



Lent

Journey through despair with the Gospel of Mark

Lent is a forty-day period that leads up to Easter in which Christians prepare themselves thoroughly to enter into the mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beginning traditionally with Ash Wednesday, we come face to face with ourselves as Jesus did in the wilderness of temptation. We acknowledge our mortality, frailty, and need for the embracing, forgiving, reconciling love of God - sometimes with a cross of ashes being marked upon our foreheads as we intentionally turn from our sinfulness towards Christ.

Usually, this self-examination also involves a form of self-discipline or self-denial, as we admit that the way of the cross can be a challenge and even, at times, a hardship. Humble service, charitable giving, and meditation on the Word of God are other common aspects of getting ready to journey with Jesus towards Jerusalem.

This year, we would like to offer you a companion reading guide through the Gospel of Mark who, quite urgently and intentionally, devotes most of his narrative to the conversations and teachings that take place as Jesus resolutely sets off on

the path that leads to suffering, despair, and ultimately, death.

You can use this guide - as an individual or a group - in several ways:

1. As part of your daily devotions, read the prescribed text and prompt for reflection. Write a brief summary/response/prayer in the blank space on the right-hand side of these pages.
2. Create a companion group that meets every week. Assign members one or two of the readings to summarise. In your time of gathering, present these summaries and one or two thoughts that came to mind as you engaged with the journey.
3. Set a morning in Holy Week aside for a quiet retreat or vigil - Holy Saturday would be ideal! As you journey through the chapters, create a visual map of the conversations and events that unfolded along the way on a large piece of cardboard and highlight the parts of the greatest significance in your own journey.
4. Share the journey with others by contributing in your comments on our daily Facebook posts at <https://www.facebook.com/Saltbushcommunity>

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| <p>Ash Wednesday 14/2 Mark 1:9-15 <i>Baptism, temptation, and the beginning of Jesus's public ministry</i></p> <p>As you enter this Lenten season, what "place" do you find yourself in: a place of affirmation and blessing, a place of trial and testing, a place of busy and vital ministry?</p> | |
| <p>Thursday 15/2 Mark 8:1-13 <i>Bread in remote places</i></p> <p>What is the "bread" that is sustaining you - especially if you find yourself in a testing place?</p> | |
| <p>Friday 16/2 Mark 8:14-21 <i>A "bad" batch</i></p> <p>What words, conversations, or thoughts might be interfering with your understanding and experience of the sustaining love of Christ?</p> | |

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| <p>Saturday 17/2 Mark 8:22-26 <i>Seeing clearly</i></p> <p>As Jesus touches your life in this season, what are you hoping might be healed, restored, revealed, or made clear?</p> | |
| Lent 1 | |
| <p>Sunday 18/2 Mark 8:27-30 <i>Who do you say I am?</i></p> <p>Who do you say Jesus is?</p> | |
| <p>Monday 19/2 Mark 8:31-9:1 <i>The way of the cross</i></p> <p>What does the image of the cross mean to you as you choose to follow Jesus?</p> | |

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| <p>Tuesday 20/2 Mark 9:2-13 <i>Keeping things to ourselves</i></p> <p>What are some of the questions of life and faith that you keep to yourself?</p> | |
| <p>Wednesday 21/2 Mark 9:14-29 <i>Overcoming unbelief</i></p> <p>How does the father's prayer "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief" (vs. 24) speak into some of your questions?</p> | |
| <p>Thursday 22/2 Mark 9:30-32 <i>Too scared to ask</i></p> <p>Are there any questions that you are too afraid to ask? Or to answer?</p> | |

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| <p>Friday 23/2 Mark 9:33-37 <i>Childish</i></p> <p>Have you behaved in a childish manner over the past week? How about a childlike manner? What is the difference?</p> | |
| <p>Saturday 24/2 Mark 9:38-41 <i>Widening the circle</i></p> <p>Who would you struggle to accept and welcome as belonging to God?</p> | |
| Lent 2 | |
| <p>Sunday 25/2 Mark 9:42-50 <i>Salted with fire</i></p> <p>What thoughts, habits, and actions that are destructive and damaging to your relationships do you want to bring into the purifying fire of God's presence and attention?</p> | |

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| <p>Monday 26/2 Mark 10:1-12 <i>The ties that bind</i></p> <p>What relationships do you long to strengthen? Long to let go of?</p> | |
| <p>Tuesday 27/2 Mark 10:13-16 <i>Receiving the kingdom</i></p> <p>What part of your life do you most need Jesus to put his hands on and bless?</p> | |
| <p>Wednesday 28/2 Mark 10:17-22 <i>Love points out what lacks</i></p> <p>If Jesus was looking at what is lacking in your life, what would his command be to you today?</p> | |

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| <p>Thursday 29/2 Mark 10:23-31 <i>Counting the cost</i></p> <p>What would you leave behind to follow Jesus?</p> | |
| <p>Friday 1/3 Mark 10:32-34 <i>Sufferings predicted</i></p> <p>How has your journey with Christ been marked with suffering?</p> | |
| <p>Saturday 2/3 Mark 10:35-45 <i>Asking without understanding</i></p> <p>What do you think and/or feel when the things that you ask of God seem to go unanswered or be refused?</p> | |

| Lent 3 | |
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| <p>Sunday 3/3 Mark 10:46-52 <i>Asking for what you want</i></p> <p>What do you want Jesus to do for you?</p> | |
| <p>Monday 4/3 Mark 11:1-11 <i>"Hosanna! Save us!"</i></p> <p>What phrase or sentence would you use to greet Jesus with as he comes to you today?</p> | |
| <p>Tuesday 5/3 Mark 11:12-19 <i>Clearing space</i></p> <p>What needs to go from your life in order to make space for authentic relationship with God and with others?</p> | |

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| <p>Wednesday 6/3 Mark 11:20-26 <i>Faith that moves mountains</i></p> <p>What act of faith might God be calling you to engage in today?</p> | |
| <p>Thursday 7/3 Mark 11:27-33 <i>Power plays</i></p> <p>How does your Christian faith shape your relationship to power and authority?</p> | |
| <p>Friday 8/3 Mark 12:1-12 <i>Protecting “our place”</i></p> <p>Are there any messages or messengers from God that you would reject in order to keep the way you have ordered your life intact?</p> | |

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| <p>Saturday 9/3 Mark 12:13-17 <i>Hidden motives</i></p> <p>How well do your words align with your thoughts, actions, and intentions?</p> | |
| Lent 4 | |
| <p>Sunday 10/3 Mark 12:18-27 <i>Eternal questions</i></p> <p>Do you have a picture of heaven?</p> | |
| <p>Monday 11/3 Mark 12:28-34 <i>The most important thing</i></p> <p>Is there a verse, phrase, or value that you seek to live out as a follower of Jesus?</p> | |

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| <p>Tuesday 12/3 Mark 12:35-40 <i>The place of honour</i></p> <p>Spend some time naming the leaders who have drawn you closer to God by their servant hearts.</p> | |
| <p>Wednesday 13/3 Mark 12:41-44 <i>Giving our all</i></p> <p>What is the most surprising or selfless gift that you have ever received?</p> | |
| <p>Thursday 14/3 Mark 13:1-13 <i>The world at war</i></p> <p>What sustains your faith when you hear stories of terrible persecution and suffering?</p> | |

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| <p>Friday 15/3 Mark 13:14-31 <i>Be on the lookout</i></p> <p>Where have you seen glimpses of Jesus and/or the kingdom of God drawing near?</p> | |
| <p>Saturday 16/3 Mark 13:32-37 <i>Watch!</i></p> <p>What parts of your daily life are “asleep” to God’s presence?</p> | |
| Lent 5 | |
| <p>Sunday 17/3 Mark 14:1-11 <i>Doing what we can</i></p> <p>How would you like to express your love for God today?</p> | |

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| <p>Monday 18/3 Mark 14:12-26 <i>Getting ready</i></p> <p>What practical and spiritual preparations do you need to make as Easter approaches?</p> | |
| <p>Tuesday 19/3 Mark 14:27-31 <i>Denial</i></p> <p>What words have loved ones spoken about you that have not fitted with how you see yourself?</p> | |
| <p>Wednesday 20/3 Mark 14:32-42 <i>Deep despair</i></p> <p>What do you think and/or feel as you read about Jesus being deeply troubled and distressed?</p> | |

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| <p>Thursday 21/3 Mark 14:43-51 <i>Giving in to fear</i></p> <p>Has there ever been a time when you felt like you deserted God or ran away from a situation?</p> | |
| <p>Friday 22/3 Mark 14:53-65 <i>False testimony</i></p> <p>How do you tell the difference between what is true and what is false?</p> | |
| <p>Saturday 23/3 Mark 14:66-72 <i>Disowning Jesus</i></p> <p>Are there times when you do not want to be associated with Jesus - or with the Christian faith?</p> | |

| Holy week | | |
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| <p>Palm/Passion Sunday 24/3 Mark 15:1-15 <i>Giving in to the crowd</i></p> <p>Who would you want to placate or satisfy - even at great cost to yourself or another?</p> | | |
| <p>Monday in Holy Week 25/3 Mark 15:16-20 <i>Mockery and maltreatment</i></p> <p>How do you respond to those who mock or make fun of you?</p> | | |
| <p>Tuesday in Holy Week 26/3 Mark 15:21-24 <i>Crucifixion</i></p> <p>How do you deal with pain?</p> | | |

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| <p>Wednesday in Holy Week 27/3 Mark 15:25-26 <i>King of the Jews</i></p> <p>What legacy would you like to be know for?</p> | |
| <p>Maundy Thursday 28/3 Mark 15:27-32 <i>Save yourself</i></p> <p>What does the “saving work” of Christ mean to you?</p> | |
| <p>Good Friday 29/3 Mark 15:33-41 <i>Forsaken</i></p> <p>Have you ever felt utterly alone in the depths of despair?</p> | |

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| <p>Holy Saturday 30/3 Mark 15:42-47 Death</p> <p>What losses are you grieving in this Easter season?</p> | |
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| <p>Easter Sunday 31/3 Mark 16:1-8 Defying expectations</p> <p>As you reflect on the Lenten journey and where you've looked for Jesus and where he's shown up in your life, what have you discovered that you hope to take with you into the rest of the year?</p> | |
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A final note

We hope that in reading the story of Mark and accompanying Jesus to the cross, you've been touched by the mystery and the complexity of life, faith, death, and hope. Jesus is portrayed as present to a wide array of human emotions and experiences even as he continues in a way that will certainly lead to his suffering and death.

And, as much as there is the temptation to point to those with power as liars, hypocrites, and perpetrators of abuse, it is often the closest followers of Jesus who get it wrong: who question, who deny, who betray, who get in the way of those they think unworthy of his time or attention, who run away when things get scary, who just don't understand

As you move from the sacred seasons of Lent and Easter towards the celebration of Pentecost and the many weeks in "Ordinary Time," may you carry your questions and responses with you and ponder deeply how Jesus's responses to human need and power might transform your way of thinking and living in the world - or in your community of faith.

What does it mean to take up your cross?
 What does it mean to lay down your life?
 What does it mean to live resurrection?

As a final reading, you may want to look at Mark 16:9-20 and think about how the Lord is working with you in offering good news to all creation.

Shalom,
Mark, Geoff, Tim, Natasha, Peter & Yvonne