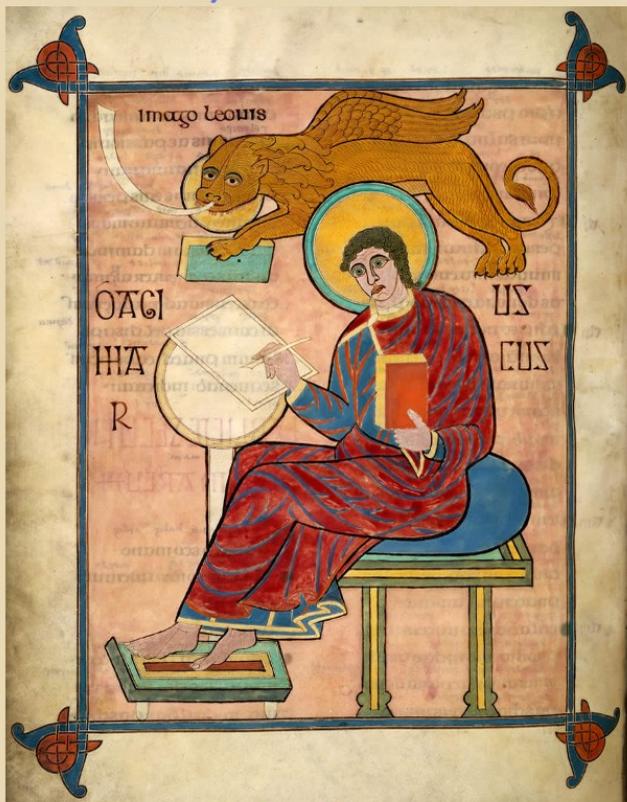


# Read, Mark, Learn

*A daily reading from St Mark's Gospel  
with reflections  
for Lent 2014*



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## Introduction

Lent is traditionally a time when Christians reflect on what their faith means to them and how they might deepen their faith and understanding of God's will for them. This booklet is offered to help us to do that this Lent. During the forty days of Lent you will be taken through the whole of Mark's gospel. This gospel was the first to be written down and was written for the church to which Mark belonged; its concerns are the concerns of his Christian community but they have a universal application and many of the things which affected Mark's church affect ours today. The message is still relevant today.

Each day you can read a section of the gospel (you'll need your bible) and a short reflection upon it. It is not intended as a commentary but simply something to start you thinking and reflecting on Mark's message. There are suggestions for prayer for each day. If you would like to join in a discussion on the gospel and the issues it raises for you you can do so on the Benefice's Facebook or Google+ pages (you need to register to post but not to view them). Links to these can found on the Benefice website ([fourcrosses.weebly.com](http://fourcrosses.weebly.com)).

Quotations from scripture are taken from the *New Jerusalem Bible*, Darton, Longman & Todd, © 1985

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## Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March – Ash Wednesday

*Mark 1.1-15 – The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

These first few verses of *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* serve the same purpose in this gospel as the narratives of Jesus's birth serve in Matthew's and Luke's gospels or the prologue of John's gospel: they set out clearly the credentials of the person – Jesus of Nazareth – that this gospel is about. We learn here that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah) and is the Son of God; he fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah; he is acclaimed God's Son at his baptism; his mission as Messiah is shown to be opposed to sin and evil (represented by Satan's testing of him) and *on the side of the angels*.

And now he begins his ministry, as John's ministry comes to its end. It is crucial that we read the rest of the gospel in the light of what we have learnt in these opening verses. This is especially important for the reader to understand because a recurring theme of the gospel is the way in which the truth about the true nature of Jesus is hidden from view so that only *the chosen* might see it.

*Prayer*

Pray that God will open your eyes to the truth of who Jesus Christ truly is.

## Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 1.16-34 – And his reputation at once spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.*

Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee by calling disciples to follow him. It's tempting to think that Jesus chose his disciples carefully but that's not how Mark makes it feel. He sees Simon and Andrew and says *Follow me*, and it's the same with James and John. It almost seems as if Jesus is picking them randomly and if they have the courage to drop everything and follow they'll be the right people. Perhaps there were others, unrecorded, who declined his invitation and so missed out.

The calling of the first four disciples is followed by teaching in the synagogue and a number of healings and the casting out of spirits. Jesus instructs the spirits to be silent so that they do not reveal who he truly is. But word spread rapidly and many came to Jesus to be healed by him. The lives of those that Jesus healed must have been touched but Mark tells us nothing here about how they responded. These miracles are all about

Jesus. It may be that Mark wants us to think for ourselves about what all this means rather than telling us directly.

*Prayer*

Pray that you will be ready to hear and respond to the call of Jesus.

## **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 1.35-45 – Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can proclaim the message there too, because that is why I came.*

The ministry continues but here Mark introduces another theme – the need of Jesus to withdraw and be alone. His disciples search for him because, they say, *Everyone is looking for you*. They move on to the next town, evading those who are seeking him, where Jesus heals a man suffering from a skin disease (leprosy in the older translation). Mark, in this story, reveals the compassionate nature of Jesus's ministry, *Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him...and he was cleansed*. The man, like the spirits earlier, is sworn to secrecy. However, he tells the news of his healing to anyone who will listen. Mark tells us that the unwanted publicity drives Jesus into *the deserted places*. It seems strange to us that Jesus appears so keen to suppress news about who he is and what he is doing. It may be that Mark has Jesus preserving his privacy now until the time is right for him to be revealed as the Messiah.

*Prayer*

Pray that God will be close to you when you need him.

## **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 2.1-12 – Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'My child, your sins are forgiven.'*

The healing story that follows is well known to those who read their bibles. Mark is still keen to mention the crowds who seek Jesus out. Because of the size of the crowds it becomes necessary for the paralysed man to be lowered through the roof so that

Jesus might heal him. The story, though, also introduces a number of themes – healing in response to faith (here the faith of the friends who bring the paralytic to Jesus), a dispute with the scribes, the equating of healing with forgiving sins, the ability of Jesus to forgive sins (the work of God). Many of these themes will come up again and will be important as Jesus's story moves towards his passion and death.

*Prayer*

Pray for someone you know who needs the healing power of Jesus in their life.

## **Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March – Lent 1**

*Matthew 4.1-11 – Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the desert to be put to the test by the devil.*

The story of Jesus's temptations reveal to us the reality of his humanity and the closeness of his relationship with God. Jesus is able to withstand temptation because he trusts God absolutely.

*Prayer*

Almighty God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,  
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:  
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;  
and, as you know our weakness,  
so may we know your power to save;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 2.13-28 – It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I came to call not the upright, but sinners.*

These verses begin with the call of Levi. It is remarkably similar to the call of the first four disciples which we saw earlier. But now the disputes between Jesus and the Jewish leaders start to heat up. First it's because Jesus is mixing with tax collectors, people like Levi who are outcasts from Jewish society because they are seen as collaborators with the Roman authorities and because they are dishonest and generally considered to be irreligious. Then there is criticism because Jesus and his disciples are not keeping a fast. And finally, a dispute about breaking the Sabbath by plucking ears of corn and eating them. Each of these disputes is responded to by Jesus with a pithy saying – *It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick; Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them?; The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* And we read the first parable of the gospel, about the unshrunk cloth and the new wineskins. But does the parable makes Jesus's point clearer or not? The parables can often seem enigmatic to us, and that is surely the case here.

### *Prayer*

Pray for situations where the church is divided – women bishops, ministry to gay people, or whatever concerns you.

## **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 3.1-6 – The Pharisees went out and began at once to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him.*

Again the disputes continue, but here Jesus makes it impossible for the Pharisees to say anything and as well as offending them by breaking the Sabbath he also makes them look foolish when he asks, *Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?* In the face of the Pharisees' silence Jesus heals the man with the withered hand. The result of all this is that there is no argument but a decision to plot to do away with Jesus: the first suggestion in the gospel that Jesus's death is certain.

### *Prayer*

Pray for all who are physically disabled.

## Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 3.7-35 – Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.*

Here we see another feature of Mark's gospel that is unique – the way in which he describes events. The first paragraph of this section has a vivid description of the way in which Jesus feels himself to be at risk from the crowds and the measures he takes to avoid the risk. Then we are given a list of the apostles, including the first mention of Jesus's betrayal. In the second half of this passage we hear accounts of how Jesus is opposed by the scribes, and the way in which they try to discredit him by saying that he is possessed by an unclean spirit. It is not entirely clear what Jesus means by *blasphemy* against the Holy Spirit, but it is clearly bound up with the opposition to his ministry that he experiences and with the claims for satanic, rather than divine, origin for Jesus's powers. But we hear too how Jesus is opposed by members of his own family, who say, *He is out of his mind*. For Jesus it seems here that his family belong to his past life – now his true family are as he says, *Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother*.

*Prayer*

Pray for those in your family who do not share your faith.

## Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 4.1-20 – To you is granted the secret of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables.*

Chapter 4 is entirely given over to a record of Jesus's teaching. It begins with the familiar parable of the Sower, with its explanation. When he is alone with the disciples he explains the parables to them with the claim that, although his teaching is made clear to the Twelve, to others it comes in parables so that *they may look and look, but never perceive; listen and listen, but never understand*. Mark seems keen to make clear that Jesus's teaching is plain for those who are Jesus's disciples but impenetrable to everyone else. Perhaps he wants to say that it is the preparedness of the hearer that determines whether the message is heard or not. It is certainly true that those who are most open to hear Jesus's message get the most from it.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who have never heard the word of God.

## Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 4.21-34 – Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!*

There follow four parables. These parables are clearly rooted in the everyday experience of his listeners. Who could not understand how important it is for a lamp to be put where it gives light to the whole room? Who doesn't see the rich getting richer and poor getting poorer? We all recognise the miracle of growth and understand that the size of a seed is not necessarily related to the size of the plant that grows from it. Most of us have no real idea of how it all works, we're just happy to accept it. But how does all this relate to the kingdom of God? No wonder Mark tells us that the crowds could not understand what Jesus was wanting them to hear. But his disciples have everything explained to them. When Jesus says, *Anyone who has ears for listening should listen*, it is clear that he wants us to think about what he says in order that we might understand.

*Prayer*

Pray for all writers and preachers who open God's word to us.

## Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 4.35-41 – Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.*

The story of the stilling of the storm has many layers of meaning. It, as the disciples say at the end, demonstrates Jesus's power over the forces of creation. It shows his unquestioning faith in God because Jesus is the only one unconcerned by the severity of the storm. By contrast the disciples, fishermen familiar with the waters they are sailing (so perhaps knowing the danger they are in), are terrified. But crucial to our understanding of this event is our answer to the question the disciples ask, *Who can this be?* The answer was vital for the early Christians and remains vital for us today. It is a question we all must answer if we are to be followers of Christ.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who live in fear for their lives, or whose work is dangerous.

## **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March – Lent 2**

*John 3.1-17 – In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.*

Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus by night to seek the truth, struggles to understand what Jesus means by being *born from above*. Those who are born from above are filled with the Spirit

### *Prayer*

Almighty God,  
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,  
that they may return to the way of righteousness:  
grant to all those who are admitted  
into the fellowship of Christ's religion,  
that they may reject those things  
that are contrary to their profession,  
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;  
through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 5.1-20 – Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you.*

This is the second of three stories that show the divine power of Jesus. We saw his power over the created order in the previous story. Here we see his power over even the most powerful of demons. The story is a difficult one for us – we sympathise with the pigs! But if we can ignore the apparently gratuitous death of so many pigs we can see that the demons that Jesus drives out here had so taken over the life of this

unfortunate man that no one could control him, or them. Jesus, with a simple word of command saves this man from a terrible life, something no one else could have done, thus demonstrating the power of God at work in him. That this story takes place in a Gentile region may be significant. This is the first time in the gospel that Jesus visits Gentile territory. This fact may be connected to the instruction Jesus gives the man to go to his people and *tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you*. The good news about Jesus must be proclaimed to the Gentiles too.

*Prayer*

Pray for everybody whose life is controlled by drugs, alcohol or gambling.

## **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 5.21-43 – Do not be afraid; only have faith.*

And now Mark shows Jesus's divine power over chronic, incurable sickness and even death. In him the woman suffering with a haemorrhage finds healing, simply by touching the hem of his garment. The synagogue president's daughter is raised from death with a word as Jesus takes her by the hand. It is clear that healing for these two people is beyond the power of anyone other than Jesus. The woman has seen many doctors but her condition is only worsening. The girl has died and the synagogue president and his family have no expectation that there is any hope. Unsurprisingly everyone is astonished at the power of Jesus. Again, though in contrast to the previous story, Jesus gives strict orders that they are to tell no one about what has happened.

*Prayer*

Pray for everybody who has lost a child.

## **Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 6.1-6 – Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him?*

The early Church struggled with the fact that the Jews – Jesus's own race – did not accept that he was the Messiah. Mark here sees the reaction of Jesus's family and

neighbours to his ministry as, perhaps, offering an explanation. In the first couple of verses they seem to have a right response, and to ask the right questions, but that quickly changes to dismissing it all because he the carpenter, Mary's son and one of a family well known to them. Jesus explains their resistance to his message, *A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house.* This episode is in striking contrast the works of power that precede it. Here he performs no miracles, just a few healings, and moves on.

*Prayer*

Pray for all divided families.

## **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 6.7-29 – King Herod had heard about him, since by now his name was well known.*

Jesus's fame was clearly starting to spread. One assumes that he sent his disciples out to proclaim repentance and to heal and cast out spirits because the demand was becoming so great, but it probably also has to do with the mission of the church after the resurrection. News of his fame had spread to Herod as well. Herod is convinced that Jesus is John the Baptist returned from the dead. These are the thoughts of a guilty conscience, and Mark recounts the story of the Baptist's death here. In telling the story here and in the way he does perhaps Mark is highlighting the connection between the message of John and that of Jesus. But perhaps too he is showing the impotence of Herod to suppress the message John and of Jesus.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who administer justice, and for all victims of injustice.

## **Friday 21<sup>st</sup> March**

*Mark 6.30-56 – They all ate as much as they wanted.*

The Twelve return from their mission with good news of its success. Jesus tries to take the disciples away for a time of quiet but the crowds find them. Jesus teaches them at

length because he is moved by their need for direction. As it gets late Jesus feeds the crowd, five thousand in number, with just five loaves and two fish. It seems that we are to understand a connection between the need of the crowd for food and their need of sound teaching and that it is Jesus who provides both. Jesus's provision is more than adequate, demonstrated by the crowd staying on the hillside to listen to Jesus until it is nearly dark as much as by the twelve baskets of scraps the disciples gather up after they have eaten. This is followed by the story of Jesus walking on the water. Mark links this event and the disciples terror with their lack of understanding of the miracle of the loaves.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who are hungry.

## **Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> March**

*Mark 7.1-13 – Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?*

Jesus's disciples are accused by the Pharisees and scribes of breaking the Jewish laws concerning washing before eating. Jesus's response is to criticise the Pharisees in return. They, he says, find ways around observing the Law. He doesn't though answer their accusation at all. It is hard here to see exactly what his attitude to the Law is. Perhaps he is acknowledging the impossibility of keeping the Law completely and so of judging which laws are more important. Or, perhaps he is simply pointing out that because of their hypocrisy the Pharisees have no right to judge others. The Law will, as we have seen already, be an important area of debate between Jesus and the Pharisees.

*Prayer*

Pray that God will prevent you from judging others.

## **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> March – Lent 3**

*John 4.5-42 – God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.*

In this long passage we see that Jesus is sustained by his relationship with the Father. The Spirit provides food and drink for those who trust in God – and inspires their worship.

*Prayer*

Almighty God,  
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,  
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:  
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,  
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 7.14-30 – All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.*

Jesus now teaches the crowd about what it is that makes a person unclean. The Jewish laws about what was clean and what unclean were very important. Jesus is very clear that uncleanness is a moral condition caused not by a failure to wash or to eat unclean foods but by the evil in the human heart, *nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean*. It is interesting that Mark should choose to put the story that follows next to this teaching. Jesus seems to be challenged to live out what he teaches. Jesus seems to judge the woman unworthy to have her daughter cured until she challenges him.

*Prayer*

Pray that God will set you free from all that makes you *unclean*.

## **Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 7.31-8.21 – Then he said to them, “Do you still not realise?”*

Here we see some of the recurrent themes of Mark's gospel. First the healing of the deaf man with the speech impediment. In Mark's gospel Jesus is very physical and here he touches the man's ears and tongue and uses spittle. This healing is again followed by the acclamation of the crowd who seek him out everywhere he goes, *Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak*. This is followed by another feeding of the crowd. The story is similar to the previous feeding of the crowd – Jesus feels compassion for the crowd, there is not enough food for so many, Jesus gives thanks and shares the food they have, everybody has enough and there are baskets full of scraps. There's another debate with the Pharisees and Jesus expresses exasperation at the current generation demanding a sign. The passage ends with Jesus having to explain everything to the disciples who are slow to understand all that they have witnessed.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who heal the sick.

## **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 8.22-26 – I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around.*

This miracle of the restoration of sight to the blind man is unlike any other in any of the four gospels. In a few sentences Mark paints a vivid picture which sets the scene so clearly for us. Jesus puts saliva on the man's eyes and lays his hands on him, and we are told that the man is starting to be able to see, but unclearly, *I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around*. Again Jesus lays on hands to complete the process. Mark gives the sense that this healing required a lot of Jesus, but finally the man's sight is restored. But again the man is dismissed and told not even to enter the village. So often we see those healed sworn to silence by Jesus. Mark never explains why and we are left to wonder at the reason for this secrecy.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who are visually impaired.

## Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 8.27-9.1 – Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*

The gospel now moves into a new phase as Jesus, for the first time, prophesies his own death. The prelude to this is the question to his disciples, *Who do people say I am?* and the more direct question, *But you, who do you say I am?* The answer to the first question – John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets – is reminiscent of the discussion Herod is recorded as having about Jesus two chapters ago. But it is Peter's answer that is the right one for Mark, *You are the Christ*. But when Jesus predicts his passion and suffering Peter fails to understand the full truth and rebukes Jesus. For this he is turned on by Jesus, *Get behind me Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do*. Jesus's suffering is part of God's plan and following Jesus has its cost for his disciples too, *If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me*. It is apparent that Mark is writing for Christians who are facing persecution and even martyrdom.

### *Prayer*

Pray for all Christians who face persecution today.

## Friday 28<sup>th</sup> March

*Mark 9.2-29 – There in their presence he was transfigured.*

Jesus now withdraws to be apart with his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John. On the mountain he is transfigured and a voice is heard echoing the voice at his baptism. Peter appears to make a misjudgement in wishing to preserve the moment, although there are no words of rebuke from Jesus. Perhaps he is not so wrong to want to hold on to the moment. The disciples are sworn to silence until after the resurrection – the first clear reference to it. But coming down from the mountain there appears to be a response to this revelation of who Jesus truly is from the forces of evil. A young man is possessed by a powerful spirit which the disciples cannot drive out. Jesus heals the young man and drives out the spirit. The authority of the disciples is insufficient, *This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer*.

### *Prayer*

Pray that you may glimpse the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

## **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March**

*Mark 9.30-50 – If anyone wants to be first. He must make himself the last of all and servant of all.*

Now we hear the second prophecy of the passion, and the resurrection. This is followed by the disciples quarrelling among themselves about who is the greatest. This provokes a number of sayings about the nature of the kingdom and attitudes to the Christ. Those who welcome a child welcome Jesus, those who act in Jesus name will receive their reward, as will those who show kindness to those who belong to Christ in contrast to those who lead others astray. These are strong sayings which encourage the disciples – and us – to reflect upon their eternal destiny and their right to a place in the kingdom.

*Prayer*

Pray that you may welcome the kingdom of God.

## **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March – Lent 4**

*John 9.1-41 – As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.*

The miracle of the cure of the man born blind is taken by John as an metaphor for the fact that Jesus is the light of the world. As he gives sight to a blind man, so he gives light to the spiritually blind.

*Prayer*

Merciful Lord,  
absolve your people from their offences,  
that through your bountiful goodness  
we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins  
which by our frailty we have committed;  
grant this, heavenly Father,  
for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour,

who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## Monday 31<sup>st</sup> March

*Mark 10.1-31 – “In that case, who can be saved?” Jesus gazed at them and said, “By human resources it is impossible, but not for God: because for God everything is possible.”*

Since Jesus has started preparing his disciples for the passion there is much more teaching than miracles in the gospel and here we have lots of it. Teaching about divorce and remarriage, teaching about being *like a little child*, teaching about wealth and riches, teaching about renunciation and its reward. These words of Jesus can be hard to take in because they challenge the reader to re-evaluate his or her attitudes to things we take for granted, and often to adopt a world view which is at odds with the attitudes in our society. Jesus is very clear that the kingdom of God is so valuable that our whole life needs to be structured around ensuring that we will not be left out of it.

### *Prayer*

Pray for all whose marriages have broken up and all who are facing difficulties in their relationship.

## Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> April

*Mark 10.32-45 – The cup that I drink you shall drink, and with the baptism with which I shall be baptised you shall be baptised.*

The third prophecy of the passion is followed by the request of the brothers James and John to sit at the right and left of Jesus in his glory. Jesus does not rebuke them but challenges them to share his fate with the warning that even doing so will not guarantee them places by Jesus's side. James and John state their readiness to share Jesus's fate, but their question provokes a response from the other disciples, who are understandably annoyed by their presumption. Jesus teaches them about the nature of leadership among his followers, *anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all*. This whole episode follows a similar pattern to that which followed the

second prophecy of the passion – and the teaching is similar too. The disciples have obviously been slow to realise its importance.

*Prayer*

Pray for our political and church leaders, that they may know truly how to serve.

## **Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April**

*Mark 10.46-52 – Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.*

Jesus has been moving towards Jerusalem since halfway through chapter 8 and now he reaches Jericho, less than twenty miles away. It is here that the final healing miracle in Mark's gospel takes place. The persistence of Bartimaeus is impressive, if entirely understandable. He will not be dissuaded and shouts out to Jesus who grants his request. Unlike the earlier miracles of this sort where Jesus laid his hands on the person, or used saliva, here Jesus simply addresses Bartimaeus with the words, *Go; your faith has saved you.* And now for almost the first time there is no instruction not to tell anybody. This miracle feels very different from the others and there might be a clue as to why in the next chapter when Jesus enters Jerusalem. He is approaching the fulfilment of his calling.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who are afraid to follow Jesus because of what others might think.

## **Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> April**

*Mark 11.1-25 – Does not scripture say: My house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples? But you have turned it into a bandits' den.*

Jesus enters Jerusalem and is greeted rapturously by the crowds. But in Mark's gospel this visit to the Holy City would appear to be largely a reconnaissance visit, *and when he had surveyed it all, as it was late by now, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.* Possibly Jesus was planning the events of the next few days. Certainly the next day he re-enters the city and goes to the Temple where he overturns the tables of the money changers. But this event is sandwiched between a story about a fig tree which Jesus

curses and which becomes an occasion for Jesus to teach the disciples about the power of prayer. The last verse here is reminiscent of the Lord's prayer, which is otherwise absent from Mark's gospel.

*Prayer*

Pray for all traders, shopkeepers and merchants and all who work for them.

## **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 11.27-33 – What authority have you for acting like this? Or who gave you authority to act like this?*

We have seen before how Jesus has upset the scribes and the Pharisees. As he begins his ministry in Jerusalem, entering it for the third time from Bethany, the debate becomes more lively as much of Jesus's teaching is now direct criticism of the religious leaders. Here Jesus, challenged as to the source of his authority, undermines the elders and makes them look indecisive and a little foolish. We see how he deflects the question the elders ask by asking them a question in return. This is a common tactic Jesus employed against his critics.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who doubt.

## **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 12.1-17 – And they would have liked to arrest him, because they realised the parable was aimed at them, but they were afraid of the crowds.*

The debate continues. The parable of the wicked tenants is clearly aimed at the religious leaders. Jesus now seems to be going out of his way to irritate them. For now Jesus's fame and popularity with the crowds is protecting him, but he is making powerful enemies who will only put up with so much. The authorities now try to catch him out. Their question about taxes seems to be one which cannot have a safe answer, but Jesus cleverly evades their trap. But even here his answer carries an implicit criticism of the Pharisees and scribes. They, as we saw earlier in chapter 7, have ways

of avoiding their responsibilities and of twisting the Law to their own advantage.

*Prayer*

Pray that we may all take our responsibilities to one another and to society seriously.

## **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> April – Lent 5**

*John 11.1-45 – I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world.*

Jesus demonstrates his power over life and death in the raising of Lazarus. Jesus is the resurrection and life is his gift to Lazarus – and to all who believe in him, *Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*

*Prayer*

Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ  
delivered and saved the world:  
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 12.18-34 – Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: you must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.*

The Sadducees come to Jesus with a preposterous question about a woman who married seven brothers. But Jesus's answer will hardly satisfy them – the two start

with incompatible assumptions – but his reply will also have hardened their attitude to him. As well as taking an entirely different view he tells them that they *understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God*. Jesus is perhaps more dismissive of the Sadducees' question than of any that the Pharisees ask him, as we see in Jesus's dealing with the scribe who comes to him with the following question. Here, the two understand each other and the scribe is found to be *not far from the kingdom of God*. Jesus's criticism of the Pharisees is not about what they profess to believe, but about their hypocrisy.

*Prayer*

Pray for grace to keep God's commandments.

## **Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 12.35-44 – They have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.*

Mark records more provocative teaching of Jesus. The scribes have misunderstood the relationship between David and the Messiah; they are more concerned with their status and wealth than with justice or faith. The crowd *listened to him with delight*. Is this because of what Jesus says, or because of the group he is criticising? Then, seeing the poor widow putting her gift in the Temple treasury, Jesus praises her for her gift and by implication censures the wealthy and powerful for their lack of generosity. But Jesus is doing more than just annoying the leaders; he is also providing a template for the discipleship required of his followers.

*Prayer*

Pray that God will give you a generous heart.

## **Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 13.1-13 – Anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Chapter 13 is taken up by the eschatological discourse, a discussion of the end-time. Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple and also warns the disciples of the

suffering they will face as well as the signs of the end-time – wars and rumours of wars. Clearly Mark's gospel was written for a Church which was facing persecution. That Jesus predicted it all would give the Christians he is writing for courage to face their trials and comfort to know that this is all part of God's plan. Jesus assures the disciples that they will be saved at the end if they stand firm.

*Prayer*

Pray for courage to witness for Christ in your daily life.

## **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 13.14-31 – When you see these things happening: know that he is near, right at the gates.*

Mark now has Jesus painting a vivid picture of the end-time itself. The language and style is reminiscent of apocalyptic literature such as the Books of Revelation or Daniel. This prophecy in Mark's gospel is for the people of Judaea and Jerusalem rather than for the whole world, although the message is broadened in verse 27, *he will send his angels to gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the world to the ends of the sky*. The Christians for whom Mark is writing are directed to read the signs of the times and are told that it will happen in their lifetimes.

*Prayer*

Pray for grace to live in readiness for the end.

## **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 13.32-37 – So stay, awake because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow or dawn.*

The time when the end will come cannot be known, *as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels in heaven, not the Son; no one but the Father*. The unexpectedness of the end is key to how the Christian life should be lived. Because it could come at any time – and will be at an unknowable time – the Christian should always be ready. Nowhere is Mark's gospel more directly addressed to the Christians

of his time than in this chapter.

*Prayer*

Pray for all lead others astray.

## **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 14.1-31 – She has done what she could: she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.*

We move now to Mark's account of the passion of Jesus, beginning with the events around the last supper. The scene is set by the meeting of the chief priests in which they plan to look *for a way to arrest Jesus by some trick and have him put to death*. This is followed by the story of the Jesus's anointing at the house of Simon which is interpreted by Mark as Jesus's being anointed beforehand for burial. Perhaps, spurred on by recent events, Judas goes to the chief priests to offer to hand Jesus over to them. Mark tells us no motive for this, but says that Judas begins to *look for a way of betraying him when the opportunity should occur*. The disciples prepare for the last supper which in Mark's gospel has three key moments – Judas's treachery is foretold, the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine and Jesus's word that he *shall never drink wine any more until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God*. The command to *do this in remembrance of me* is absent from Mark (and Matthew); it is introduced by Luke and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 (which is probably written earlier than Mark). The third key moment at the last supper is the foretelling of Peter's denial. The ground is prepared for the events that will follow – Jesus's body is prepared for burial, Judas will betray him, he takes his farewell from his disciples and Peter will deny him three times.

*Prayer*

Pray to be forgiven for the times that you have denied Christ.

## **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April – Palm Sunday**

*Matthew 26.14-27.66 – The veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks were split, the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy*

*people rose from the dead.*

Matthew relates the events of the passion, from the betrayal by Judas, through the trial and to the death of Jesus. At the moment of his death, death itself is overcome and the old order is overthrown.

*Prayer*

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who in your tender love towards the human race  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,  
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Monday 14<sup>th</sup> April**

*Mark 14.32-65 – Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?*

For the last time Jesus withdraws to pray, this time in the garden of Gethsemane. Again he takes Peter, James and John with him. They cannot stay awake; it is the first desertion of the passion. Jesus knows that this is the moment when he will be handed over and Judas leads the soldiers to him and Jesus is arrested. There is a scuffle and Jesus is taken away to the high priests house while the disciples run away – the second desertion. When questioned Jesus initially makes no reply, but when asked if he is *the Christ, the son of the Blessed One* he says that he is – the first direct claim that Jesus makes of his Messiahship. And the beatings begin.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who serve in the armed forces, that they may act with integrity.

## Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April

*Mark 14.66-15.5 – Pilate put to him this question, “Are you the king of the Jews?”*

After the trial before the high priest Peter is challenged three times and three times denies knowing Jesus. As the cock crows Jesus remembers the words of Jesus and breaks down in tears – the third desertion. Jesus is now taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate's questions are not about whether or not he is the Messiah but whether he is the king of the Jews – he's concerned about the politics, not the religion. As before the high priest Jesus does not answer beyond, *It is you who say it*. Pilate is surprised at the way in which Jesus makes no effort to save his own life.

*Prayer*

Pray for all who have lost their faith.

## Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April

*Mark 15.6-20 – After having Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.*

Mark tells us of a custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover, and Jesus is on the short-list with Barabbas. The crowd, encouraged by the chief priests call for Barabbas, and Pilate complies to keep the peace, according to Mark. Jesus therefore is handed over to be crucified. There is an irony in Mark's telling of the story as the soldiers who prepare him for crucifixion mock him with the words, *Hail king of the Jews!* When they had had their fun they removed the purple cloak they had put on him and dress him in his own clothes.

*Prayer*

Pray for strength to resist going along with the crowd.

## Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April – Maundy Thursday

*Mark 15.21-24 – They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull.*

Jesus is led out to be crucified. Simon of Cyrene is enlisted to carry Jesus's cross. That Mark goes to such lengths to mention that he is the father of Rufus and Alexander suggests that they, if not Simon himself, are disciples of Jesus and may be members of Mark's church. Perhaps Jesus has not yet been totally abandoned by his followers. When they come to crucify him Jesus refuses the drug and the soldiers cast lots for his clothing. Everything of his life is taken away as Jesus nears his death.

*Prayer*

Pray for grace to watch and wait with those who suffer.

## **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> April – Good Friday**

*Mark 15.25-39 – Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.*

The charge against Jesus, pinned to the cross, read *The King of the Jews*. It is a political crime for which he has been crucified. On the cross Jesus is mocked by the passers by, by the chief priests and scribes and even by the criminals crucified with him. For six hours, according to Mark, Jesus hung on the cross. Darkness came over the land for the last three hours and at the end Jesus cried out words from Psalm 22, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* And then he died. Following his death the centurion becomes the first to acknowledge the truth of who Jesus is, *In truth this man was Son of God.*

*Prayer*

Pray that you may know that Jesus died for us.

## **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> April – Easter Eve**

*Mark 15.40-47 – Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joset took note of where he was laid.*

Some women who followed Jesus have watched from a distance. Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James and Joset, and Salome are named. Mark has hardly mentioned any women disciples of Jesus until this point. Again James and Joset are presumably known in Mark's church. Joseph of Arimathea takes the body of Jesus and

buries him in a tomb. The two Marys watch all of this and take note of where the body is laid. Mark is preparing us for the resurrection.

### *Prayer*

Pray that you may show kindness to Jesus in the way you treat others.

## **Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> April – Easter Day**

*Mark 16 – You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here.*

The ending of Mark's gospel is complicated. It probably ended originally with the account of the discovery of the empty tomb by the women and the proclamation by the young man (an angel?), *You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here.* The women are instructed to tell the disciples what has happened and to tell them that they will see Jesus in Galilee, at which they run away terrified, telling no one anything. Perhaps later Christians thought this an inadequate ending for the gospel. What follows is a later addition and there are a variety of endings in a number of different sources. Mark told the story he thought it was important to tell. It ends with the empty tomb and challenges us to decide how we will respond to the story.

### *Prayer*

Praise God that Christ is risen. Alleluia!

In addition to this booklet these daily reflections are available to download from the Benefice website (fourcrosses.weebly.com) as a pdf, or for eBook readers (epub or Kindle). They will also be posted each day on the Benefice Facebook and Google+ pages (links to these are on the Benefice website) where you can join in a discussion if you wish (registration required).



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