 feet, a loud “boom!” was heard and passengers saw daylight coming in through the side of the plane where a door had previously been. A mist momentarily filled the air due to the rapid decompression of the cabin, and wind immediately surrounded the passengers. Oxygen masks dropped. News accounts brilliantly reported, “passengers were scared.”

We laugh at that obvious remark. Of course people become scared when such a natural (or manmade) disaster happens! Sitting on what is suddenly an open-air balcony, moving at 350 mph three miles up in the air – is scary. Fortunately, no one was sucked out the opening and the flight returned to the ground, everyone unharmed.

In today's reading, an equally terrifying scene is described. Jesus and His disciples have finished a long series of sermons and are now crossing the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is exhausted and immediately falls asleep in the back of the boat. A storm suddenly comes up and the waves are crashing over into the small boat. If this continues, they'll soon sink. The Bible reports that the disciples were “afraid”.

I don't think words can describe how you or I would feel in that situation – scared? Afraid? Frightened out of your mind?! Naturally, they were afraid! But they turned to find Jesus still sound asleep, apparently not concerned in the slightest with their predicament. Awakened, the Master “rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”

Never one to miss a teaching moment, Jesus gave them a jaw-dropping lesson. He's not just a man of wise sayings. He's not just a magician who can pull rabbits out of a hat. He's the Lord and Ruler over Creation itself, just like the One Who spoke it into existence out of nothing. That's the unspoken message, but Jesus says more: “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”



Fires, earthquakes, car accidents, and cancer need not “frighten us”. Sure, they’re scary and can ruin your plans for your life. But Jesus is “in the boat” with us. He knows how relying on ourselves (and aircraft manufacturers, mechanics, etc.) can never guarantee we’ll avoid harm when it comes knocking. But Jesus is with us and is Lord of His Creation. He may allow calamity to strike, but He is right there with us in our suffering and will see us through.

On that Alaska flight, Vicki Kreps passed on this lesson to her two young grandkids who flew with her: "So once the kids were masked and settled in, and I took their hands, we did say a prayer, that if we were going to meet Jesus today, that we knew we were going to be safely in his arms," Kreps added.

We pray: Blessed Jesus, please be with me when calamity strikes. Through Your Spirit, fill me with Your Peace, knowing that I am safely in Your arms. Amen.

**Saturday’s Prayer for Lutheran Schools Week: Church & Ministry Support**

Gracious Father, I give You thanks for the many church members involved in the ministry of our school through volunteering, prayer, financial support, and counsel. Help each of us to see the opportunity You have given us to share Your love with the families who come to Hope Lutheran ECC. Give us your Spirit to connect our families, school, and church in a partnership that allows our school to generously share the love, forgiveness, and joy of Jesus with the children and families in our school and church community. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, February 5, 2024

Read Mark 5:1-20

### A Mixed Reaction

“(The people) began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him.”

Mark 5:1-20

Perhaps a mixed reaction is an understatement. These are wildly different reactions. Jesus has freed a man who was tormented by demons to the point he attacked others and himself and was forced to live among the tombs. Upon being ejected from the man, the demons entered a herd of pigs and the herd ran into the sea and drowned.

The herdsmen and townspeople saw Jesus as destructive and dangerous. Their livelihood was gone and Jesus had something to do with it. The man who had lived among the tombs was finally in his right mind, for the first time in his memory. He was free and Jesus had everything to do with it.

The townspeople beg Jesus to leave. The healed man begs to go with Jesus. A very mixed reaction.

Despite His incredible mercy, Jesus continues to receive a mixed reaction. Some want nothing to do with Jesus and wish that He would just go away. Some know His mercy and help and can't imagine being apart from Him. Yet Jesus desires to give the same rescue from Satan and his minions to all. So, he sends us to speak and share His healing word. “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” Those words spoken to the healed man can just as well be spoken to us.

Prayer: O Jesus Christ, I am humbled at how much you have done for me and how you have had everlasting mercy on me by Your death and resurrection. I rejoice that I don't need to beg you to let me go with You because You have promised to go with me always by Your Spirit. As You go with me, encourage me to share all you have done for me (and for all!). Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

Read Mark 5:21-43

### Waiting for Relief

I rejoice, well, at least, I try to rejoice - when I find it necessary to wait for God to keep His promises. He tells me that He is taking care of me, but he waits so long ... or maybe it is only when I am trying to insist that He does things my way!

I want help, yes, I want help and I want it right now. Oops, I can see my problem clearly. The problem is 'I want'. My wants, my desires, and my self-focus make me try to watch God to make sure that He is keeping His promises - and of course, that He is keeping them the way I have decided for Him to keep them.

My heart aches. Not everything I want is selfish. There are good things I think the world should have, that I want my family, and my friends to have and use. And I hurt for them too. But God knows best. Oh, my God, how well You teach me. You make me wait for good things as well as waiting for relief. It is good for me to wait.

I know you tell me in the Bible, you show it to me repeatedly. When I wait for Your plan to unfold, it is so marvelously better than mine. Please, God help me to wait, help me to appreciate your teaching me. As I think about it, I expect You to do things that will surprise me and make my wait worthwhile.

Prayer: Dear God, keep teaching me, keep me from trying to make You do things my way. Thank you for your promises to do so. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Read Mark 6:1-6

### Jesus Marveled on Account of Their Unbelief

*“And [Jesus] marveled because of their unbelief. And He went about among the villages teaching”* Mark 6:6.

You and I probably θαυμάζω (*thaumazō*) - wonder/marvel in amazement why someone and many would not (will not or does not) believe the Gospel Word of Jesus Christ. Here in our text today, so did Jesus. He left where He was from the woman who was saved and healed of her disease, from raising the little girl from the dead/sleep, and He **"came to His hometown, and his disciples followed Him"** (v. 1). Jesus goes to the synagogue and is teaching. Many listening were astonished and in wonder, saying, **“Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?”** (vv. 2-3). And they began to take offense at and were repelled at Jesus.

Then Jesus proceeded to say to them, **“A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household”** (v. 4). So, Jesus was not able to do any miracle there except healing a few by putting His hands on them – Jesus still had healed as few even though He is rejected there by many. **“And He marveled because of their unbelief”** (v. 6) and went around the villages teaching.

Instead of honoring Jesus as Lord Christ in His hometown, the Carpenter Jesus was shamed by those who knew Him and His family. Many people today shame Jesus and do not believe Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal Son of the Living God, the crucified living One who rose from the dead for the salvation and redemption of all mankind. Salvation from slavery to sin, death, and Satan. This is marvelous, to say the least. And the Truth remains, and the Word endures; Jesus died and rose for you to give you Life in His Name.

Peter Chrysologus (380 – 450 AD), who was the Latin archbishop of Ravenna, said, *“Yet as the eternal Son, he came down into our broken humanity as if we were already his own.”*

Prayer – Lord [Jesus], give us eyes to recognize You, ears to receive Your Word, and hearts to believe its promises. By Your grace, bring us to the fullness of Your glory in heaven. Amen.  
(Prayer from TLSB)

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, February 8, 2024  
Read Mark 6:7-13

### Unprepared, and Yet Prepared

And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. Mark 6:7

Working for Jesus is not always as good a proposition as you might imagine. He's not the kind of employer that spells everything out and makes following Him simple. Quite the opposite. He sends His disciples out and commands them to make no provisions for themselves. He says to go on a long journey but don't pack anything that you need, except a staff and shoes because you're going to be doing a ton of walking. He sends them without food or water or direction. As far as it seems, Jesus is sending them out to die.

But He gives them one thing: His authority.

Jesus sends these apostles His word and His authority to do their work and He commands them to trust that the rest will work out for them. And though Mark puts it very shortly and succinctly, their ministry is successful. They don't starve to death or stumble on the way, but rather they do all that they were sent out to do: cast out demons, heal the sick, and proclaim repentance. Jesus asks them to trust Him and not their own preparations and their ministry is a massive success. And their ministry is not unique.

This is exactly how Jesus still works with the church today. He plants churches and asks them not to plan too far ahead, not to make a foolproof plan for ministry that is certain to be self-funding and successful. He does not tell us to go only to places where the gospel will be best received but to go everywhere, taking no grand plans but only a grand message, trusting the authority of our Lord to be sufficient for His purposes.

Prayer: Lord of the Church, you have sent us into Your harvest field, unconcerned with efficiency or human fears. Teach us to be faithful workers, trusting only in the authority of Your Word to accomplish all that You would have us do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, February 9, 2024

Read Mark 6:14-29

### Confession or Confusion

“14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known. Some said, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.’ 15 But others said, ‘He is Elijah.’ And others said, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.’ 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.’” (Mark 6:14-16 ESV)

In my class at the seminary, there are three students named Ryan, three students named Andrew, and two Zachs. Even though we are all in the same classes and we all know the same people sometimes we still get very confused about which Ryan we are talking about, or which Andrew made a good point in class. We know from daily life that it can be very easy to get people confused and we see that here in our verses as well. The news of Jesus and His miracles had gotten out and people were beginning to wonder who this guy Jesus was. As they discussed it many people came up with answers for themselves, some said that Jesus was John the Baptist, some said He was a prophet, and some said that he was Elijah. In the end, Herod decides wrongly that Jesus must be John the Baptist raised from the dead.

We see from this text that it can be easy to confuse Jesus for someone that He isn’t. In our day people want Jesus to be all kinds of things and sometimes they might get close, but they still miss the full picture. Often, we are looking for a savior who will fit our personal hopes or our fears. In the case of Herod, he was afraid that Jesus was really John the Baptist whom he had beheaded. Now most of us aren’t confusing Jesus for people that we know but we might want Him to answer specific problems or hopes that we have. He might end up fulfilling some of those things that we have hoped for, and He might not, but ultimately Jesus came to be who the Father sent Him to be and when we say that we follow Jesus then we have to confess Jesus as He really is. We as Jesus’ people know who He is and who we are in relation to Him. Jesus is Lord and we confess that He is our Lord and regardless of how our hopes and fears turn out now we know that He is in control, and He has won for us a place with Him for eternity.

Prayer: Lord thank You for being who You are and for rescuing us from the fate we deserve and creating a new story for us as Your people. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, February 10, 2024

Read [Mark 6:30-44](#)

“You give them something to eat.”

Jesus’ disciples were accustomed to hard work. Collecting taxes, fishing for a living – these were the sort of things they’d done before Jesus called them. But they’d each grown into those professions and had become skilled enough that they could make a living at them. Going to bed every night, stinking of fish, was a hazard of the job, but they’d accepted it. They were comfortable in their lives.

But Jesus had called them away from all that. They’d had distinct, clear callings before – work hard all day; rest in the evening. But now, “Follow me” Jesus had said. They were now His followers and their days filled with the unexpected. While hearing God’s Word being explained to them by the Son of God might have stimulated their minds and warmed their hearts, the miracles must have blown their minds away!

They’d seen water turned into wine, the sick healed, the blind given sight, the lame enabled to walk – three of them had even witnessed Jesus raise a dead girl to life. The constant crowds, the travelling – all this was new. They’d never imagined a life like this! But in today’s reading, this non-stop going had taken a toll on them. We’re told, “They had no leisure even to eat.” They were tired. They wanted rest.

And Jesus recognized this. So, He set out with them to a “desolate place by themselves” for some R & R. I bet they longed for this respite! But it was not to be – before they could even get out of the boat, the great crowd was upon them, again. And Jesus “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

So, this day of rest became yet another long day of work. Jesus taught, they assisted. As the evening mealtime drew closer, they realized that not only hadn’t they had the time to eat, there was no food to be had! Telling Jesus this hard news, they were doubtless astounded by what He said: “You give them something to eat.” Just like that!

I did some crude math – the disciples’ solution of spending their combined money to buy bread for the 5,000 men and countless women and children – would have amounted to about \$4 dollars a head. Even if they could have found a bread store in that desolate place that had that much bread that late in the day – would have been a miracle!

But “following Jesus surrounds you with miracles”, they were learning. This story was yet another teaching moment for them, and for us through them. Jesus used these ordinary men to do extraordinary things. Healings and miracles, sure, but He opened their eyes to God’s promises and ways. Promises for them – yes, a hard life and suffering along the way – but lives filled with the sure hope that their Savior was with them. And surely, He’s with us, too.

We pray: Heavenly Father, help me to follow Jesus like the disciples did – in faith, not knowing where You will lead, but trusting in You. In His Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, February 12, 2024

Read Mark 6:45-52

### Utterly Astonished

“They were utterly astonished, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”

Mark 6:51-52

The disciples were “utterly astonished.” Well, of course, they were!

The wind was blowing so hard that the 12 of them in a boat couldn’t get anywhere crossing the Sea of Galilee, but he went whistling by on foot as though taking a stroll in the park. Of course, they were utterly astonished!

They were sure that they had seen a ghost. Of course, they were utterly astonished!

When He stepped in the boat, the wind ceased, as though a switch were turned off. Of course, they were astonished!

But Mark tells us that the real reason that they were astonished was because “they didn’t understand about the loaves.” In other words, had they understood about the loaves, Jesus’ night walk on the water should have been expected. If they had understood that Jesus fed the 5,000 men plus women and children, just as the LORD, Yahweh, had fed the people of Israel with manna in the wilderness, of course, He could walk on the water. After all, He would be the same One who split the Red Sea and let His people pass through on dry ground, of course, He could shut off the wind like a switch.

The proper response to the loaves or the storm? Gratitude, praise, and joy at the coming of God in human flesh to rescue His people. Seeing our God who comes in mercy walking on the water would not lead to fear but to confidence. We would say, “Let the storms rage all around, my Savior, my helper commands the waves (He made them!), and feeds the hungry and silences storms, and quiets my fears.”

In your time of difficulty, look to Jesus, the Lord and God, who comes in mercy. Sometimes He silences the storm. Sometimes He just quiets Your fears by reminding You of His love. But no matter how He chooses to act, He has come to calm the greatest storms of sin, Satan, and death. So hear these words spoken also to you from your Savior, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, in stormy times and trials, calm me by Your saving presence. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Tuesday, February 13, 2024

Read Mark 6:53-56

### Truly Important

My mind gets all wrapped around importance. My topics are varied but they all seem to push importance. I worry about important things and not other “mere” items in life. And so I find that I am losing sight of God, who cares about the poor and weak, the “unimportant” in life.

But when illness comes, physical or mental or spiritual, then all those other things seem to fade away. When trouble comes I find out what is really important. And then I realize I need God’s help. Then I turn to Him.

How sad it is that I need trouble, I need the very things I don’t like, to drive back to what I really care about. I see in the Bible that people came to Jesus when they realized they had a solution to their troubles near. People flocked to Him. And then, so often, like myself, they forgot their solution and ignored God afterward.

Certainly, if I am important to God, then He is important to me. I want to be looking to Him, to fit my feet onto His roads, to walk and talk with and about Him. There I see those supposedly unimportant things of life, walking and talking, are truly important.

Where I tend to let those matters fall where they may while I worry about my status or how I can sustain life, the reality of what is really important gets lost. So may I turn to Him, being what is important to Him and therefore to me.

Prayer: Oh, God. Help me. I get my life so confused. But You can straighten me out. Thank You, my LORD.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Read Mark 7:1-13

### Jesus Reveals Isaiah's Prophecy

*“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”*

Mark 7:6–8.

Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and questioned Him why His disciples do not walk in the tradition of the elders and ceremonially wash their hands. They believed the disciples were defiled for unwashed hands from the elbow to the knuckles before eating their bread, according to the tradition of the elders. So then, Jesus called the Pharisees and scribes hypocrites. He said, **“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written ...”** (v. 6). Well, let’s look at Isaiah shall we, **“And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men”** (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus uses His Words from His Prophet Isaiah, revealing to us His fulfilling and interpreting His Words rightly, the Word of God spoken to the prophet. Jesus used His own Word of judgment to the Pharisees and scribes for their “tradition” and non-discerning, unwise – well, foolish hearts, which are hidden from seeing the power and wisdom of God (see Is 29:14; 1 Cor 1:19). For they follow the commands of men and not of the Lord YHWH.

Jesus then told the Pharisees and scribes His Word of Command, which He gave Moses at Mt. Sinai. The fourth command – to **“honor your father and your mother ... [for] whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death”** (Exodus 20:12; 21:17). Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes, you know, **“you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!** (v. 9). Jesus exposes the Pharisees and scribes who teach that if a man says to father and mother that what you benefit is gained from me is “Korban,” which is a consecrated gift offering to God—**“then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”** (vv. 12–13).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You are the Savior and sacrificial Lamb slaughtered for all sin. Thank You for Your love for the Father and for me. Grant me true repentance and faith that Your precious Blood has paid for and cleansed me from all my sins and granted me life, forgiveness, and salvation in Your Name, by grace in Holy Baptism. Help me to walk in Your ways, and in Your Word and Truth, into life everlasting. For You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, February 15, 2024

Read Mark 8:22-26

### Adjusting to Our New Eyes

24 And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking."

Mark's gospel is fascinating because it is simultaneously the least colorful and detailed of the gospel accounts and the most bizarre. Today's account raises some serious questions. Why does Jesus seem to take two tries to heal the man? What does the man mean by seeing trees walking? Why does He forbid the man from entering the village?

In some sense, Mark's intention is to confuse us, to paint a picture of the way the kingdom of God comes to us. It comes in confusing ways. It comes a little at a time, first in part then in whole, not because God is unable to do it all at once but because for His purposes He intends to be patient for our sake.

Why does the man not see clearly at first? Perhaps because his eyes are healed and he sees the world for what it is but his mind is not yet able to process what he is looking at. The kingdom of God is not always comprehensible to us at the first until Jesus comes to us again and again. Jesus whole ministry shows to us over and over the strange character of the kingdom of God and teaches us not to be surprised when it comes in unexpected ways but to always expect it, trusting Jesus' word that it is coming and it is already at hand.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You brought God's reign among His people in the days of Your earthly walk. Bring it also among us. Open our eyes to see the kingdom in its presence and give us patience for what is yet to be. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, February 16, 2024

Read Mark 7:26-30

### No Longer Enemies

“26 Now the woman was a gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ 28 But she answered him, ‘Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ 29 And he said to her, ‘For this statement, you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.’ 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.” (Mark 7:26-30 ESV)

This text has always been interesting to me because it feels like it is a text where Jesus is being mean. This story butts up against our conception of Jesus as the guy who was nice to everyone. Here it seems that He is being kind of nasty to this poor woman who has nowhere else to go but Him. An important thing to remember when reading this text is to remember who Jesus is really “supposed” to be in the first century. In His time Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah for the Jews but as He has gone along, He hasn’t looked much like the person that the Jews expected their messiah to look like. This story is a prime example. Jesus is not supposed to help this woman by first-century Jewish standards. This woman who is a Canaanite is supposed to be Jesus’ enemy but, in the end, He doesn’t treat her that way. In the end, Jesus grants her request and saves her daughter.

This isn’t the only time that Jesus will act with compassion toward those who are His enemies. At His crucifixion, Jesus calls on the Father to have mercy on those who make themselves His enemies by nailing Him to the cross. And again, on the road to Damascus Jesus calls out to Paul, who had been persecuting Christians, and begins to change him from an enemy into an apostle. Ultimately, we can extend this idea to everyone Jesus ever interacts with because every other person that Jesus ever met was a sinner who had made themselves an enemy of God and Christ, but Christ came down and crossed behind enemy lines so that He could become the savior of His enemies which includes you and me. Jesus has turned us from being His enemies to being His people and as His people we are called to go and do likewise and turn others from being enemies of Christ and make them into His people too.

Lord, thank You for having mercy on us who were once Your enemies. Help us to go out into the world and shine Your light so that others may become Your people too. In Your name, we pray, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, February 17, 2024

Read [Mark 7:31-37](#)

“The Deaf Hear, the Mute Speak”

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is about John the Baptist in prison. John had been unusual from birth: he'd lived the life of a Nazarene all his life (locusts and honey for food, etc.), and had finally fulfilled his calling – to prepare the way for the Messiah. And he'd done that – he'd preached to massive crowds, baptized thousands, and readied the people for their coming Savior. But now, that was all over. John had been imprisoned for a year already and probably didn't expect to walk out again. I imagine he was just a little down – all the prophecy about his calling, all that work and seeming success, and now – what? What was it all for? Prison, chains, and death?

Matthew and Luke both record his question, brought to Jesus by John's disciples: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” John knew he didn't have time to mince words. He wanted to know for sure if all he'd heard about Jesus was true – is Jesus really the One?

Ever since Adam and Eve's sin, God had promised to send a Messiah to save people from their sin. He'd renewed His promise to Noah after the Flood, to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses. The Messiah would defend the poor, lead His people, and triumph over their enemies. His might, power, and glory would dwarf that of Solomon. For literally thousands of years, God had promised the Savior.

But for John, some of the little things prophesied about the Messiah stood out: When the Messiah returns, Isaiah had said, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” This wasn't like any other god – no other god cared for the sick, the tired, the poor, or the widows. Elsewhere Isaiah had said, “In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.”

And so, hearing of Jesus' deeds recorded in today's reading must have filled John's heart with Peace. Jesus said, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

John knew that a Savior who cares so much for the weak, the sick, the lame, and the poor is truly the promised Messiah. He knew that Jesus would care for him in his captivity and bring him to heaven for eternity. He knew that he was blessed by Jesus.

We pray: Savior Jesus, Your love is like no other. When I'm down, weak, or sick, remind me of the mighty deeds You do for Your little lambs. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, February 19, 2024

Read Mark 8:1-10

### Life in God's Word

“They have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.”

Mark 8:2

If we met these people today, I fear that we would not look on them in compassion as Jesus did. This crowd in the region of Tyre and Sidon (Gentile territory!) has gathered around Jesus and refused to leave.

Don't get the wrong idea. They are not an unruly mob. As a group they have found the “spring of living water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14).” As a group they have agreed with Jesus (and Moses) in the wilderness that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4 and Deut. 8:3).

Oh, Jesus sees that they also need bread for the body and in miraculous fashion, He provides for the crowd. Seven loaves and a few fish quickly feed 4,000 men plus women and children. Seven – the number of creation. It's no coincidence that the sustenance that Christ has come to bring is enough for all of creation with seven baskets of leftovers. The life He comes to bring extends to all and fills all.

And the crowd was granted to glimpse this. How could they leave? Sure, if He sends them on their way (which He does at the end of the story), but they will not leave before then. They could have left sooner to fill their bodies, but they couldn't go anywhere else to be filled spiritually.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, apart from Your Word of forgiveness, life, and salvation, I starve. Help me to hunger for Your Word and be satisfied in You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Read Mark 8:11-13

### God's Blessed, "No."

I am so glad that God doesn't tempt anyone, especially me. I want all the time, I want something, and that desire always seems to pull at me. Not only do I appreciate that God doesn't make life harder for me, but He also steps in to guard and help me to resist temptation. When I can't resist, God shows me His love by often holding me back, and I am thankful. I can count on Him.

But then there comes a desire to make God listen to me. I don't need that. I know He knows more and better than I do, but that desire keeps coming. I know what is right and wrong, and I know what God has guided me through already, yet there is the temptation to insist that God should prove Himself to me. Every time I fall for this, the desire is to make God dependent on my decision to listen to Him. I try to tell myself that I am just making sure of life, but really I'm trying to force Him to do things my way. That way I can control God!

Well, it doesn't work. God doesn't listen to me that way. He knows my desires but doesn't give me the right to leave Him to try to be my own God! I am so thankful! I can't be responsible for myself. No, I am blessed that He doesn't listen to my sinful wants and says "NO".

Prayer: Thank You my Father for not giving me the bad for me things that I want. Please guide me into contentment. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Read Mark 8:14-21

### Jesus Teaches About Leavened Dough

*"Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"*

Mark 8:18

Jesus was in the boat with the disciples on Lake Gennesaret (The Sea of Galilee), headed toward the other side of the lake to Bethsaida. This is after Jesus was tested by the Pharisees in the district of Dalmanutha. And this is after Jesus fed the four thousand and healed a deaf man in the region of the Decapolis.

The disciples forgot bread going to the other side of the lake and **"had only one loaf with them in the boat"** (v. 14). Jesus cautions them and gives them orders to look out for the ζύμης (*zumēs*) - leaven/fermented dough of the Pharisees and of Herod. In the ancient world, fermented dough (leavened bread) was referred to in a moral/immoral sense by rabbis as a bad/evil impulses or bad/evil convictions of a man or community. But not hearing Jesus' teaching, the disciples are discussing that they had no bread. Jesus knew they were discussing this matter of no bread and proceeded to say to them,

**"Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"** (vv. 17–18).

Jesus continued to proceed and told them that when He broke the five loaves for the five thousand and about the Twelve (Jewish) baskets full of broken pieces they gathered. And Jesus tells them of the seven loaves He broke for the four thousand and the Seven (Gentile) baskets full of broken pieces they gathered and then said: **"Do you not yet understand?"** (v. 21).

Recall what Jesus said in v. 17, **"Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"** The ζύμης - leaven/fermented dough of the Pharisees and Herod's house, referring to their traditions of men and beliefs compared to the Word and commands of God. There was a separation of Israel from the Gentile nations. Jesus is proclaiming that the traditions of the old covenant are no longer in force, as we heard Jesus declare **"all foods clean"** (7:19). Jesus' Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, His rule and reign are forever for both the Jew and the Gentile. In this passage from Mark, we see Jesus continuing to fulfill His mission and plan of salvation for the sins of the world as He heads toward the cross, giving Himself as a ransom for many, for you, and for me. You have Life in the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You are the Bread of Life Who gives us Life. Grant us faith to follow You in suffering till You come again. For You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*



Thursday, February 22, 2024

Read Mark 7:14-23

Note: We had a little mix-up in our devotion schedule, so today's devotion picks up the piece of Mark that we missed.

### Clean from the Outside In

23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

It's common for Christians to revel in the fact that Jesus has freed us from all those burdensome Old Testament laws. Often that's the message focused on in this text from Mark. But Jesus is not here pointing people to how little He cares what they do, that couldn't be further from the truth. Jesus took issue with the Pharisees because they took the law too literally. They felt that if they obeyed the letter of the law (with some extra margin to make absolutely sure), then they would have done everything that God desired of them.

So there was the idea that hatred may be a bad thing but only literal murder breaks the law. Lust may be bad but if it never amounts to adultery, it is no transgression. Jesus disabuses them of this foolish notion. He says that God's will is not a matter of avoiding certain foods but of avoiding uncleanness without and within. It is not enough to outwardly be a follower of God, one must not just do God's will but to delight in it in one's heart. To any honest person, this is no relief at all. If we could scrupulously keep the letter of the law, we stand no chance of purifying our own hearts. We are hopelessly hateful, corrupted by sin without and within.

But if our defilement comes from within, our cleansing comes from without. Christ cleanses our hearts by His words of promise that we hear. He saves our bodies from death by giving us His flesh and pure food to eat. He washes our souls with His baptism so that the things that come from us could by His power be pure.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, You have declared all Your creation clean for our sake. Make our hearts also clean by Your grace that we might do Your will. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, February 23, 2024

Read Mark 8:27-30

### His True Identity

And (Jesus) asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'

I think we all have the experience of traveling with friends or family and having different conversations in the car. At least for me traveling has a way of bringing out interesting topics of conversation which can very easily become deep and personal. Here in our text today I think we see something similar. Jesus and the disciples are on the road again and as will happen between friends on a trip they begin to talk about who people think that Jesus is. The disciples provide a few answers that they have heard from people but ultimately Jesus prompts them to answer for themselves. Peter's answer on behalf of the group is that Jesus is the Christ.

In this fast paced exchanged between the disciples and Jesus an important truth is revealed. Jesus being the Christ changes everything for His followers and the same is true for us. One thing that is different for us than it was for the disciples is the mandate to keep who Jesus is a secret. Jesus told His followers then to keep His true identity to themselves, but we have different instructions. Jesus tells us to go out and tell everyone about who He is and what He has done. When people ask us who we say that Jesus is we can be confident in telling them that Jesus is the Christ sent by God to redeem the world. We get to be confident in who Jesus is and we have the privilege to share that news with everyone around us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to tell others about who you are and point them to Your saving work. Lead us to trust in You and call on You in all things. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, February 24, 2024

Read [Mark 8:31-9:1](#)

“The Cross”

One special thing about our Advent Wednesday services is the “hymn sing” that we do right before the service. Pastor asks for requests, and then we sing them. They’re our favorites; mostly Advent hymns with a few Christmas ones thrown in. Ever wonder why we don’t do that Wednesdays during Lent? Because nobody has a favorite Lenten hymn! They’re all somber, in a minor key, and are just plain downers. Let’s move on to Easter! That’s where our favorites are.

Up to this point in Mark’s Gospel, the disciples have been witnessing “Easter” kinds of things: Jesus healing the sick, preaching the Good News to the poor, casting out demons, and even bringing the dead back to life. Sure, there have been scuffles with the Pharisees and Scribes, but every time Jesus blew them away with His wisdom and Words. He often baffled them with new teachings that “re-interpreted” the old teachings, but this was the life! Every day, they understood Jesus better. Peter had even said what they had all come to believe – that Jesus was the Messiah! You know, the Chosen One Who would restore Israel to power and glory over her enemies!

Today’s reading, however, turns a sharp corner. Jesus **“began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.”** “No, say it isn’t so, Jesus! You can’t die – You’re the Messiah!” said Peter. The disciples didn’t want to hear this message. Jesus – being rejected and killed?!

But Jesus stopped this line of thinking and immediately taught His disciples a new lesson, starting with these familiar words to Peter, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** You see, while Jesus loves life and wants everyone to have a full stomach, perfect health, and long lives, even more so He came to save His people from their sins. And that can only happen through His being rejected, abandoned, and nailed to the cross. Jesus can’t rise from the dead on Easter without first dying on that cross.

Satan would have us believe that our sins aren’t “that bad”. We like to think that we’re “pretty good” most of the time, and those good things surely outweigh the bad we do. Satan would have us skip past the cross and start partying like it’s Easter.

The truth is, even one, little sin deserves death. And I can’t count how many and how enormous are my sins! Jesus died on the cross because my sin killed Him. We go through these many weeks of Lent, singing these dreary hymns, because we need to face the depths of the trouble we’re in. Jesus performed miracles and healed the sick so we recognize Him as the promised Messiah. But He travelled to the cross to pay for my sin.

We pray:       Glory be to Jesus,  
                  Who in bitter pains,  
                  Poured for me the lifeblood  
                  From His sacred veins. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, February 26, 2024

Read Mark 9:2-13

### Jesus Only

“And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.”

Mark 9:8

The disciples opened their eyes and Moses was gone. Elijah was gone. The cloud atop the mountain (a clear evidence of God’s presence in the Old Testament) was gone. The voice of the Father was gone. The whole remarkable experience of Jesus’ transfiguration was gone.

Except...

“They no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.”

The experience before was exhilarating and terrifying all at once. But now...

“They no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.”

This was no longer Jesus in glowing white, holding court as the greatest atop the Mountain, being audibly praised by the voice of God the Father. Jesus’ glory was hidden again. But as they descended to the valley, this was what they needed. This is what we needed.

Jesus left His glory and power and brightness behind to descend into the valley of our sin and suffering. This is what we needed. Jesus only. The Savior whose glory would be hidden in the valley, most of all when He would be lifted up on the mountain of Calvary. But this is what we needed. His glory is set aside to take our shame. His power is set aside to take up our weakness. His brightness is set aside to carry the darkness of our sin.

And yet, in setting all these aside, He would open the glories of heaven and the light and life of eternity by carrying our shame, weakness, and sin. This is what we needed. This is what we need.

Jesus only.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for laying aside Your glory to be my Savior. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

Read Mark 9:14-29

### Why Do I Pray?

Why do I pray? After all, God knows everything; I don't have to tell Him anything because He already knows it all. And I can't make God do anything, especially it seems I can't make Him do just what I want Him to do. So why do I pray anyway?

Well, He asked me to. That's a pretty good reason. If God wants something from me, seems like I should listen to Him. So, I tell Him about my day and how I feel. I share with Him my few glories and my many sorrows and troubles. There is a relief in sharing things with Him, somehow the very fact I share them makes them seem much less important to me.

There is also this, while God knows my feelings, intentions, etc, if there is something I care a lot about, I will demonstrate that care by continuing to bring it up to God. Not that He listens more to repetition, but I show and demonstrate to myself that that is important by repeating it. So, part of praying is demonstrating what I care about, God and other things, and demonstrating my commitment to those things.

There is so much in the world that I cannot handle or do anything about, from active demon possession to world affairs or my personal health and/or wealth. But I can put those things in God's hands, releasing them from my "worry". And He does not only listen but also gives my desires - in His own time and nature.

Prayer: Thank you, God. Thank you for making me pray, for promising Your actions, and for helping me to let things go to You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Read Mark 9:30-32

### Jesus Said it Again

*“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”*

Mark 9:31

Jesus and the disciples came from where he commanded the demon out of the man's son and passed through Galilee. Now, Jesus did not want anyone to know of His journey toward Jerusalem and was teaching His disciples. **Jesus said it again:** That He, the Son of Man, would suffer many things, be rejected, and rise after three days (see Mark 8:31; 9:12-13). He taught His disciples and said the Son of Man was going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they would kill him, and He would rise after three days.

**“But [the disciples] did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him”** (Mark 9:32).

Recall Peter rebuking Jesus for saying this earlier, and Jesus called Peter “Satan” (8:31-33). Now, **Jesus said it again**, and the disciples did not understand; they lacked the ability, and no one said anything. They were afraid (Greek-ἐφοβοῦντο-*ephōbēō*, *afraid to ask something*) and shrunk away from asking Jesus. They did not understand Jesus' strange and repeated statement that He would suffer and die and rise on the third day. And dying and rising is what Jesus did for you and me—taking our sin and punishment upon Himself, defeating sin, death, and the devil.

Although hidden from the disciples, Jesus would later open their minds to the Scriptures. So Jesus also does for you by sending the Holy Spirit through repentant faith and Baptism into Christ. God's gift and promise to you. Here, in this passage in Mark's account of the Gospel, Jesus continued His journey to suffer and die in Jerusalem for the sins of the world. Jesus does what He says He will do ...

Prayer – Increase my faith to believe in You, my Lord and God, in Your Word, Lord JESUS. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Read Mark 9:33-37

### The Greatest

“When he (Jesus) was in the house he asked them,

“What were you discussing on the way?”

Mark 9:33

Our Lord knows our every thought. It would be enough for today merely to ponder that even knowing this, He yet loves us though he knows every wayward thought and worthless conversation in our hearts. So when he asks the disciples what they were talking about on the way, He is really only reminding them of their self-centeredness.

But He does so not to rub it in their noses, but rather to answer their question in a way they would never believe. After their missionary journey, they were comparing who had been given the greatest power from on high. Jesus reminds them that they haven't the faintest clue of what God's power looks like.

God's power is not in being first but in being last. It is not in being served but in serving. This is a simple teaching, but a deep mystery. How could we truly believe that servants are greater than their masters? How could we truly believe that children have more perfect faith than us? We could not if we had not seen Jesus become the servant of all and an obedient child as he fulfilled his word and suffered and died and rose again. Jesus has taught us that the power and strength of God are unbelievable apart from Jesus' death and resurrection.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to be weak, to be servants, to be obedient children, that we might be great in faith, receiving with joy all the gifts you have showered upon us in Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, March 1, 2024

Read Mark 9:41

### A Cup of Water

“(Jesus said) For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” (Mark 9:41 ESV).

A cup of water seems like a pretty insignificant thing to me. In high school, I would help people move to make a bit of extra money during the summers and I couldn't tell you how many times people offered me water. When I got to college, I did a summer of field work in the Nebraska cornfields helping to produce hybrid corn and again it was common for the people on my crew to offer each other water on hot days.

There are a lot of directions that we could go with this text, but the cup of water caught my attention. In the beginning of the text, John rebukes another follower of Christ for doing “mighty work” in Jesus' name because the man is not one of them. Jesus then corrects John and concludes with the statement about the water which made me think about how we treat other believers. I think that we can often become territorial as Christians which isn't helpful for anyone. How often have we thought poorly of other believers? This could be the members of another denomination or even our own Lutheran brothers and sisters down the road. Jesus instructs John in a different way. Jesus points out that anyone doing mighty works in His name is on His side. It is important to remember that we are all part of one body and that is Christ's body, we are all members of one another and are called to serve one another. Which brings me back to the cup of water. When I worked my summer jobs people were supportive of me even when they weren't Christians which makes me wonder how much more we could do for one another as Jesus' people. Supporting one another is important because we are all members of Christ who gave much more than a cup of water to save us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to serve one another and love one another as You have loved us and help us to earnestly serve Your kingdom. In Your name we pray. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*



Saturday, March 2, 2024

Read [Mark 9:42-50](#)

“Fire and Millstones and Salt, Oh My!”

Jesus’ disciples have been on the receiving end of a firehose. Everywhere they travel, Jesus teaches them new lessons. He heals someone, and explains to them the Kingdom of Heaven. He gives a sermon, and afterward explains what it means. Fortunately (for them and for us), they wrote down these teachings. Mark describes to us how often they just didn’t get it, but later, Jesus’ words came back to them.

In just this chapter alone, three of them had witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration. They were humbled when, despite all their recent experience travelling, preaching, and performing miracles, they were stumped by a very difficult demon. Jesus came on the scene and handled it like a master. But then, even after all that, they ignored what they’d learned for a brief session of “Which of us is Greatest”.

In today’s reading, Jesus wraps up with another lesson, packed full of vivid imagery. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” I’ve never imagined that scene, but it sounds really bad. But, it gives an idea of how deep Jesus’ love goes, even for the smallest child (or adult).

And then, fresh off the road where He’d repeatedly given sight to the blind, healed the sick, made the lame walk, and the dumb speak; Jesus teaches them how much less important are those things compared to losing the Kingdom of God. “If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.” He wasn’t advocating self-mutilation; no, He loves life and wants us to have it to the fullest. But losing your hair, becoming arthritic, needing joint replacements, and such “normal” parts of getting old mean nothing compared to having heaven to look forward to.

These words were immediately helpful to the disciples, as soon, Jesus would no longer be physically with them and they would go to the corners of the earth to share Him with all nations. But His teaching is for us, too. He closed this lesson with these mysterious words, “For everyone will be salted with fire... Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

The disciples would be tried by fire – persecutions, beatings, being jailed; even the constant travel where they carried everything they owned, and often slept in a strange bed. You and I don’t have those trials, but you know exactly what Jesus is talking about. When that diagnosis comes in, when you learn what your child has gotten into, when you hear of another school shooting – these trials are meant to draw you closer to Jesus.

And the salt? That’s God’s Word filling your very being with life, love, and hope.

We pray: Lord God, please continue to draw me to You when I endure trials. And fill me with Your Word to “salt” me for those hard times. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, March 4, 2024

Read Mark 10:1-12

### What God Has Joined

“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Mark 10:9

As we meet up with Jesus at the opening of Mark 10, He is approaching Jerusalem. He is quickly confronted with another challenge from the Pharisees asking about whether divorce is lawful or not. The Pharisees are looking for allowances, disclaimers, or special circumstances. In such a test, the Pharisees could have been looking to justify their own behavior that men could divorce their wives for any reason. OR They may have thought they could trap Jesus if He discarded the law altogether.

He deals with their question, but His focus is on God’s intentions for marriage. One man and one woman becoming one flesh - united as one. This is following God’s intention in creation. And the joining together is meant to be permanent. Why? Because God has joined the two together.

Perhaps this is an aspect of marriage that we lose sight of: God joins. In modern society, we think of every part of marriage as a series of our choices: who to date, who to marry, when to do so, and whether to stay married. It’s fair to say we have choices, but God joins husband and wife together. In the bond of marriage, He makes two into one. This does not make marriage easy in a broken world, any more than the various limbs of my body are free from pain and injury in this sin-bent world.

Yet God joins the two together. As a gift. And as a sign. As a gift that these two are no longer meant for another. As a sign of Christ’s love and care for us – His bride, the Church – to whom He has graciously joined Himself, from whom He will never walk away. “What God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to cherish the gift of marriage. Forgive our failures to treasure the gift as You have given. And help us see through this gift, the sign of Your faithful love for us. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Read Mark 10:13-16

### His Child

God is so good to me! He has given me skills in life, and has taught me to listen, to learn, to be so much in life. And I turn around and get proud of all of that. I consider myself an adult, independent, decision-making, and life-guiding. In my personal evaluation, I put myself ahead of all others, especially those who can't accomplish what I have done!

What God has to put up with me! I am so glad that He cares for me, that He made me His, I am so glad that I think, somehow, that God came for me because of my "charms", my accomplishments. But in reality, He loved me with no accomplishments - adult or not, nothing I "achieve" is worth saving. I would have been cheaper with fewer accomplishments!

He has made me His child and has taken over my life, throwing out my desire and dedication to sin. He is the one I look to for help and guidance. How could I then put down others, others with more "accomplishments" or with fewer accomplishments, when God has removed anything I am responsible for to make me worthwhile to Him? Even as an "adult", a speaking, thinking, doing person, I am a child. When I come to God I am a child, And that tells me that everyone, young or old, baby or geriatric, is a child. Since nothing I can do helps, then if I couldn't do anything, I would be the same to God. I have been His since a child, am still a child. Praise the Lord.

Prayer: Help me Lord to remember that all are children for You. Thank you for loving me, and taking me in, when beginning my life and at the end of my life. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Read Mark 10:17-31

### Confession and *Following* Jesus

Jesus is in the region of Judea beyond the Jordan River here at this point in His journey to Jerusalem. The Pharisees tested Jesus about divorce, and the crowds gathered around Him, bringing children to Him, and the disciples tried to prevent them. Jesus teaches the *Kingdom of God* belongs to such as these ...Text note: ἀκολουθεῖ, *akōlouthay—follow*.

Now, Jesus is setting back out on His journey. A man knelt before Jesus, calling Him, Good Teacher, asking what he “**must do to inherit eternal life?**” (v. 17). And Jesus said, “**No one is good except God alone**” (v. 18). Then Jesus went through the commandments with the man; and then the man says that he has kept these commands—the Words of Yahweh God. Then the text says how Jesus looked at the man, and “**loved him**” (v. 21).

Let’s pause for a second and think about Private Confession and Absolution. In private/individual confession and absolution; between *Luther’s Small Catechism* and the *Lutheran Service Book* (pp. 292-93); Meditation on the Ten Commandments (Words), the Lord’s Prayer, and penitential Psalms (6,32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 141), are encouraged for preparation in confession of sins.

Martin Luther said, “Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of ... but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts ... Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commands ...” Have you kept any one of these as you should? Can anyone keep the Word of God entirely whole? No one except Jesus Christ alone.

This man, in Mark’s account, is kneeling before God. The man refuses to confess that he is a sinner in his error and “ability” to keep God’s entire counsel, Law, and Commands as he claimed; “**Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth**” (v. 20). So Jesus loved the man; And still, the man could not *follow* Jesus, walking away toward his many possessions.

Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God, the Word of God incarnate. Jesus remains and continues to be the crucified and risen Savior for you and me today! Jesus fulfilled the Law and Words of God for the redemption of all mankind from sin, death, hell, and Satan, just as Jesus said He would. Jesus also bids us to die and rise with Him in our Baptism; And in Baptism, we live daily in true repentant faith that confesses sin and *follows* Jesus into eternal life. All who suffer for the sake of Christ and the Gospel receive Jesus’ eternal promise now in His rule and reign and in the age to come ... For Jesus is Eternal Life!

Prayer – Lord Jesus, Grant me true repentant faith to confess my sins and *follow* You today and in the age to come in Your Eternal Word and Promise of Life Eternal. In Your Name. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, March 7, 2024  
Read Mark 10:32-34

### When We Don't Get It

Sometimes they just don't get it. For a third time, Jesus has told His disciples that the Son of Man must suffer and die and on the third day rise again. Jesus spoke clearly to His followers about what had to happen and again they just didn't get it. It's hard to tell what was happening in their hearts.

Did they think Jesus was speaking metaphorically but had no idea what it could mean?

Did they think He was being facetious or joking?

Did they understand His words but simply had no room in their hearts to understand?

Whatever the case, it's true that the same issue comes up today. It is impossible for nonbelievers to comprehend what a dying and rising Christ means for them. The words of Paul are true, the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us, it is the power of God. The apostles were not particularly special men. Mostly they were gruff tradesmen, not idiots per se but certainly not well educated. They were not chosen for their abilities and talents but by the irresistible will of God. They had no special insight into Jesus' words. They were in the same boat as us.

Until one crucial moment: when they received the Holy Spirit.

After this moment, they become twelve of the most important men in history with no shortage of impressive boldness and rhetorical skill and brilliance and understanding. So it is with us. We believe the words of Jesus only by the Spirit's prompting. We trust the unjust crucifixion of a lower-class Jew thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away to be the climactic point of all history and the salvation of our souls. We are blessed to look back through the Scriptures with understanding because the Spirit has enlightened our hearts to believe Jesus' words.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, continue to enlighten our hearts to believe all that Christ has taught us. Lead us to join Christ in His suffering and death so that we might join Him in His resurrection. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, March 8, 2024

Read Mark 10:37-40

### You Don't Know What You're Asking

There have been many times when I have asked God for things. The things I have asked for have ranged in importance from the trivial to the existential and in many cases I don't know if I could point to a clear answer to the prayers, though I would say that they have all been answered in one way or another. In our text for today, we see James and John make a very clear request and in return, Jesus gives a very clear answer. James and John know exactly what they want, they want to share in the glory that is coming to the Messiah. They are hoping that they can leverage their close relationship with Jesus in order to get special places for themselves where they will share in Jesus' glory. Jesus gives a simple response and tells them that they don't know what they are asking for.

I think that we can all sympathize with James and John. I think that we would all like to have a close seat with Jesus, but I think that just like James and John we don't always know what we are asking for. The places at Jesus' right and left are not prepared for the disciples but rather they are for two criminals. The disciples don't quite get it yet even though Jesus has just finished explaining it, but Jesus' glory will come at the cross and those places of honor are the crosses to His left and right. Jesus enters His glory when He is hanging on the cross in agony standing between us and the Father. Someday we will be able to join with Jesus in His eternal glory but in this age joining Jesus in His glory looks like a cross. When we ask Jesus for glory, He just might give us what we ask for and we shouldn't be surprised when that glory looks like His glory on the cross where we can share His love with others just as He did.

Prayer: Lord, help us to follow after you and be good examples of Your love for those around us. Keep us in the faith so that we will see the glory which will have no end. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, March 9, 2024

Read [Mark 10:46-52](#)

“Too Busy!”

You’d been dating for a long time before finally becoming engaged to the love of your life. You can’t say why it took so long, but finally, the big day is here. You’ve gotten your hair trimmed and styled just right, you have the finest clothes to wear, the church is beautiful, the flowers perfect – this is going to be the best day of your life! So now, hurriedly driving to get there on time, you barely notice the guy on the side of the road with the flat tire. You turn your head and watch him as you go by, with a million reasons racing through your mind why, on this of all days, you can’t stop to help.

Seriously, would you stop to help even if it was just an ordinary day? You could get dirty, it’s just a trick and he might carjack you, it’s been a long time since you changed a tire. Your list may be different than mine, but for most of us, it would have to be an unusual circumstance to go out of our way for a stranger.

In today’s reading, Jesus’ earthly ministry was drawing to a close. He’s on His way to Jerusalem for what He knows to be His last time. He recently raised Lazarus from the dead. He’s had enormous crowds following Him everywhere He goes, and He knows where He’s headed isn’t going to be friendly. The Jewish leaders want Him killed – they’ve already tried to stone Him. And, Jesus is going there to meet all of them, face to face. The High Priests, the Sanhedrin, and the religious guards, along with throngs of Pharisees and Sadducees, many with hearts filled with hate for Him. Not only is Jesus going to the capitol and the Temple, He’s going to personally visit all the top political leaders there – Herod and Pilate. And, if that’s not enough, it’s Passover.

So, on the day before His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He hears the voice of someone calling to Him from the roadside, “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**” It turns out to be a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, calling Him by this Messianic title. Will Jesus stop? Could there be any question?! Of course, Jesus stops, restores the man’s eyesight, and is immediately joined by Bartimaeus on the road to Jerusalem.

In a sense, Jesus was more like that person on the way to their wedding than meets the eye. He is the bridegroom of His Church. His feet smell better right now than any bridegroom in history (after Mary anointed them with expensive perfume). He’s prepared Himself since Adam and Eve’s first sin for this upcoming day. He’ll go to Jerusalem and declare His love for His bride and go to the cross to consummate the ceremony.

But today? Just six event-filled days before this? Today, He stops and has mercy on this poor, faithful sinner.

We pray: Son of David, have mercy on me, a poor sinner. And, especially when I think I’m too busy, help me share Your mercy with those around me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, March 11, 2024

Read Mark 11:1-11

### He Did This To Himself

The Palm Sunday account is one of the most familiar stories in the Gospels. Jesus sends two disciples to borrow an unused donkey. Any questions will be put aside by the disciples telling the owner, "The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately." Everything happens just as Jesus said. And the whole city of Jerusalem welcomes Jesus as the city once welcomed King David with shouts of Hosanna!

What struck me in re-reading this account was the first part. Jesus is orchestrating the whole thing!

We are right to recoil over the cruelty and cost of our sin as Jesus will be betrayed, beaten, disgraced, and discarded upon the cross. We should grieve our sin as we consider the cross. We did this to Him, not Pontius Pilate, not the guards, not the religious leaders. We all did this by our sin.

All this is true, and yet misses the beautiful truth that He did this to Himself. He has already predicted His death three times. He has made the trip to Jerusalem while knowing the blood-thirsty opposition awaiting Him. He uses His divine authority to procure a donkey to raise expectations and ensure that jealous men would seek His execution.

He did this to Himself! Not by a series of mistakes or missteps, like when we often us this sentence. No. Not all.

He did this to Himself...for you.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, as You entered Jerusalem, You used Your divine power to fulfill prophecy and ride as a Son of David – ensuring the reaction of those who would kill You. Later in the week, You will refuse to take advantage of Your divine power to escape the lies and crooked trial that will condemn You. You did this to Yourself in love for me! Gratitude seems too small a word for so great a sacrifice, and yet it is all I have. Thank You. Thank You. A thousand times, thank You, dear Lord. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Read Mark 11:12-16

### Lessons From a Fig Tree

A fig tree is used in the Bible to illustrate a follower of God, a Christian. The point of the comparison concerns the fruit of the tree; the Christian is expected to show “good” fruit for God. And what does God want as fruit - good works, that is, doing things for others?

The question I get when I read about this tree is this: What fruit am I producing? And here I get in trouble. God tells me to do my good deeds in ‘secret’, not necessarily anonymously, but without self-glorification. I want others to know that I am a good person too. I want them to, maybe not praise me, but accept me, and in that way, to honor me for doing good.

The problem is: I keep finding myself letting people know. I find it so gratifying to be recognized as a good man that I just have to let that secret out. And then, well then, I’m not doing the good work I would be praised for. In fact, if I keep seeking glory, I will lose my relationship with my LORD and no longer be a Christian, even if I look like one to others.

How I need repentance! Jesus cursed the false tree with no fruit. I don’t want Him to curse me. So I turn to Him, deep sorrow that I hurt Him by my selfishness. I keep doing those good things I spoiled but praying to God each time that no one will recognize that I did them!

Prayer: Thank you, LORD. Thank you for tearing me up and restoring my sense of humility. Let all that I do, please, be yours, and let not others praise me. Amen

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Read Mark 11:15-19

### House of Prayer

*“And [Jesus] was teaching them and saying to them, ‘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.”*

Mark 11:17

Jesus and His disciples are now in Jerusalem to fulfill all that is written of Him. Jesus is at the temple and our Lord and Savior Jesus does an amazing thing here. It may be overlooked too often that Jesus is also God incarnate, the Eternal Son of God and Judge of mankind. Jesus rightly displays His discipline and judgment as He teaches and acts of the will of the Father and the Spirit, and His divine will and purposes. He drives out those buying and selling in the temple, overturning the money changers' tables and seats. Jesus did not permit anyone to carry a vessel or implements of any kind through the temple. This temple area is believed to be in the court of the Gentiles.

Jesus taught that His house shall be called a House of Prayer. Yahweh had spoken to Isaiah that foreigners of other nations joined to Yahweh, and others, will be gathered with Israel, **“These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”** (Isaiah 56:7; see Isa 56).

And Yahweh also spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah, who had written, **“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.”** (Jeremiah 7:8-11).

Bede the Venerable (673/73 - 735 AD) stated, *“What, my beloved, do you suppose our Lord would do if he should discover people involved in disputes, wasting time gossiping, indulging in unseemly laughter, or engaged in any other sort of wicked actions? Remember: when he saw traders in the temple buying the sacrificial offerings meant to be made to him, he was prompt in getting rid of them. ... These things should cause us great perturbation, beloved; we should dread them exceedingly with well-deserved fear, and carefully avoid them with painstaking diligence, lest he come unexpectedly and find something evil in us, as a result of which we should rightly be scourged and cast out of the church.”*

Prayer – Lord Jesus, Your House of Prayer is Your Body, Your Church. Cast out sinful desires and wicked practices and turn our hearts to You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, March 14, 2024  
Read Mark 11:20-26

### When You Pray...

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” Mark 11:24-25

Jesus is such a difficult Messiah. His words are baffling even to the disciples who followed Him for years. They are amazed at His ability to wither a fig tree and He teaches them that this is only the tip of the iceberg, that anyone who has faith can move mountains.

Our world tells us that prayer is, at best, a meditative exercise to change ourselves and help us come to peace with the world around us. Jesus teaches us that prayer is powerful enough to change the world itself, that our Heavenly Father is listening and answering every word we pray. This should be a word of comfort, but for most of us, it is quite the opposite. Because we know that we aren't moving mountains, it's clear that our hearts are filled with doubt. Jesus' words of good news turn out to be condemnation of our lackluster faith.

Yet, this saying is best understood through the eyes of the apostle James who says "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly" (4:2-3). Jesus is not out to destroy our faith but to remind us of what we ought to pray for: forgiveness for ourselves and others. And we are not to doubt that this incredible request, much more difficult than moving a mountain, will be granted for Jesus' sake. Jesus speaks not to weaken our faith but to strengthen it, to remind us of the power of our prayer and teach us how eager our Father is to forgive.

Prayer: Father, forgive us and grant us to forgive also those who have sinned against us. Strengthen our faith that we may pray rightly and receive all the blessings you have in store for us. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, March 15, 2024  
Read Mark 11:28-33

### Stumped

“28 and they said to Him, ‘By what authority do you do these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?’ 29 Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?’” (Mark 11:28-30 ESV).

When I was younger, I worked in retail for several years both at a shoe store and at a farm supply store. I was always pretty good at answering the questions that customers would ask, and I usually didn’t need much help but every now and then I would be stumped, and I couldn’t say anything except, “Let me get my manager.” It was always a bit of a surprise to me when I would get stumped because the questions that would get me were always about things that I had never thought about or if I had I didn’t think that it was important enough to come up with an answer.

I think that in this text the temple authorities have found themselves in the same position as many retail workers. They have no idea how they can respond to the question that Jesus asked without digging a deeper hole for themselves. Jesus has caught these men between a rock and a hard place just like me when I would get asked a hard question at work only, they don’t have the luxury of saying, “Let me ask my manager.” Luckily for us, we know the answers to both sets of questions in the text. We know that the baptism that John gave was from God because John the Baptist was a true prophet sent to prepare the way of the Lord. And we know what authority Jesus had and where He got it from. Jesus had the authority to do and say the things that He said and did because He is the incarnate Word of God and the Son of God, we also know that He has this authority from the Father who sent Jesus and from the Holy Spirit that came to Jesus at His baptism (He was baptized by John). This is good news for us because it means that we know that Jesus really has the authority to forgive us and make us His people forever.

Prayer: Lord, we praise You for Your words to us and for our salvation by Your work for us on the cross. Thank You for having all authority in heaven and on earth. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Read [Mark 12:1-12](#)

### “Jealous God”

Jesus loves to speak in parables. You know, those sometimes-odd stories that teach you something. They’re sometimes easy to understand, other times the most difficult riddles. Sometimes He’d do this to describe the Kingdom of Heaven, others to show how we should treat one another; still others to reveal God. Today’s parable is very different. It’s dark, it’s obvious, it’s pointed at a particular group of people, and it reveals so much to us about our God.

A man planted a perfect vineyard with all the trappings – fences, winepress, and a tower – and rented it to tenants. Every harvest, the tenants would pay a portion to the man as their rent. So far, an absolutely typical business arrangement. Where it goes off the rails, though, is at the time for the first rent payment. The tenants disrespected the man so much they “flayed” the servant he’d sent – he was bloodied and beaten. Again and again and again the man sent servants to collect from the ungrateful tenants, and every time they were either beaten or killed. The text says, “many others” were sent. What kind of man would do this?!

In the real world, would a business owner send more than one when he was treated like this? But, to exaggerate the point even more, the master finally was out of servants and sent his beloved son into this war zone “saying, ‘They will respect my son’”. That’s crazy! Who would do such a thing?! As expected, the evil tenants, knowing they would inherit the vineyard if the master had no heir, killed the son.

Telling this parable to a crowd of religious leaders and ordinary people, the crowd shouted out the answer when Jesus asked what the owner would do – “He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

At this point, Jesus probably looked directly into the faces of those entrusted with the care of God’s people – the priests, scribes, and Pharisees – and took off the gloves. “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

And here we get a glimpse of our “jealous God”. God so loved His people that He sent prophet after prophet, many of whom were beaten or killed. Throughout Israel’s history, many who were given responsibility over His Church had abused that power, used it for personal gain, and betrayed God’s trust.

But God mercifully kept trying, over and over again. And now, His beloved Son stands before these traitorous priests, eyes blazing with anger, and declared judgement. They can keep their trappings, their positions, and their imagined power, but the Vineyard is going to be ruled by Jesus, not them. True, they would kill Him and bury Him outside the city, but there He and His New Jerusalem would rise to fill the world.

We have a jealous God, and He’s jealous for His faithful followers.

We pray: Gracious God, please continue to send faithful servants to tend Your Vineyard. Keep them and us faithful through Your Son, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, March 18, 2024

Read Mark 12:13-17

### What Belongs to God

In today's reading, another group has shown up to trick Jesus, but in thinking about this reading, it's easy for these words to trick us. Jesus redirects the whole thing. The trick question is about taxes, but Jesus wants to talk about something else. This little story isn't about the approaching Tax Day, but a more consequential judgment day.

The leaders try to trap Jesus in His own words. "Does God want us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? What does His Law say?" They knew if He said, "Pay them," He would be in trouble with the people, who hated the Roman taxes, yet if He said, "Don't pay them," He could be executed by the Romans for rebellion.

Jesus knows what's going on, but uses the moment for a larger point. So He asks whose name and image are on the tax coin. Oh, Caesar's? Well, then, give Caesar what belongs to him. But more importantly, give God what belongs to Him. Give God your whole heart and mind, body and soul together -- because you yourself carry the image of God.

What He said to the leaders, He says to us today: "Give to God what belongs to God." Give yourselves, because God has created you in His image and has placed His Name upon you in Baptism. You are not your own, you belong to the Lord.

And to place that fact beyond the shadow of a doubt, Jesus is on the way to Calvary -- to carry away your sins and mine, to remove every possible claim the devil might have on any human being as a result of our wrongdoing. His suffering and death cleared away any claims the devil might have on us. And now that He has risen from the dead, Jesus promises us that we who believe in Him will also rise to everlasting life -- new, freshly minted, with the image of God because we belong to Jesus.

Prayer: Father, You have put Your image upon me, but I have marred it in many ways. Forgive and restore me in Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Read Mark 12:18-27

### The Present

At times I find it easy to pay more attention to those who have died before me than to the God who is here with me now. But how silly that is. The past is out of my control, and the future will come with or without me doing anything about it, but the present is here for me to be and to enjoy.

Do I need proof that God cares for me, cares enough to bring me home to Him when I die? No, surely when He submitted Himself to the world to save me, He won't abandon me or forget me. But He has demonstrated that He does save people, that at least some of those who died are now alive. God claims to be the God of Abraham, not the God that Abraham worshiped but the God whom Abraham is with now.

I appreciate knowing that. It reminds me that He is the God of me, that I am His now and I will continue to be His, forever. Thus He reminds me that death is not an ending, it is a doorway. I have a home with Him, for which I am merely waiting now. I don't know all about it, but I don't need to know that. One day I will be talking to Abraham myself. I could ask Him what it's like, except that I will live that life myself. I think I will just agree with Him, to thank God!

Prayer: I thank you my God for the eternal life You have given me, but also for the fact that You have given evidence to me in the Bible for that. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Read Mark 12:28-34

### Hear, O Israel; Hear, O Christians—God's people

*“And when Jesus saw that he [the scribe] answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.”*

Mark 12:34

Jesus is teaching in Jerusalem and had just explained to the Sadducees that God is the God of the living. Then one of the scribes saw that Jesus **“answered them well”** (v. 28). Jesus does all things well. We recall how Jesus had healed the blind man in Sidon in the region of the Decapolis, **“And they were utterly astonished, saying, ‘He [Jesus] has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’”** (Mark 7:37).

And now the question Jesus leaves no one daring to question Him. The scribe asked Jesus, **“Which commandment is the most important of all?”** Jesus is rightly pointing them to *The Shema*; “Hear, O Israel”—שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל — *shaw-mah yis-raw-ale*. *The Shema* comes from Deuteronomy 6:4, **“Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one!”** (*Legacy Standard Bible*). Jesus continued with the Word of God in Deuteronomy, **“You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”** (Deut 6:4). That is the most important command.

And the second most important command, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18, **“... you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.”** There are none greater than these. What else is there to say? Yes and Amen! Jesus saw that the scribe answered wisely and was **“not far from the kingdom of God”** (v. 34). The Kingdom of God was standing right before this scribe. Wherever Jesus is, there is the Kingdom of God—there is the rule and reign of Yahweh.

For Jesus is the Word of God become flesh, to die and atone for our sin, and on the third day, rise! Yes, wherever Jesus is, there is heaven—Yahweh God is dwelling with His people.

Jesus serves you in His Divine Service in His Word, and in Spirit and Truth. In the means of grace, continually working daily in your Baptism. Grace is handed over to you in The Holy Supper of Christ's True Body and Blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Hear, O Israel; Hear, O Christians—God's people, Yahweh is our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Yahweh is One, **“there is no other besides Him”** (v. 32). Jesus is the Wisdom of God, and Jesus rules and reigns in His Kingdom, here and now.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You do all things well. Grant us true repentance to turn to You from sin. Grant us true faith to always hear and follow Your Word in loving You and loving our neighbors as ourselves. For You, Jesus—Yahweh our God, live and rule with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*



Thursday, March 21, 2024  
Read Mark 12:35-37

### King of Kings

35 And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? 36 David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared,

" 'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet." ' "

37 David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?" And the great throng heard him gladly.

To fully understand what's happening in today's short lesson, we should review quickly the things that come before: at the end of Mark 11, we have a question of authority, then a parable against the leaders of the people, a teaching about taxes and authority that causes people to *marvel*, a question about the resurrection where the Sadducees are condemned for ignoring the Scriptures and the power of God, and finally a question from a scribe who is said to be "not far from the kingdom of God."

After all these questions and teachings of authority, no one dares to ask Jesus questions. All of these lead up to Jesus' teaching about the nature of the Christ. Jesus cites a peculiar Psalm as definitive proof that the Christ is not the son of David (though elsewhere the Gospels go to great lengths to show Jesus as the son of David). Jesus wants to show that even the most learned men among them are completely ignorant of what is most important. The Christ will turn out to be not a mere human king but God in the flesh, carrying all the authority and teachings of God and bringing not a human kingdom but the Kingdom of God. All the people's misplaced questions and trust come to the fore as Jesus directs them to the questions they should be asking and the authority they should be seeking. *And the great throng heard him gladly.*

Prayer: Jesus, You are King of kings and Lord of lords, teach us to seek Your authority and ask the questions You wish to answer. Help us to hear You gladly. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, March 22, 2024  
Read Mark 12:38-40

### The Problem with the Best Seats

“38 And in his teaching he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces 39 and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts 40 who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’”

I sure am glad that there is nothing in this reading that should concern us Lutherans. We tend to sit in the back of church. We tend not to overemphasize how we dress for church. And finally, in most Lutheran churches that I’ve been to you can set your watch by when they leave church because if they go much over an hour the pastor will hear about it. I sure am glad that this text doesn’t apply to us. Or maybe it does.

While we have conditioned ourselves to be careful about crossing the line in these, I think that we are just as susceptible to the same problems as everyone else. I think that Jesus’ warning about the scribes can help us as well. In each of the things that Jesus warns against the core issue is pride. These men wanted to be the greatest on their own terms and for them that looked like having nice things, being looked at by everyone, and asserting their dominance over those less fortunate than themselves. Christ tells his followers to be different. We are not supposed to do the things that Christ warns against but even more than that we aren’t supposed to take so much pride in ourselves that forget to care for our neighbors.

As those who follow after Christ, we are called to be humble instead of proud. We are called to be servants which can be really hard, but we have a good example. The one that we follow was the greatest servant of all time. He not only lived a humble life, but He died a humiliating death. Jesus was the most fortunate person in all of history. He has all authority, but He chose to be a servant and He did that for you. When we think about taking pride in what we have or what we can do we would be wise to remember who it is that has given us everything.

Prayer: Lord thank You for becoming a servant and for rescuing us from the consequences of our sin. Thank You for being our example in humility. And thank You for being You and working all things for good. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Read [Mark 12:41-44](#)

### “The Widow’s Offering”

The very idea of an “offering” is one of the most complicated, difficult, and troublesome things for people to understand. What’s going on when a person puts their gift in the offering plate? Of course – “they’re returning to God a representative portion of all that He has given to them”. Is that what’s going through your head though, as you place your gift in the basket? Or is it something more along the lines, “God better appreciate this sacrifice I’m making (it cost me dearly!)”

This simple act can initiate some of the most unintended, crass, and even selfish thoughts that may fly through our minds. You might think about what you’re giving up, how people will react to seeing you dropping a big bill onto the pile, whether or not your gift will be used wisely, even whether or not it’s OK to make change for a bigger bill. Our sinful minds can really mess with something that should be a beautiful thing!

In today’s reading, Jesus “takes a break” from teaching to sit for a while – so He can do more teaching! As He and His disciples sit in the Temple’s outer courts, they watch the great crowds of pilgrims bringing offerings to the Temple. This was probably the time of year when the Temple budget really came together, as throngs of the faithful from around the world made the annual pilgrimage. They’d been saving all year to bring their best to God’s dwelling place, so the piles were rapidly growing. Jesus, noticing how the rich gave some pretty impressive amounts, had some words to say to His followers.

As is Jesus’ way, His words probably shocked His disciples. Seeing the numerous, large gifts of silver and gold, Jesus said that the two copper coins given by a poor widow were the greatest gift they’d witnessed! Think about it – most people wouldn’t have even noticed her. She was alone, dressed very plainly, and may have even been ashamed of having so little to give. Compared to the loud murmurs for those who’d made large offerings, no one even noticed her \$1.85 (in today’s currency).

But Jesus noticed. He saw that she gave everything she had. He knew that her faith was so strong that she looked only to God for sustenance. While left with nothing, she knew that she’d eat again, soon, because God would provide. She showed everyone that day what it looks like to truly worship God. She understood what Paul would later write to the Romans: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

She knew that her two, small coins weren’t going to buy much of anything, and even that God Himself has no need for money! But she knew God’s love for her and wanted others to be able to worship Him, too. Meanwhile, her thoughts were centered on all that God had done and would certainly continue to do for her. I’ll bet Jesus smiled at her worship.

We pray: Gracious God, You give me all I need and have even given me Your Son; thank You. In His Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, March 25, 2024

Read Mark 13:1-13

### What Wonderful Stones

On this Monday of Holy Week, Jesus is telling His disciples about signs of the age and the destruction of the temple. We'll hear more about these things in the devotions through the next few days.

But what caught my eye was what caught the disciples' eye, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" (Mark 13:1) As the Lutheran Study Bible points out, "huge stone blocks, some measuring 37ft long, 18ft wide, and 12ft high, and decorated with gold, were used to build Herod's temple, one of the most impressive man-made structures of the ancient world (LSB p. 1685)."

To give a little perspective, that means one of these gold-covered stones would fill the entire front of our sanctuary from one side to the other, stretch out to the first pew, and reach up into the organ box. No wonder the disciples are blown away by these wonderful gold-covered stones!

And Jesus' response is basically, "Yeah they look great and impressive, but they won't last."

Contrast this with the words of 1 Peter 2, "As you come to him, a living stones rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Peter goes on to refer to Jesus as the cornerstone, that is the foundation on which God's new temple has been built. And what wonderful stones! You yourselves are being built up as a spiritual house through Jesus Christ.

Herod's beautiful temple with insanely huge and beautiful stones lasted for less than 100 years. But you are part of a building that Christ is constructing (His Church!) that will last forever and since each stone is covered in the righteousness of Jesus, the beauty of the house of God's people shines far greater as well.

Prayer: Father, thank You for making me part of Your temple that will last forever, built on the foundation of Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Read Mark 13:14-29

### Comfort in Troubled Times

God has promised me that there will be terrible times in the world and that sometimes, they might affect me! But this was not to terrify me, rather it was to reassure me that when the world threatens, God protects.

I have needed that reassurance when I read the news. I know that I can trust God to watch over me, but I worry that I should face up to persecution and trouble without letting it bother me. After all, our Lord accepted suffering and death in my place, shouldn't I be willing to accept that as well? God reminds me that while I might be called on to face such troubles, He never wants His children to face troubles they don't need to. Thus, He tells me to "flee", to travel to other places where I can live in Him in peace.

How this reality comforts me. God does not take pleasure in my troubles, even when they might seem to glorify Him, even when they look like my stubborn insistence on being His child will tell others about Him. No, He tells me to leave. Jesus implores, begs, the Christians to leave Jerusalem as He prophesies about the destruction of the city coming in the future.

So today, I take comfort. God has promised to always be with me. He has assured me that the world has no trouble so big that I will be forced to leave Him. But He also tells me to leave if I can avoid trouble. Praise the LORD.

Prayer: Please God, keep me in your hands. Don't let the threats of the world freeze me into inaction but let me keep my mind on you. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Read Mark 13:24-27

### Jesus Will Gather His Chosen People

*"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."* Mk 13:26

Jesus describes Himself as *the Son of Man* coming with the *clouds* with much/*great* miraculous *power*, wonder, and *glory* "**in those days**" (v. 24). Wow! So Jesus is continuing to speak privately to Peter, James, John, and Andrew, sitting on the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem (2700 ft above sea level, *see pic*), about when these great buildings will be thrown down and the sign of all this (see Mark 13:3-5).



Jesus says, "**In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven**" (v. 24-27; see Deut 30:4; Isaiah 13:10; 43:5; Dan 7:13; Joel 2:10; 3:4,15; 4:15; Heb 12:26; Rev 1:7; 6:12). All this will happen! The prophets wrote of all this, Jesus fulfills and will fulfill all these miraculous things. The whole world will see *the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power*. The Eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, does what He says. And on the Last Day, He will gather us, His chosen!

The next few days, we reflect on Jesus' institution of the Sacrament of the Altar, the New Covenant in His Blood, His betrayal, arrest, trial, and condemnation to death by crucifixion, just as Jesus said would happen. Crucifixion does not look powerful and glorious to us at a glance, but here, God revealed to you and me as a Savior and light, power and wisdom of God for salvation, in Jesus' death for our sin. For your sin. Yet, God's plan of restoration, power, and glory does not end there. He will rise and rule and return, just as He said.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, when You speak, You are the Word that accomplishes that for which You go and are sent forth. Grant us to live and love as you have loved us and given us life, forgiveness, and salvation. For You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, March 28, 2024  
Read Mark 13:28-31

### Holding to What Lasts

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Mk 13:31

When I was a kid, my favorite store (like everyone else’s!) was Toys R Us. Aisle after glorious aisle. Just thinking about it, I can visualize tall rows stuffed with everything, “From bikes to trains to video games.” (I won’t continue the jingle, it will be stuck in your head for two days.) But it’s now been six years since a single bike, train, or video game has been sold. Like most things of this world, Toys R Us has come and gone.

Like many people this week, you were likely grieved and mesmerized by the video of the collapsing Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore. The event itself included the tragic loss of lives and serious economic consequences to anyone with any connection to that harbor. Yet when I read about the bridge, something else stood out – the age of the bridge. It was built in 1977, the year I was born.

The bridge collapse got me to thinking about Toys R Us and the many things that come and go in this world, even over the span of our brief lives. In fact, our Lord points out in today’s reading that “heaven and earth,” (by that He means all of creation) will pass away, but He does give us something that lasts. He gives us something that is not destroyed by online shopping, mechanical failure, or even decay.

He gives us His Word. His Word gives life because it brings us Him, His forgiveness, His assurance, His direction, and His hope. It is good to enjoy and appreciate the things of creation and even for the things we shape from creation (like bridges and the greatest toy store ever), but there is one thing to cling to: God’s everlasting word.

Prayer: Jesus, You are the very Word made flesh and You have given us Your Word to guide us, direct us, forgive us, and enliven us. Lead us to ever cling to Your word that will not pass away. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Friday, March 29, 2024  
Read Mark 13:32-36

### Staying Awake

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. 35 Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—36 lest he comes suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

I am not great at keeping a schedule. I don't keep a calendar and I don't write things down, when I need to remember to do something I just trust myself to remember. This system works ok for me, I don't often miss appointments and I turn in my assignments on time with only a few exceptions but still this system of mine is far from perfect. Because I'm not very organized, I find that I leave important stuff until the last minute which always causes some stress for me. I end up thinking that I have all the time in the world until I need to get things done and in a manner of speaking, I fall asleep. I let myself quit worrying about the things that are important and I look to other things. This is the kind of behavior but on a far larger scale is what Jesus is warning us about in this text. Jesus doesn't want His followers to procrastinate in their faith. He wants them to live in an active faith right now not sometime in the future. Christ warns us to be prepared because He loves us, and He doesn't want us to be unprepared for His coming. He knows just how easy it can be for people to get distracted because He became a man a lived among us, but He was never distracted, He always knew exactly what to be looking toward and he wants us to do the same. He remained focused on the cross something that I think most people would want to be distracted from, but He stayed focused. Unlike Him we don't have to stay awake for something as ugly as the cross because Jesus already did that for us. We get to stay awake for something much better because we know that what is coming is the promise of new life forever with Him.

Prayer: Lord, help us to stay awake while we are in this world. Keep us vigilant for Your coming hopeful that when You come, we will be with You forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*



Saturday, March 30, 2024

Read [Mark 14:1-2](#)

### “Target Run”

If you ever want to feel in awe of greatness, of amazement at courage under fire, or just hear countless, incredible, stories of honor, skill, camaraderie, and blind, dumb luck, just read any of the stories of the Mighty 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in WWII. The B-17 bomber, called the “Flying Fortress”, was one of the first large, four engine bombers that were used to bring the war home to the Nazis. Each manned by 10 men, they’d launch through cloud-filled skies from England, form up with literally hundreds (sometimes over a thousand) of other bombers, and fly toward almost certain death to hit their target for the day.

As they neared that target, some would have already been shot down by German fighters. Others would have succumbed to mechanical failures or anti-aircraft gunfire from below. But the final two minutes were the most deadly. In order for their bombs to impact close enough to maximize damage, they had to fly straight and level (no evasive maneuvers), constant airspeed, and hold this for 6 – 10 miles. This made them sitting ducks! The Germans were no fools, and concentrated their guns right at this point. Their fighters would even risk being hit from the ground to strike at this most vulnerable time. But, with engines crippled, planes riddled with bullet-holes, and injured and killed crewmen, they flew on to the target. 71% of them were killed, captured, or otherwise missing in action. But, they had a mission to do and nothing else mattered.

Two days before He’d be turned over to be crucified, Jesus was on His “target run”. He knew that His mission would take Him (with 100% certainty) to death. As a matter of fact, His death was His mission. He wouldn’t be so much as lifting a finger against those killing Him. He healed the ear of one of His captors! No, He was purposely dying to forgive those enemies. He didn’t call His accusers names; He prayed for their forgiveness, insisting they didn’t know what they were doing. He was silent when He easily could have defended Himself.

How many “off-ramps” could Jesus have taken? He could have “hidden” Himself as He’d done before. He could have travelled to Samaria, where He’d be safe. He could have called in legions of angels, who would have gladly defeated any foe. But no. Jesus had a mission. His focus was solely on the cross. Nothing would turn Him from His goal. He would willingly go to the Chief Priests and Scribes who had already decided to kill Him. He was focused. He was on His way to die on the cross, for me and for you.

We pray: A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, The guilt of sinners bearing, And, laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing; Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint, That spotless life to offer, He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies, The mockery, and yet replies, “All this I gladly suffer.” Amen. (LSB 438)

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, April 1, 2024

Read Mark 14:3-9

### A Loving Wastefulness

In love for her Master, Mary gave away the finest thing she could offer. In one sense, it was wasted, but there's a kind of wastefulness that God loves. It flows out of a heart that wants to do everything for Him. This love is better than all calculated wisdom that first and foremost considers the benefit. Judas was the voice of common sense. Certainly, his reason was driven by bad motives, but the argument he used is one many good Christians have used. But Jesus said Mary was right. There is a loving wastefulness, a joyful extravagance that vies its best to Jesus. We have a right to waste our time when it means listening to Jesus like Mary did when she sat at His feet and listened to His Word while there was so much to do around the house. We have the right to waste our gifts on Him. When the soldiers were dividing Jesus' clothes on Golgotha, they were astonished that this poor prophet had such an expensive garment that was woven in a single piece. Surely this was a gift from someone who wanted to give Him the best. Gifts like this can still be given today. It's completely all right to decorate our churches if we do it out of love for Jesus and a desire to glorify Him in a way that allows others to experience the heavenly joy of the Divine Service.

Now we will always have the poor among us, Jesus said. So love for Him must include love for those who suffer here on earth. But there is also a place for a blessed wastefulness that gives without a calculating attitude or weighing the consequences. We may not always exhibit such a wonderfully extravagant wastefulness, but we understand where Mary was coming from – giving the best she had to Him who would give His life for her and for each of us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have truly given extravagantly for me and for all people by giving all. As I consider all You have given to me, open my heart to respond in similarly extravagant love toward You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion from Pastor Jason was adapted from*

***To Live with Christ*** by Bo Giertz p. 261-262

Tuesday, April 2, 2024

Read Mark 14:10-11

### Judas and Us

Ah, Judas! How he threw away his place in heaven, threw it away for 30 pieces of silver and a feeling that he had triumphed over a bad situation. What a shame and what an example to avoid. ... And yet, I find myself doing the same thing!

I'm not so blatant about my betrayal. No I do a decent job of concealing what I'm doing, even to myself. But, but ... It's still the same thing. As God told Cain, "Sin is crouching at my door!" And like Cain, I embrace it.

When sin comes around, it doesn't label itself, rather it gives me self-satisfied justification. I hurt my neighbor, insulting him/her. I steal time from my job for my personal desires. I keep my mouth shut when someone needs my witness to their innocence. I fail my marriage partner, my wife/my husband, resenting and getting even. There are so many ways to sin!

And that is doing the same as Judas. He took sin into his heart and life, throwing away the time he spent with Jesus, for nothing serious. When I look at the desirability of sin, when I rashly hurry into doing wrong, then I am throwing away the forgiveness that Jesus bought for me on the cross.

But Jesus died for those sin, as well as the others, He died to make me His. So, unlike Judas, I repent, I come back to Jesus, pleading for His forgiveness and help. He died for us both, but I am still His. Alleluia.

Prayer: I thank you my Lord Jesus, that you don't reject me like I reject you. Please support me, according to Your promise, to continue to cleans all that out of my life. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Read Mark 14:12-21

### Jesus Will Be Betrayed

*“For the Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”*

Mk 14:21.

Jesus and His disciples are getting ready to “**eat the Passover**” (v. 12) on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread “**when the [πάσχα—*pascha*] Passover lamb was being sacrificed**” (v. 14). This is on Holy Thursday where Jesus celebrates *Pascha*, institutes His Supper in His New Covenant, commands His disciples “**to love one another**” (John 13:34) as He loved us, is betrayed, and later arrested. It is no coincidence that Jesus the Messiah was betrayed on Holy Thursday and handed over as “**our Passover lamb had to be sacrificed**” (1 Cor 5:7) into Holy (Good/Glorious) Friday. Jesus is fulfilling and fulfilled the Passover Celebration Feast. All of it! We celebrate Holy Week going into the Festival and season of Easter/*Pascha* as Jesus is our *Pascha*—Passover Lamb Resurrected from the dead.

Easter/Passover is generally celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon or after the vernal (Spring) equinox. Israel and Jesus celebrated *Pascha* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month of Nisan (see Exodus 12-13), continuing into the early hours of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Jesus continued fulfilling what is written, the night He was betrayed, Yahweh’s plan of salvation.

Judas will betray Jesus, and Jesus knows it. Judas *is that man—woe to that man—*better off not even born! On the one hand, Jesus, “**the Son of Man goes as it is written of Him**” (v. 21), and on the other hand, “**woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!**”

Richard Lenski commented, “Since his own course is fixed in Scripture, Jesus turns to the awful condition and fate of the traitor. He cries “woe to that man” and designates him as one who is distant from himself (“that man”). This is not a woe of indignation like the woes in Matt. 23:13, etc., but a woe of deepest grief and pain. Yet this woe, like all others and like its opposite “blessed,” is the verdict upon the traitor. All that causes wretchedness and agony in time and in eternity for the traitor is in this “woe.” When Jesus says “is being betrayed,” the present tense lets Judas know that Jesus knows just how far Judas has already gone. [Through, “**by whom**”] speaks of Judas only as being an instrument; there is another (Satan) who works “through” the traitor.” Judas did not heed Jesus’ warning. By his own fault, “Satan entered into him” (John 13:27). Jesus willingly died for our sins, rose from the dead, and calls us to Himself Baptism daily, to die to sin and rise to life.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You were betrayed to die so that we would have life in Your Name. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, April 4, 2024  
Read Mark 14:22-25

### Making Sense Through the Resurrection

It is difficult to say something new about the words of institution. We hear these words each week in the Service of the Sacrament and their importance is obvious to us. Perhaps for today's reflection, we might zoom out and look at the importance that this passage has in the Gospel of Mark. Coming right between Jesus' prophesy of His betrayal by Judas and His denial by Peter, the institution of the Lord's Supper seems quite understated. If you aren't looking for it, you're likely to read right past it. An uninformed reader has no clue of the importance that these words will have in the worship life of the church.

At first, this is almost scandalous, but it serves as a representative example of the way Mark's Gospel works. It seems that Mark wants his readers to get the genuine experience of Jesus' disciples: Jesus will do or say something of critical importance and it will go completely unnoticed or ignored for lack of understanding. Jesus acts first and answers questions later. He is a very bizarre Teacher who seems to have no concern for the actual learning of His disciples. He makes a strange, difficult statement and promptly goes on to something else.

Of course, Jesus knows what He's doing. All of the loose threads that He leaves are pulled together in His resurrection on the first Easter morning. The women come to the tomb, see it empty, and are bewildered. The angel present says, in so many words, "What's wrong with you, Jesus told you all this stuff would happen and here it is. Go tell those disciples that Jesus meant what He said and everything He said would happen will happen." The women and through them, the disciples were directed to Jesus' confusing and bewildering words as the ultimate source of truth and authority. The whole life of discipleship was to be based on His true and trustworthy word.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, Word of God, You have taught Your disciples all things needful. Teach us to dwell on Your words as all-important, and grant us Your Spirit to thoughtfully discern their meaning for us. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, April 5, 2024  
Read Mark 14:26-28

### The Only Shepherd Capable

“26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away, for it is written ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” (Mark 14:26-28 ESV).

On the day before His death, Jesus spoke to His disciples and warned them about what would happen in the next 24 hours. He told them that hard times were coming and that none of them would endure the struggle ahead. Jesus was their shepherd, and He knew that He was about to be struck. But Jesus didn't leave His disciples with this word; He also told them that He would rise and that He would go before them to Galilee. In some ways, we are a lot like the disciples who were scattered on Good Friday. In the end, Jesus had to go alone to the cross because there is no one else who is capable to doing what He did. Only He can be the shepherd of the sheep and in our sin, we are lost without Him, but He didn't stay dead. In this time of Easter, it is worth being reminded that we are no longer the sheep that are scattered without a shepherd but instead, our shepherd has gathered us together with His outstretched arms on the cross as only He could, and He has sent us out with His Word and command to share the good news that He is risen forever and will live forever and the sheep will never be scattered again. The flock that Jesus has called to Himself includes all kinds of people and it includes you. No matter how much you may have gone astray Jesus the Good Shepherd is able to call you to Himself and it is His faithfulness that saves you and brings you to the green pastures. We can rejoice because Christ through His resurrection has made us into Easter sheep who can rejoice in their shepherd forever.

Prayer: Lord Jesus our Good Shepherd, be with us as we live out our lives and vocations in this world and help us to be Easter people who are always rejoicing at Your work for us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Read [Mark 14:32-42](#)

### “Jesus Prays in Gethsemane”

Isaiah prophesied to the Jews while they were in exile. They’d been subjugated into service to their foreign overlords and cried out in anguish. Isaiah wrote them: “Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering. There is none to guide her [Jerusalem, signifying Israel] among all the sons she has borne; there is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up. These two things have happened to you— who will console you? — devastation and destruction, famine and sword; who will comfort you? Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the Lord, the rebuke of your God.” Isaiah 51:17-20

Our reading for today tells the account of Jesus, after the Last Supper, going with His disciples to pray in Gethsemane. His doing so is the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. In the short term, Israel’s tormenters freed them from bondage and allowed them to return to their homeland. But here, in Gethsemane, we see God’s completion.

That cup that Jesus prays His Father to take from Him is the cup of God’s wrathful judgement on sin. Psalm 75 describes it, “For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.” Up until Jesus’ death on the cross, sinners had no choice but to drink God’s judgement themselves.

It’s only human for Jesus (fully human) to pray repeatedly to His Father to take that cup from Him. Jesus already felt the agony that tasting it would bring. Here, His own disciples deserted Him for the first time, as they slept instead of watching and praying. Jesus felt this isolation, just as He looked ahead to even worse suffering. Those disciples personify Isaiah’s description of the sons of Jerusalem – their fainting, lying like an antelope in a net, devastated and destroyed with no one to save them. Luke called their rest, a “sleep of suffering”. Without Someone to take this cup from us, we would be doomed just like Jerusalem.

But Jesus (fully God), prayed that His Father’s will be done, not His own. And soon, Jesus would take that cup of wrath from our hands. He would go to the cross and be forsaken by man and by God. He would drink it down to the dregs in our place. He would be cursed for us and die. After finishing praying, Jesus woke His disciples and told them, “Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

We pray: Abba, Father, You saved us by sending Your Son to die for us. Help us to watch and pray like He prayed for us. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, April 8, 2024

Read Mark 14:43-52

### Only One Left to Fight

Today's reading should have been on last Monday. What an ideal text for April Fools' Day! "And a young man followed (Jesus), with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked" (Mark 14:51-52).

What was he doing there with only a linen cloth over him?

Why on earth is this detail included?

A young man (the fool!) is as naked as the day he was born while hightailing it away from the soldiers, from Judas, from Jesus. How does Mark know this?

Tradition points to the fool being Mark himself. Only Mark's gospel has this detail, and who would know it better than young fool who ran away. Of course, his lack of clothing showed some foolishness also. A good explanation for his lack of clothing is that it was common for ancient warriors to fight without clothing. The young man could have been showing up to do battle on the side of Jesus. But by the time he arrived, he was the only one on the side of Jesus. He could stay and fight, or make like all the rest of Jesus' followers and head for the hills. At the expense of his only clothing, the young man chose to run. Leaving no one left to fight.

But that's not quite true. Jesus remains. He is the only one left to fight, just not against the soldiers or Judas or the religious leaders. Jesus alone will fight the greater evils of Satan, sin, and death. He, too, will be stripped of His garments, prepared for battle that He must lose, for us to win. Once more, it seems like foolishness! But as we know, Christ will get the last laugh over Satan, sin, and death. He will be victorious for you, for me, and for Mark! And joined to His victory in baptism, we are truly clothed – with His righteousness!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You alone could have fought and won the most important battle for me (and for Mark). Embolden us to courageously share Your mercy, since we are clothed in You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion from Pastor Jason*



Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Read Mark 14:53-65

### When Troubles Come

Life is hard - living in a sinful world. Well, it would be much harder if I didn't have a wonderful Savior living with me, guiding me, and protecting me. The world gets very frustrated around me, not because I am so good at avoiding its temptations but because my LORD keeps me following Him. On the other hand, the world does have access to my interaction with the world.

One of the temptations the world loves to hurl at me is physical trouble. The world brings physical troubles to me to tempt me to take personal action for personal protection - but abandoning my LORD. What a terrible idea that is, but physical hurts can come.

And then there are the mental hurts - lies, shameful lies, browbeatings, accusations, etc. The devil never hesitates to use the voice to tempt, especially with damaging threats and falsehoods. How such lies work on my heart - to be falsely accused demands my response to force an end to such a dismal feeling future, and yet, there is Jesus holding my "hand," reminding me that He isn't believing that nonsense. He is reminding me that He has suffered this too and that His support will get me through anything.

The devil attempts to trick me into trying to face him myself, without God's help or presence. Often there is a demand for an instant "now", response. How I appreciate God telling me to "let go" and "let God." When I "let go" then I don't get in His way as He handles the situation.

Prayer: Thank you, God. Thank you for not letting me get too big for myself. I really do depend on You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

Read Mark 14:66-72

### The Rooster Crows

*"[Peter] broke down and [began to weep/cry]." Mk 14:72*

Jesus told Peter he would deny Him three times—hours earlier after eating the Passover Meal—After Jesus' institution of the New Covenant and His Holy Supper (see 14:12-31). Peter **"said emphatically, 'If I must die with You, I will not deny You.' And ... [all the disciples] said the same"** (14:30). Well, here we are, all the disciples had fled at Jesus' arrest (v. 50), and Peter is in the courtyard warming himself by the fire with the guards. A female slave of the high priest came and said Peter was **"with the Nazarene, Jesus.' But [Peter] denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you mean.' And [Peter] went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed"** (vv. 67-68). We might think to ourselves, *"I would not have denied Jesus (the first time? Or any time?) like Peter did or flee from Jesus' arrest in the Garden."* But have you ever lied out of fear or to test someone?

Peter (cowardly?/curiously?/frantically?/frightfully?) followed Jesus at a distance (v. 54) after Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest and the whole council. Jesus foretold His betrayal, being delivered into the hands of men/sinners/the council, rejected, condemned to death, mocked, spit upon, killed, and after three days, rise again (see 8:31; 9:31-32; 10:32-34). Jesus' *Parable of the Tenants* (12:1-12) spoke to the chief priests, scribes, and elders of this moment after His Triumphant entry into Jerusalem, of His rejection and death by these men, fulfilling Scripture, **"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes"** (Psalm 118:22-23).

The slave girl told one of the bystanders of Peter in the courtyard, **"This man is one of them.' But again [Peter] denied it"** (Mark 14:69-70). Are we still thinking we would *"not deny Jesus like Peter (the second time?)"* Is there such a thing as a better or innocent lie? ... I do know God's Word and instruction says, **"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"** (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20) and **"love your neighbor as yourself"** (Leviticus 19:18; see Mark 12:31; compare Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

The bystanders said to Peter, **"Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.' But [Peter] began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know this man of whom you speak.' And immediately the rooster crowed a second time."** (vv. 70-72) Peter remembered Jesus said, **"Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept."** (v. 72; 14:30). Jesus knows everything. Jesus was rejected for you.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You were rejected for me. Died and bled for me. And rose victoriously from the dead on the third day so that I would believe and live in You. Grant me faith to believe and love as You commanded. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, April 11, 2024  
Read Mark 15:1-5

### Bold Silence

15:1 And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. 2 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

As the prophet Isaiah foretold of our Lord: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away." (Is 53:7-8) Jesus stands before the Roman governor of Judea and makes no plea for his innocence. He speaks the truth but little more. It is certain that Jesus could have talked His way out of the sentence. Perhaps He even could have turned Pilate against those who gave Him over. But Jesus has no concern for self-preservation or for revenge. He has nothing to say to Pilate the governor.

Pilate thinks that he is in control, Jesus knows otherwise. After a sleepless night and a mock trial before the Jews, Jesus is no longer interested in teaching. He has used His words for years and has accomplished His purposes. Now is the time for action and Jesus will go willingly. Knowing now that there is no other way, Jesus will go courageously to death, through the Jews and through Pilate. He will not plead for His own life so that He might plead for ours. He is silent before His temporal authorities that He might be bold before our spiritual accuser. The King of the Jews submits to a third-rate local politician to fulfill the ancient prophecies.

How wonderful and strange that the eternal story of the Almighty God should be so detailed and dirty, that the Lord of life should be sentenced to death by a small group of first-century men and a crooked Italian judge. How strange that God would concern Himself with people as specific as the Jews and Pilate as individual as you and me. Pilate himself is amazed at Jesus' calm demeanor as only He knows the true weight of the moment: He quietly goes to crucifixion so that He may leave authorities temporal and eternal, even death and hell themselves, speechless in the face of His authority at His resurrection.

Prayer: Lord, you have faced down all might and authority to show Your own power made perfect in Your suffering. Give us grace to accept suffering and wonder to marvel at Your redemptive suffering in our place. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, April 12, 2024  
Read Mark 15:12-15

### The One Who Did No Evil

“12 And Pilate again said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with the man you call the king of the Jews?’ 13 And they cried out again, ‘Crucify him.’ 14 And Pilate said to them, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify him.’ 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.” (Mark 15:12-15 ESV).

Pilate’s job was not to help the people that were handed over to him for judgment. He was not expected to go out of his way to help people that were either caught committing crimes or were handed over to him for political reasons. Pilate’s job was to keep stability in this part of the world. Knowing this about Pilate makes it all that much more amazing that we see him advocate for Christ in any way at all. It is actually amazing to think that from the time that Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane to when He dies on the cross the only person who stops to question if they should kill Him, is Pilate. Pilate asks a simple question. In response to the cries for crucifixion Pilate asks, “Why? What evil has he done?” In the end Pilate does end up doing as the crowd wants and he hands Jesus over to be crucified because in the end his job isn’t to advocate for those handed over to him but to maintain stability and he doesn’t want the crowd to turn against him.

I think that we can take Pilate as an example to us. Certainly not in every way because he was far from perfect, but he did recognize the One that did no evil. We should follow Pilate’s example by believing in our own lives that Jesus did no evil. This means more than just that He didn’t do anything bad, but it means that Jesus lived perfectly, whether Pilate meant that or not doesn’t matter. Jesus lived a perfect life, and we are now witnesses to that perfect life. We get to be like Pilate only more boldly. Instead of asking “What evil did he do?” We can confidently tell others that Jesus not only didn’t do anything evil He even lived a perfect life. Jesus exchanged His perfect life for our sinful one and saved us which makes us His people. Pilate advocated for Jesus, but Jesus now advocates for us forever and He frees us to share this good news of His salvation to all people.

Prayer: Father thank you for sending Your Son to be our advocate. Help us to trust in Him always and to lead others to trust Him too. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, April 13, 2024

Read [Mark 15:16-20](#)

*“The Royal Treatment”*

It’s hard, after Easter, to go back and take another look at Jesus’ suffering on His way to death on the cross. Mark will get there, soon, but he’s not yet there. And, the scene in today’s reading is just a small part of what was still to come. It is the grossest understatement to say that Jesus has had a bad night. Captured in the Garden of Gethsemane by the Temple guards, He was for the first time placed in bondage and led away. His captors were completely unafraid to assault Him during their interrogation, the accusations from lying, false witnesses rained down upon Him, and they did everything to find just a word from His mouth they could use to condemn Jesus to death.

Finally, as the morning dawned, the religious authorities gleefully declared the Son of God guilty of blasphemy, a crime worthy of being cast out of the body of believers, out of the Temple, and sent to be executed. So, bound and already bloodied from mistreatment, Jesus began the new day on His way to similar condemnations from the civil authorities.

Pilate was conflicted in his personal feelings about Jesus and by his responsibilities as governor. As the morning proceeded, He became more and more convinced that Jesus was not an ordinary criminal, much less an accused false king.

As his final attempt to win sympathy for his prisoner from the hard crowd, Pilate took Jesus into his headquarters, where around 600 of his soldiers did their worst to Jesus. It was already fixed firmly in Pilate’s mind that Jesus’ supposed crime was that He claimed to be the “King of the Jews”, and he wanted to show to Jesus’ accusers the absurdity of that idea, and proceeded to turn his prisoner into the most garish parody of a king possible.

So, stripped naked and flogged to near-death, Pilate’s soldiers dressed Jesus in a dirty robe (the Gospel writers couldn’t even agree on what color it was). They “crowned” Him with spiky brambles, formed into a mass which they then pushed down into Jesus’ scalp. They gave Him a “scepter” with which to “rule”, but then snatched it away from Him repeatedly and beat Him about His bleeding head. They spit upon Jesus and pretended to bow down to Him. Finally, Pilate took Jesus back to His accusers, hoping that their hate would be satisfied.

“Behold, the Man”, said Pilate. There Jesus stood, silent before His accusers, like a lamb goes before its shearers – dumb. This was the King of the Jews. He’d soon die on a cross under that condemnation. This mighty King of the Universe would appear as a weak, mockery of a king to the world, but there, Jesus died to save His people.

We pray: Dear Jesus, my Lord and my God, You saved me by the stripes You bore for me. Thank You, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, April 15, 2024

Read Mark 15:21-32

### Carrying the Cross

Simon of Cyrene is an interesting man. It appears he was a foreigner from Cyrene, a place in modern day Libya. He was probably visiting Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Mark says he was coming in from the country, which might mean he was camping outside the crowded city during the holidays or he had just arrived in town. Some timing!

Simon was on his way somewhere else when he saw Jesus stumbling under the cross. He wasn't there to watch the procession to Golgotha—chances are Simon had no idea men were going to be executed that day. He just happened to be in that place at that time. And so the Roman soldiers, realizing Jesus wasn't going to make it without help, grabbed Simon. "Hey, you!" they must have said, "Grab this and follow Him!"

Simon couldn't get out of it. What, carry a bloody, shameful cross through the streets of Jerusalem? No doubt everybody would think he was the condemned man! But the soldiers wouldn't listen to any arguments. They had the right to force him, and they did. Simon carried Jesus' cross.

It probably wasn't that long before Simon himself became a Christian. Mark tells us the names of his children, which means they were likely well-known in the Christian church. If so, that means the Holy Spirit Himself said to Simon and his family the same thing the soldiers would have said the first time: "Here, take up this cross and follow Jesus." That command—that honor—is repeated every time another person comes to faith.

Every one of us who loves Jesus learns what it means to carry the cross—to follow after Him—to be exposed to shame and mistreatment for His sake. Some of our brothers and sisters learn this in very graphic ways, as they suffer persecution at the hands of those who hate Christ. For others of us, it comes in more subtle ways. But however it comes, we endure it knowing that if we carry Jesus' cross, it is because He Himself has carried our cross first, suffering, dying—and rising again!—for our sake. Because He loves us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for carrying the cross for us. Amen.

*Today's Devotion from Pastor Jason*

*Adapted from a devotion from lhm.org*

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

Read Mark 15:33-41

## Why

There are many places in life where I wonder about myself and why. "Why?" I wonder. "Why do I have to put up with this?" Now it may be my tendency to do wrong. I do find that I like to do wrong and then I repent and now I am filled with sorrow, sorrow that I did that to my LORD and sorry that I forced myself to go through with the shame that comes from sinning.

"Why" comes when I am overwhelmed with emotion, when life and what I am or have experienced seems overwhelming. Truly I cannot control my feelings! I ask "why" not because I think I am so intelligent that I need to review what God has put me through, nor is it because I am going to try to change the nature of the world. No, I ask "Why" because I am unhappy.

I am unhappy and I want to not be unhappy. So I am pleading with God, pleading for Him to change things. Such a plea could be a demand for God to do what I want Him to do, but when emotion overwhelms me, when I feel that I cannot handle any more unhappiness, then my plea simply amounts to, "Help".

And God never lets such a cry go forth unanswered. Not that His answers are always recognized at the time, but the situation resolves and strength appears as I need it. God is faithful. He holds me when life itself cannot!

Prayer: Thank you my LORD, that when I need You, You are always there. You don't need my planned eloquent pleading, just my need. Thank you.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Read Mark 15:42-47

### **The Body of Jesus to be Buried**

*“Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus” Mk 15:43.*

Jesus breathed His last bodily breath and died on a cross, atoning for our sin after the ninth hour (3 PM). The temple curtain was ripped in two, and a centurion confessed that Jesus was true man and true God. Now evening had come, and Jesus' body hung dead on a piece of wood. The Sabbath was approaching, and a man named Joseph of Arimathea requested Jesus' body.

Joseph of Arimathea was looking for the rule and reign (kingdom) of God and was courageous as he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Joseph was from Arimathea, a city in Judea, and a respected member of the council, the Sanhedrin. Many Jews like Joseph here were awaiting the rule and reign of God in complete restoration of His kingdom to come. Not every Jewish leader was hostile to Jesus. Jesus is where the rule and reign of God is. Jesus is the Eternal Son of God and King of Israel, King of all creation, and will come again on the Last Day to make all things new and restore all creation to all perfection. But at this point in the text. Jesus' body is dead on a cross. So here on the day before the Sabbath, on Friday, Joseph of Arimathea could work in taking the body of Jesus from the cross and bury Him, as the next day of Sabbath was a day of rest.

Pilate was surprised at the quickness of Jesus' death and handed over the corpse of Jesus to Joseph. Joseph had provided the linen shroud, wrapped the corpse, and laid Jesus' dead body in his own tomb carved out of stone, fulfilling the Scripture, **“And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush [bruise/break] Him.”** (Isaiah 53:9-10; see Gen 3:15). The body of Jesus does not remain a corpse in a tomb, and just as we do not remain dead and buried in our sin, we are made alive to God in Christ as He lives in us through faith and in our Baptism into His death, burial, and resurrection.

Prayer - Jesus, You suffered, died, and were buried for our benefit. You are Risen from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand, ruling and reigning here and now till the Last Day. You are present in Your Covenantal Word and Sacramental promise. You come to us, feeding us life, forgiveness, and salvation in Your true Body and Blood we so desperately need. Grant us Your Peace always. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*



Thursday, April 18, 2024  
Read Mark 16:1-8

### Just as He Told You

At the climax of Mark's Gospel, there is so much to see. At first light, the women who loved Jesus must go to the tomb to honor their teacher's corpse. They go to mourn. And these ladies who were bold enough to stand at the foot of the cross were troubled, thinking of how they would manage to even get to Jesus. But their world is turned on its head. The very large stone which had sealed them out and which sealed Him in was rolled away.

As they investigate, they see a young man, but it is not the Lord and it is no beaten and bruised corpse. It is an angel in a white robe, a messenger from the Lord. They are understandably surprised, even amazed. The angel softly reproves them for their amazement. There is no need. He knows whom they are looking for and why they are surprised, but he knows also why they should not be. Yes, this is the tomb. Yes, Jesus has been crucified. Yes, He is no longer here. He is risen, the grave could not hold Him. You will see Him again, He is going to meet His disciples and to meet you. Yet at this, the most amazing thing that has ever happened, the women should not be amazed. They should not be amazed because all of this has happened *just as He told you*. They should have been amazed at His words throughout His ministry, but they did not understand. Now they understand and all the amazement of those years of His earthly ministry hits the women at once. The women do what normal people do in extraordinary circumstances: they run away and say nothing to anyone out of fear. Now of course, these words would not have been written if the awestruck women did not eventually come to their senses and report what they had seen and heard, but as the story stands, the Lord is risen and there is no one to proclaim the good news.

We as readers stand on a perilous balance between Gospel and tragedy. On the one hand, death is defeated, on the other hand, this is hidden from the world for fear. For us today, the situation is no different. We know that the Lord is risen but fear and amazement ties our tongues. We are given a message to speak but we are woefully unprepared for this news. Nevertheless, the Gospel must be proclaimed. Christ has done all things just as He said. His words are trustworthy and true. He has said that He will come again, and we are bound to believe Him and to proclaim it, despite fear or lack of understanding.

Prayer: Holy Spirit of the risen Christ, be upon us. Give us boldness to tell the world of the beautiful news of Jesus risen from the dead. Change our hearts to accept His word with faith and believe everything He has said to us. Cleanse us from fear and amazement and doubt and give us too faith that we may meet Him in joy, just as He has promised. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Friday, April 19, 2024  
Read Mark 16:11-13

### The Hard Part of Good News

“11 But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. 12 After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. 13 And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.” (Mark 16:11-13 ESV).

I think that good news can be a hard thing to take in sometimes. This isn't because we don't want the good news to be true, but I think that more often it is because we have come to expect the worst and therefore when something good does happen it can catch us off guard. This isn't to say that we are all pessimists but maybe we are just realists. We have seen what happens in this world, sometimes good things do happen, but bad things happen too and isn't it easier to just expect the worst? When I started my freshman year of college in Nebraska, I was assigned a roommate at random. The guy that I was placed with is named Owen, and Owen and I got along very well. Owen and I were good friends so when Owen got engaged the next year I was expecting to get invited to the wedding. What I wasn't expecting was for him to ask me to be his best man. Sure, Owen and I were good friends, but I was not expecting him to ask me that question. My actual response to his question was “Are you sure?” I couldn't believe that Owen wanted me to be his best man and while I did say yes afterward it was still quite a shock. I think that my initial reaction may have been similar to the reaction of the disciples. I think that just like me they were surprised by the news and their response ended up being like mine, “Are you sure?” The news of Jesus rising from the dead was something the disciples did not expect. This news of Jesus resurrection is the best news of all time, and it had a real impact on the lives of the disciples, and it has a real impact on your life as well. Because Jesus rose from the dead, He has promised us that we will also rise. When we find ourselves expecting the worst and falling into the trap of pessimism, we can remember the promises of Christ for us that He will come back for us, and He will bring us to new life with Him forever.

Prayer: Lord, let us hear the good news of Your resurrection and believe it. The hope that You have given us is beyond anything we could possibly imagine and we thank You for your steadfast love and faithfulness. It is in Your holy name that we pray. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, April 20, 2024

Read [Mark 16:14-20](#)

### “The Great Commission”

“Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.” Mark 16:14

“Ouch! That hurts!” Jesus disciples knew that Jesus had died on the cross on Friday. They knew He’d been placed into the tomb where He’d laid ever since. Then, just this morning, the three Marys had come back from the tomb where they’d gone to properly anoint Him. But, when they’d returned, they told crazy stories about how the tomb was empty! Then, they were told that He was alive!

This was too much! Their dear Lord was dead, and now their friends were teasing them – this was way too early for that! But now, as they were eating in the evening, a very much alive Jesus stood before them. He was alive! But what message did He have for them? He rebuked them! Ouch!

You don’t think of Jesus speaking words of Law after the Resurrection, but here it is. And much needed it was – after all, hadn’t they spent the last few years following Him? Hadn’t they witnessed with their own eyes Jesus performing miracle after miracle?! Some of them had even seen several people that were dead, brought back to life by Jesus. And how many times had He told them He was going to suffer, die, and rise on the third day? Hello?!

Yes, they were blinded by sorrow, pain, and loss. But their hearts had been hardened by this hurt to the point that they wouldn’t believe the truth standing in front of them! Matthew’s account of Jesus’ ascension points out that even on that day 40 days later, just before He ascended into heaven, “they worshipped Him, but some doubted”. Yes, sometimes we need the Law, just like the eleven did on Easter evening.

Going from verse 14 to the very next verse, though, is like night and day. Verse 15 is set 40 days later, on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus and about 500 of His followers – including His disciples – received Jesus’ final words. That rebuke of 40 days earlier had instantly softened their hearts and restored them to ecstatic, joyful faith in Him – alive, and eating their food again! But now, they heard and believed Jesus’ words, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” And, soon, armed with the Holy Spirit, they began to do just that.

We pray: Risen, Living Savior, rebuke me when I lose sight of You. Empower me with Your Spirit to join with all your disciples in proclaiming Your Gospel to the whole world. You are Risen – Alleluia! Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*