

## Lent with Mark

### Introduction to Lent with Mark

As much as I love the gifted storytelling of Luke, Matthew's narrative style and John's uniqueness, I enjoy reading Mark most of all.

He has a way of telling the story of Jesus that keeps the reader focused and moving, and because it can be read easily in one sitting. Indeed, not only can it be read silently by oneself in one sitting, it can be read aloud by a small group in just under two hours; or, as was the case last year, it can be told aloud by 29 different tellers in just over two hours. A single teller can usually proclaim the whole gospel of Mark in about 90 minutes. Doing so helps us to hear the story of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus as a single narrative rather than in the small segments we hear each Sunday in church.

As we prepare for our Journey with Mark, I encourage you to first read the whole gospel, out loud and with someone else if possible, in one sitting. And then, each day, follow along with the various people, lay and ordained, near and far, who have reflected on a short passage. Journey well.

Susan Wilson

### **Ash Wednesday, February 18 Mark 1:1-20 Baptism, Temptation and Calling of Disciples**

Mark jumps right into the story of Jesus' ministry beginning with his baptism by John. There is no doubt about who Jesus is and what he is going to be all about. A voice from the heavens confirms his identity and assures him of God's love and pleasure in him. He is tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, and although Mark doesn't elaborate on what those temptations are, apparently Jesus passes the test and needs angels to minister to him. Affirmed in his identity and calling, Jesus begins to gather his own disciples, whom he will teach and who will carry on his ministry after his death and resurrection.

Reflection on the purpose of our lives is one of the most significant and challenging tasks that we as human beings engage in. At points along our journeys, we are just as certain of what our identity and purpose are as Jesus appears in this opening passage. But along the way, our certainty of these things shifts and changes, grows and matures. Alas, the experience can be confusing, frustrating, depressing or exhilarating. Where

are you today with that question? Do you have clarity about your life and purpose?  
What if you don't, where can you go for help?

Regardless of what we see as our purpose in life, or our role in the world, or our vocation in the community, everything comes back to rest on who we are in the eyes and heart of God. We are God's beloved. You are a special child of God, deeply loved by God. When we are not sure of what to do or why, it is always good to remember this truth. On the spiritual journey it is important to seek out companions on the way – a pastor, a mentor, a soul friend, a spiritual director – who will help to remind you of this truth when life gets a bit fuzzy or uncertain.

Susan Wilson, Rector, All Saints Erin

#### **Thursday, February 19    Mark 1:21-45    Beginning of Jesus' Ministry**

Jesus worked and rested. Jesus worked and rested.

Notice the pattern?

Probably Jesus learned this lifestyle from his parents and religious traditions.

The Ten Commandments had recommended people should rest after working six days straight.

Mark put Jesus to work immediately after Jesus made his own commitment to God and selecting followers who would bring God's mission to fruition.

Then he healed people and preached God's good news ... afterwards he found an alone place to pray, think, reflect and recharge before resuming resume his work.

That is Mark's message to us as we study his gospel about Jesus Christ this Lent.

WORK for us may mean our daily labours, our volunteer endeavours or whatever else occupies our time, talent and resources in our every day living.

REST means what we do when we get away from our WORK to become rejuvenated physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally.

Our REST could take place in a quiet room, in public worship, during travel or eating or any other situation where we can retreat into ourselves and be alone to communicate with God.

This Lent let Mark lead you through your WORK and REST to a new or renewed relationship with your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*Hollis Hiscock, Editor, Niagara Anglican*

### **Friday, February 20 Mark 2:1-12 Healing of Paralytic**

There is a fascinating thing at work in this story. Although there were many people seeking help and healing from Jesus, the focus is on one person - the paralyzed man whose ingenious friends find a way to get him into a place where he will experience the power of being in the presence of Jesus. He says and does nothing to receive forgiveness, but simply responds to the words spoken by Jesus to him, "Your sins are forgiven ... Take up your mat and go home".

We see also the struggle of the Pharisees present; they were seeking to keep the religious institution alive and well. How often do we miss the experience of being in the presence of the Divine while seeking to maintain the status quo and the rule of law?

What about sin? It means to miss the mark. When we miss the mark, accept it with a change of heart that we are forgiven. Receiving forgiveness is truly a powerful and most liberating moment. We are realigned with our true self and can live again.

*Elizabeth Heuther, Rector, St. Matthias' Guelph*

### **Saturday, February 21 Mark 2:13-17 Calling of Levi**

It always strikes me, the people Jesus calls directly and they come. They just drop their current lives and come. A whole wealth of thoughts go with that; it just isn't that simple. Perhaps those were simpler times. Perhaps not. What you did for a living was who you were.

I am also struck by the polarity of the passage. On one hand there is the tax collector, reviled by his society; on the other there are the scribes being offended.

Jesus does not "call" the scribes but they are around, watching everything. Do the scribes offer him food and drink? Do they bring him home? Do they drop their lives to follow him?

Jesus' final line of the passage - that he came to call sinners, comparing himself to a physician for the sick - resonates down through time. If we are to follow Jesus, we must seek out the ones who truly need us. Christ is not just for the righteous but for those who need him. The sick in body and mind, the ones who struggle day by day to get through, to think well of themselves, the ones filled with anger, wanting to lash out. There are so many; he calls them all.

*Anne Gould is Treasurer of St. Paul's Shelburne*

### **Monday, February 23    Mark 2:18-27    Questions of Fasting and Sabbath**

As I was researching my UK family and an understanding of how they lived, and what if any hardships they had to endure' I ran across this story.

A councillor was walking home on a Sunday and suddenly pointed his gold topped walking stick in the direction of the river. "You two, what are you doing fishing on a Sunday? You are breaking the law. You will each pay a fine of 5s."

No amount of pleading, of hungry children and just getting enough for a family meal was listened to. The law was broken. (The Sunday Observance Act 1780 [Eight sections long.]

The disciples with Jesus, while walking through some wheat fields on the Jewish Sabbath, gathered and crushed some grains between their fingers. Immediately they were criticised by the Pharisees for breaking the law. Jesus answered that the law was made for humanity, not humanity for the law. Almost 2,000 years of Christianity later, the British parliament had not learned that.

I am reminded that the word lent is an ancient word for spring. Springtime sees much activity underground, the plants are pushing down their roots as they prepare for new life, so Lent is a time for us to push down our roots into deeper nutritious soil of love and compassion ready for new life in Christ ,where love is above law and compassion is above rule.

Easter and resurrection only come through the cross, but wood and nails could not have kept Jesus on the cross had Love not held Him there.

*Muriel Hornby, former Honorary Assistant, All Saints' Erin*

### **Tuesday, February 24    Mark 3:1-19    Appointing the twelve**

One theme running through this passage is Jesus' moral authority over all powers of evil. The Pharisees are condemned for their "hardness of heart" in not encouraging the healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. Their evil intentions are indicated when they go off to the Herodians, clearly a group associated with the hated Roman state, to plot against Jesus.

Great crowds are then attracted to Jesus' healing powers but it is the powers of evil, the "unclean spirits", who realize that a spiritual revolution against evil is going on, not just a wonder-worker healer in action. "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'" They recognized one who operated by divine moral authority, not just good healing techniques. And they fell down before him in fear, recognizing his authority.

Finally, in choosing the 12 apostles and sending them out, Jesus sends them not only to proclaim the message of Jesus as the Son of God but to have "authority to cast out demon."

As we are called to participate in God's Mission in the world, it is good to be reminded that we are given a divine moral authority over the powers of evil in the world and we should not be afraid to invoke it. Jesus had it and God gives it to us.

*Terry Brown , Co-Rector, Church of the Ascension Hamilton*

### **Wednesday, February 25 Mark 3:20-35 Jesus, Beelzebub and Family**

True confession. When I first reviewed this segment of Mark's Gospel, the word "Beelzebub" glared at me. Not through Mark's words, through the lyrics of the singing group, Queen. Bohemian Rhapsody played in my head, "Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me." Another discussion, perhaps ...

The second word that stood out prominently was "family." Jesus exclaimed, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Family. What are your thoughts? Do you think of the nuclear family - mother, father and birth siblings - or a newer definition?

A couple of years ago, our Church borrowed a toy "Nativity Scene" from the Diocesan Resource Library. Inside were all the standard pieces, including the adoring parents, Mary and Joseph, and their lovely white-plastic baby Jesus.

Consider the definition of "family" today. In the future, will this toy company include same-sex parents gazing upon their intersexed baby? Not likely, by toy manufacturer's standards. How about you? If you were to design your manger scene, what would it

look like? During this Lenten season, let us continue to consider Jesus' words: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.' Amen.

*Joan Dunn, Priest Associate, Halton Cluster of Parishes, Georgetown*

**Thursday, February 26     Mark 4:1-20     Parable of the Sower**

In this season when gardeners are only beginning to contemplate what they want to plant in their gardens, Jesus' parable of the sower reminds us deeply of the significance of the seeds we plant not only in the ground, but also in all the lives we touch.

Jesus describes the seed as God's word, scattered by the farmers to produce a crop, and that the environment or soil of the ground makes a difference in whether or not that which was sown grows and produces a crop.

Like the soil, all souls receiving the word are subject to their environment for nurturing what is planted inside of them. It is important to listen for truth, and to not allow worries, distractions, trouble or suffering to delay or prevent spiritual growth in our lives, that we might share it with others - 30, 60 or 100 times!

What should strike us most is Jesus' statement, "Those who have ears should listen." As gardeners, in the right season we look for where we can best plant seeds in order to produce a good crop. Perhaps we need to do more listening and learning to help others cultivate their soil so that the seeds we all scatter land in good soil.

*Ruth Reid, Pastoral Assistant, Youth and Family Ministry, St John the Evangelist Thorold*

**Friday, February 27     Mark 4:21-34     Parables of Lamp, Growing Seed and Mustard Seed**

As a former teacher of literature, I have always enjoyed the ambiguity of Jesus' parables.

In the Parable of the Lamp, we hear the well-known instruction "Don't hide your light under a bushel" with the warning that we must "pay attention to what we hear." At the end of this passage we are told that Jesus spoke in parables to all, "as they were able to hear" but he explained them to his disciples - a rather mysterious comment that seems to round out the warning to listen carefully.

The Parable of the Growing Seed and the Parable of the Mustard Seed both offer comparisons to the Kingdom of God in terms of earthly activities like planting, growth, harvesting and shelter - activities familiar to an agrarian society. These seem to be simple lessons about the importance of care and faithfulness. But they might also suggest the possibility of God's kingdom here on earth. Certainly, the stories imply the power of growth and development from the smallest of beginnings.

These parables have always suggested to me the possibility of God's kingdom here on earth and the need for each of us to contribute to its growth.

*Elizabeth Hopkins, Parishioner, All Saints Erin*

### **Saturday, February 28    Mark 4:35-41    Jesus Calms the Storm**

When I read this story about Jesus it made me remember a time or two when I was much younger and still living in Upper Island Cove, Newfoundland. When I first met Mabel, who would later become my wife, my friend Ray Barrett also had a new girl named Olive and the two of us fellows decided to take the girls for a ride across the Bay (Conception Bay). It was about 3 km in a 12 foot punt (that's a row boat for mainlanders) to go from Bishop's Cove to the Mad Rock in Bay Roberts. We packed a picnic lunch and got aboard. About half way across the swell came on. Now, you must know that this swell comes into Conception Bay from the Atlantic Ocean. This swell of water out in the middle of the Bay was very frightening when you were sitting in a small row boat. Well, my buddy Ray had all the confidence and he got us to the other side just fine. Ray said that in another few hours it would be fine for our return trip. We enjoyed our picnic lunch with our gals and then got aboard the boat to head back home. We made it safely back to the Rocky Land at Bishop's Cove shore and all was well.

I think that Jesus had his hand on our boat, and on the wind and the water that day back in 1956.

Despite the somewhat scary adventure, the girls later decided to marry us and the four of us remained dear friends for more than 60 years.

What memory comes to mind when you read this Gospel story?

*Douglas Mercer, Lay Reader, All Saints Erin*

### **Monday, March 2    Mark 5:1-20    Jesus Heals a Demoniac**

This passage from Mark's Gospel about the healing of the demoniac speaks to me about liberation. Not a liberation theology per se, but a liberation from all that binds us body and soul, and chains us down.

The key to the story lies in a part of the question that the possessed man puts to Jesus; "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"

We may well ask the same question of Jesus when we are feeling chained down by our own demons. It may seem that every time we feel that we have freed ourselves all on our own the demons return, weighing us down even more.

The demons were still there after Jesus commanded them to leave the demoniac. They had only been set aside to another place until they ultimately destroyed themselves.

All Jesus asks of us is to lay all our cares at his feet and He alone will remove the chains.

This invitation is a common thread that weaves its way through the Gospels.

The most poignant to me can be found in the comfortable words of the Holy Communion as found in the Book of Common Prayer: "Come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you." [Matthew 11: 28] These words can liberate us from our demons and set us free to be our true selves.

*Ron Pincoe, Vocational Deacon, St Mark's Orangeville*

## **Tuesday, March 3     Mark 5:21-43     Girl Restored, Woman Healed**

A man of prominence publically requests Jesus to heal his young daughter and a woman comes silently for healing without even asking. One story embedded within another, but both about faith as well as anguish relieved by Jesus' healing touch. Jairus came to Jesus in the midst of a crowd. He humbled himself, bowing at Jesus' feet and "begged him repeatedly" to come and heal his young daughter. Jairus laid his faith out for all to see the extent to which he trusted Jesus. Then the news came that his daughter had died. We are not told if Jairus wavered in his trust because Jesus so quickly responds, "Do not fear, only believe."

Silently, without wanting anyone to know, the woman who had suffered for many years approached Jesus to gently touch his clothing hoping to be healed undetected. She was granted her unspoken request, but was not allowed to remain anonymous. Realizing she had indeed received healing she felt compelled to come forward when Jesus demanded to know who had touched him.



Like that of Jairus and the woman, our faith becomes a witness when others see it and recognize the difference it makes in our lives.

*Stephanie Pellow, Rector, St. Alban the Martyr Grand Valley and St. Paul's Shelburne*

**Wednesday, March 4    Mark 6:1-13    Jesus is Rejected, Mission of the Disciples**

The passage from Mark is a remarkable passage about faith. In the first part, we learn that the teaching of Jesus is rejected in his home town, Nazareth, and Jesus is amazed at the lack of faith. This should be a significant blow to Jesus because, according to Mark's account, he is becoming well known. However Jesus does not quit - instead he sends the 12 disciples out, two by two, to teach and to heal. The Holy Spirit is with them; they teach and they heal.

Rejection is part of life and God is very aware that it will occur to all of us.

The disciples must have headed out in some trepidation having seen what had happened to Jesus in Nazareth, but they went and let the Holy Spirit guide them.

Sometimes we feel that nothing will work and there is no point trying to live out our baptismal role of being the church in the world. But if we, in faith, can accept the power of the Holy Spirit, then God can and will work through us.

*Rod McDowell, Vocational Deacon, St John's Niagara Falls*

**Thursday, March 5    Mark 6:14-29    Death of John the Baptist**

Ever found yourself blurting something out without first engaging your brain? We've all done it - spoken the first thought without considering the potential consequence. As soon as the words left our mouths we wish we could roll back time and retract them. But the sad reality is, we can't and now it's time for damage control. It usually goes something like this, "Hi guys, good to see you again. You wouldn't believe how well my division has done this quarter, records sales and profits; I'll eat my shoe if anyone in the company is even close to what we've achieved. How are things in your neck of the woods? Oh, you don't say?" Suddenly you have a decision to make. Whether to lose face and in humility say you're sorry, you didn't actually mean it, OR you can choose to eat your shoe, think you are retaining the respect of others, but in reality you will be remembered for being even more foolish.

Herod chose to eat his shoe. Grieved at the thought of losing face in front of others, he decided he had no choice other than give his daughter whatever she asked for after she

danced for him and his guests. After all, that is what he blurted out that he would do, without first thinking about the potential consequence. When she later asked for the head of John the Baptist, a man whom he feared as a righteous and holy man and a man whom up to this point he had protected, he chose to value the opinions of others, above his own beliefs and values. It was a foolish decision that haunted him for the rest of his days.

As Christians we are not immune from blurting something out that we wished we hadn't, and then be challenged to set aside our own beliefs and values, in order to save face in front of others. We can choose to eat our shoe or we can stick to our beliefs and values by apologizing and retracting our words. In the long term we will avoid being haunted by our actions and we may just attract the admiration and interest of others through our Christian witness.

*Brian Galligan, Rector, St Alban the Martyr Acton*

**Friday, March 6      Mark 6:30-44      Feeding of 5000**

This well known story is like a three act play.

The first scene reveals Jesus compassion for the crowds (verse 34), not only in their hunger for that food that was nourishing their souls, but also for food to nourish their bodies.

Jesus' resolve not to send them away hungry opens the middle scene. He is calling the disciples to work with him in meeting the people's need. There is movement from invitation to charge to a pointed question and bidding, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." (verse 38)

Their bringing of five loaves and two fish opens the third scene. Jesus takes their offerings, looks up to heaven, blesses and breaks the bread, and gives it to the disciples to distribute among the people. Miraculously all eat and are filled. (verse 42)

This story moves me to give thanks ...

For all the hands across Niagara, making breakfast for kids before school, soup for the homeless, community suppers for those living in poverty.

For the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund and its abiding commitments to food aid and food security (see [fredsays.ca](http://fredsays.ca))

For all of the world leaders who labour to eradicate extreme poverty among the nations.

*Fred Hiltz, Primate, Anglican Church of Canada*

### **Saturday, March 7    Mark 6:45-56    Jesus Walks on Water**

So many of us live our whole lives in our own little boat. Understandably, as there is comfort and safeness staying there and most times we cruise along and the sailing is smooth. But at other times, a fierce wind storm arises and the sky around us turns black and we are tossed about with little sense of where we are or in what direction we are travelling. In those moments, the tempest is our only focus; we wonder how long it will last and if we will even survive.

The disciples probably thought the same thing.

Exhausted from rowing against the adverse waves, they frantically searched the horizon for a break in the storm; for hope and relief. When a figure appeared out of the darkness moving toward them, they cried out in terror, "It's a ghost!" Fear often makes us see things not as they really are.

Jesus came to them, walking on the water, coming to calm their fear and ease the storm. He tells them "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." He got into their boat, the winds ceased, peace and calm resumed.

When the storms arise in our lives, and they will arise, it does not matter how big our boat is. What matters is where we are looking. Do we focus on the turbulent seas, the crashing waves and wicked winds threatening to capsize us OR do we search the horizon for Jesus to come and get into our boat with us?

Jesus does come to us. He comes to us and enters our boat and calms the waters, and by doing so, he calms our hearts also. We don't need to expend our energy rowing in circles or bailing water. We need to wait and keep watch and trust that Jesus will come to us.

Don't look at the storm. Look out into it and watch for Jesus making his way to you. He brings you peace and calmness. He enters your boat and never leaves you alone. And for that, we too are "utterly astounded."

*Holly Klemmensen, Postulant, Diocese of Niagara*

**Monday, March 9      Mark 7:1-23   Tradition of the Elders**

It is easy to get used to doing things because that is what has always been done. We kneel here, stand then and speak these words at this point. Most long term Anglicans can, without any effort, hear "and now, as our Saviour taught us, let us pray" and immediately launch into the Lord's Prayer. Why? (It states in the Bible that Jesus spoke that prayer as an example, but says that prayers should come from the heart and not be said by rote.) Jesus often tells the people around him to not follow tradition so strictly; that love of God is more important than following the way it has always been done. In this case Jesus is confronting the tradition of cleanliness, which in itself is a good thing... washing hands and keeping clean have many benefits and should not be forsaken! However in that time it had taken on a life of its own and following the "elders" was more important than anything else. Scribes, always looking to complain about something, jump on the disciples for not washing their hands before eating. Not for basic sanitary concerns (Do you know what those hands had been doing? Could have been anything!) but for the lack of following the elders' ways. And even after Jesus has rebutted them for not loving God with their hearts by being so focused on man made rules, the disciples need another explanation. One cannot help but feel for Jesus as he probably sighs and settles down to try to get yet one more seemingly simple thought through the dense skulls of his followers. The gist: love God with your heart, pray, worship, share as feels right in your heart, when it feels right and how it feels right ... not just when the elders/institution/society decrees or how it decrees. The little prayer for safe travels as the weather turns bad on a Wednesday is just as correct as the prayers for peace during the 11am Sunday service, and probably a more heart felt prayer than the Lords Prayer ever has been!

*Trish Gould, Parishioner, St. Paul's Shelburne*

**Tuesday, March 10      Mark 7:24-30   Syrophenician Woman**

This is a shocking story for many of us to read as Jesus appears to be speaking in a very harsh, disrespectful way to this woman who is seeking help ... perhaps as a last resort she comes to him because she has heard of his reputation. Is this really about Jesus or about us and our perception of him? We do not want to hear him speak with such disdain, sounding sexist and racist in one statement. It disturbs our image and ideal of who Jesus is.

So what is the point of this story? Perhaps, it is a wonderfully clear reminder that all are part of the kingdom of God and that we need to respect and accept diversity and difference. We need to see that each one is a part of the whole of humanity. All are welcome at our table. Can we appreciate that we are different and love it and each other?

Elizabeth Heuther, Rector, St. Matthias' Guelph

### **Wednesday, March 11 Mark 7:31-37 Healing of a Deaf Man**

Jesus caused the deaf man to hear and speak clearly. However, before doing that, Jesus withdrew with the man to a private place, and performed the healing there.

This is one of several times we see Jesus withdrawing from the crowd to a more private place – to heal, to pray, or just to be alone. Lent is the season in the Christian year that especially encourages us to cultivate our own private times and places – to carve out space in our busy lives, to meditate, to pray, and to listen to God. Private time with God can be achieved during a quiet walk, while listening to music, by contemplating a line of Scripture such as “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10), or in prayer, to name a few. It is not so important how we achieve it, but rather the fact that we do achieve it.

Do you have a private place or time that allows you to withdraw from the busyness of the day to spend time alone with God? Lent is an ideal time to develop such a practice. May this quiet time be a blessing to you!

*Shirl Christian, Rector, Grace Church Arthur and St Paul's Mount Forest*

### **Thursday, March 12 Mark 8:1-10 Feeding of 4000**

“In those days ...” In these days, the story is one of the most familiar and the most controversial of Jesus’ ministry. How did he do that? Did he do that? Or did the gathered crowd, moved by witnessing his giving thanks and blessing the seven loaves of bread and the few small fish, simply share with their neighbours what each had brought?

Ultimately, at this distance in time and geography, we simply cannot know. Does it matter?

What does matter is that in this story we see Jesus fulfilling the ancient Hebrew tradition, even obligation, of feeding others, a tradition that became and remains central to Christians in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

I invite you to take time through this Lent to reflect on what the simple meal of bread and wine shared in our churches every Sunday really means to you. Is it just routine, and coffee time afterwards is more satisfying? Or do you come to be fed, body and soul, by the love of God manifested in Jesus the Christ, and given freely to us in that bread and wine, as he said, “Do this to remember me.”

In these days, let us remember...

*Fran Darlington, Honorary Assistant, St. Matthias’*

### **Friday, March 13     Mark 8:11-21     Conflict with Pharisees**

As one who has made his living at the craft and spiritual discipline of biblical storytelling, I am glad when the lectionary’s Gospel of Mark rolls around—not just because Mark was the first book of the Bible I learned by heart, but because I relate to Mark’s very human Jesus. I look at the text as a musician studies sheet music and ponders how to “perform” it. Here my eye falls on Jesus’ reaction to the Pharisees: “He sighed deeply in his spirit.” What does that sound like? The Greek verb means something like “grunt,” a sound of painful exasperation, utter frustration—“hhhhhhrrrrrrrrr!” It’s also how Jesus might sound with his dim-witted (an alternative translation to “hard-hearted”) disciples, who misconstrue their master’s venting about the Pharisees and Herodians as a criticism of their failure to bring sufficient bread with them. They have just witnessed Jesus’ feeding 4000, preceded by his having fed 5000. An exasperated Jesus surely “sighs deeply in his spirit” at them, when he asks, “Don’t you get it?!” The audience always laughs at this point in performance—but then I can hear them thinking, “No, we don’t get it either; we’re just like the disciples.” St. Paul tells the Romans that the Spirit helps us pray with “sighs too deep for words”—the very root word Mark uses. In this season of the Christian year when we take stock of ourselves, I am comforted by that grunting Spirit, by the company of those dim-witted disciples, and by the love of the

Lord, who, though no doubt exasperated with us, cares enough to have offered his life that you and I might have life abundant.

*Written by Dennis Dewey, Mentor, Academy for Biblical Storytelling*

**Saturday, March 14    Mark 8:22-26    Jesus Heals a Blind Man**

On Blindness

What are these shadows around me?

Moving

Laughing

Crying

Singing

Living

Shadows seething with Life.

What do they mean?

What do I mean?

Am I a shadow too?

Then the Light

Shines

On Everything

In Everything

Through Everything

No more shadows.

Only One.

*Owen Ash, Rector, St James' Guelph*

**Monday, March 16 Mark 8:27-9:1  
Peter's Claim and 1st Prediction**

I had a disconnect with Jesus. I cherished his words and parables but did not accept his forgiveness: I was always a step behind.

Recently, I went on a silent prayer weekend because my spiritual eyesight was cloudy and I needed time away from everyday life. I was asked by my weekend spiritual director "who and what Jesus was to you?" Funny that 8:29 says the same thing when Jesus asks "But who do you say that I am?"

I prayed that weekend honestly and earnestly, and I was rewarded. In a small chapel on the grounds in sunny solitude I asked for Jesus' friendship and forgiveness, and I asked for the joy of walking in the Holy Spirit. When I finally looked up from my prayers, there on the wall was a figurine that to me appeared to be Jesus jumping for joy, arms in the air, saying to me "at last" hallelujah! I laughed out loud!

Recently I was asked to write my reflections on Mark's passages. Coincidence? I think not. Am I ready for the journey? Surely with God's greatest messenger at my side I'm as equipped as I ever can be: merely have to ask in prayer.

*Colin Shutt, Warden, St Paul's Shelburne*

**Tuesday, March 17 Mark 9:2-13 Transfiguration**

This passage from Mark deals with the Transfiguration of Christ.

The transfiguration is an event in which Jesus bestows on us a foretaste of the heavenly kingdom. In this moment Christ allows us to see him in his full glory. He takes with him only three of the twelve apostles.

When they get there Elijah and Moses are on both sides of Jesus and for just this moment the full reality of heaven was presented to the disciples. Peter is so overcome with joy and terror that he wants to make a tent for each and to stay there. Then they hear God's voice and he reaffirms the ministry and authority of his son. The disciples find themselves only with Jesus, and the beatific vision has ended.

Then Jesus gives them a reminder of the suffering of Elijah and then a prophecy of what he is to endure in the near future.

For myself my trip to Boston served to me as reminder of the wonderful and happy times my family had, and it served as a sign or promise of better days ahead. The



Transfiguration serves as a reminder of the ultimate reality; we shall all see Christ in his full glory but before we do we have to go and make our way through the crucifixion.

There is pain; sorrow and heart break ahead on the road at some point for all of us. Jesus has been able to give us just a little foretaste of the reality that is to come, which is better than anything we can even imagine.

*Philip Shearin, Divinity Student*

**Wednesday, March 18      Mark 9:14-29      Boy Healed**

To me this reading is about faith and prayer more than it is about healing.

I find it encouraging to me that here we have the disciples trying to cure the boy and failing! Then they end up arguing with the scribes. How human! I am sure we all can relate to the frustration the disciples must have felt when things were not going their way when they thought it should. Like them, we think our belief should be enough.

This passage shows we don't have to get it right all the time either. If even his disciples didn't get it right then neither do we, and God will not fault us.

Jesus teaches them, and me, that faith is not enough. Sometimes you need help, and you can get that help through prayer as Jesus just demonstrated. I know that you and I have faith, but how often do we forget to ask for help by praying to God, not to fix the problem, but to help us find his way to the solution!

*James Gould, Lay Reader, St. Paul's Shelburne*

**Thursday, March 19      Mark 9:30-37  
2nd Prediction and Teaching about Servanthood**

Last autumn I visited Nuremburg. The city is rightly proud of Albrecht Durer. His bronze statue adorns a main square; another of his "rabbit" delights children and adults. When Albrecht came to the city he had to work during the day so he could pay for rent and food and study art at night. He came to know an older man who also studied with the art teacher. "Why don't you move in with me Albert? We'll both save money that way."

Living together in the shabby attic, they hoped things would go easier. But after a hard day's work Albert was so tired that he tumbled into bed when he wanted to paint. "This isn't working", said the older man. "One of us ought to work and the other study art. When the art starts to sell, the one working can have a chance."

Albert nodded, "All right, I'm younger and stronger, so earning our keep is up to me."

"No. no," cried the friend. "I have a better paying job and you have more talent."

Albert embraced his studies with enthusiasm while his friend scrubbed floors and washed dishes in a cafe. No matter how gray the day or tired he was, his old friend whistled cheerfully and told Albert he would be a great artist.

When Albert sold a wood carving, he threw the money on the table and said, "Now I can earn money from art. It is your time to study art again."

The old man set up his easel, but his fingers had grown gnarled and twisted, his arms stiff and his joints enlarged. He tried to keep Albert from finding out he would never be able to control a brush again.

Another day, when Albert came home, he found the old man seated at the table, head bowed, his rough twisted hands folded in prayer. Albert wanted the whole world to see the hands of this man who had sacrificed so much for him to become an artist. And so Albert Durer portrayed the hands most of us recognize simply as PRAYING HANDS.

Albert Durer was called to be a great painter of the Early Renaissance, but his friend was no less called in his service of the artistic genius.

*Barbara Sykes, Honorary Assistant, St George's Guelph*

### **Friday, March 20    Mark 9:38-49    Temptation to Sin**

At first glance this saying of Jesus is frightening with its talk of cutting off hands and feet and plucking out eyes but in reality it is also "good news." As Gloria Steinman succinctly put it, "The truth will set you free, but first it will 'tick' you off."

I have known many people who are good, contributing people who lack a hand or foot or are blind in one eye. I have known significantly more people with two hands and feet and eyes who are diminished, incapacitated by a sin that "owns" them and they cannot envision a life without that all-consuming sin.

The fear of letting go of a way of being that has become familiar and comfortable leaves them clinging desperately to a life of spiritual poverty. The resolve to cut off what seems a part of them terrifies them. The need to walk through that shadow of a mini death seems beyond their resolve. So it is, without the help of God.

Each of us, in truth, is stumbling blocks to some degree. The good news is that none of us are beyond the love and the help that God offers.

*Nancy Rowe, Priest Associate, St George's Georgetown*

### **Saturday, March 21 Mark 10:1-12 Teaching about Divorce**

Lent brings challenges and challenges are good.

My job today is to struggle with Jesus' harsh sayings about divorce, and this is a challenge for a twentieth century Anglican who has come to accept divorce in the Church.

There can be little doubt that Jesus, like the Essenes of his time, did not like divorce, although he recognized it happened. The passage from Mark's gospel comes for a larger debate he held with the biblical lawyers of his own day, about the problem of their substituting legalism for the basic principles of God's law, just as in his pronouncement about escaping the obligation to parents by making gifts to the church (Mark 7:6-13) based on human traditions; or the substitution of attention to legalisms about outward cleanliness for attention to the condition of human hearts (Mark 7:14-23).

The point is made clearly in Jesus' saying "what God has joined together, human beings are not to break apart" (Mark 4:9), which we have incorporated into our marriage service, or "you abandon the commandments of God and hold to human tradition" (Mark 7:8,13). Many rabbis of his own time understood that when two people bound themselves together in vows of marriage, God's grace was there; St. Augustine calls it a "union of friendship" and the Prayer Book speaks of "mutual society".

But sometimes human beings reject God's grace. People fail in their marriages; marriages break down, and I suppose that is what divorce is really all about, not the search for legal weaknesses, nor the legalism of contract-breaking acts. Marriage breakdown happens in the human heart where God's graces are given, not in the courtroom.

In Lent, we can remember that God's gifts in the big principles of love for neighbour and in the constant gifts of grace far outweigh the Church's human by-laws, although the by-laws, and disagreements about them, may steal our attention.

*David Neelands, Dean of Divinity and Margaret Fleck, Professor of Anglican Studies, Trinity College, Toronto*

## **Monday, March 23 Mark 10:13-31 Like Children and Parable of Rich Man**

This passage in Mark's gospel appears to be about two separate issues. On the one hand are the children who are brought to Jesus by their family members to be blessed. And the second part is about the rich man who asks Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life.

The disciples still don't seem to understand that children need to be allowed access to him - that there might be much we can learn from these young people. Surely we can depend on our children to be less encumbered with earthly things, and rely more on their creative imagination than we can. Their minds are perhaps clearer and purer than ours which may have become cluttered with the daily importance of paying the mortgage, being on time with the bills, purchasing the upgrade or latest version of the whatever.

Last Advent the Christian world awaited the birth of the Christ child, all the while struggling with the horrific news that 132 children had been killed in a boarding school in Pakistan, a mother reportedly had killed seven of her own children and another child in Australia and in Canada one in seven children live in poverty.

How can we reconcile all these events and make sense of them. In fact we may not have journeyed very far in the last 2,000 years at all. Have we learned anything?

And the man who ran urgently to Jesus to ask how he could enter into the kingdom - how can we learn over and over again from him? Jesus looked at him and loved him. But the man went away grieving because he was so attached to his "stuff". He was all grown up now. He couldn't part with his gadgets and gizmos. It had seemed like an urgent request when he ran up to Jesus. But now, not so much after all.

How can I remind myself of this simple truth: for of such in the kingdom of God.

*Lindsay Ogilvie, Choir Member, All Saints' Erin*

**Tuesday, March 24 Mark 10:32-45**  
**3rd Prediction and the Request of James and John**

Most gospels create a positive feeling through warmth, good news, important lessons or tragedy. But I found this passage rather irritating. It shows the weaknesses of the disciples at a time when they should have been more supportive of Jesus.

The disciples were committed followers leaving everything to follow Jesus, but now they seemed convinced everything will collapse with Jesus' arrest, trial and death. They reacted like many Christians, who feel after attending church regularly, helping in many ways and living good lives, that they deserve a better reward than others in the life hereafter.

Jesus rebuked them for seeking a special reward or status, telling them it is not within his power to grant special treatment in advance.

Like many Christians, regrettably churchgoers too, the disciples bickered over status and entitlement ... sound familiar? Jesus's response - you become great by being a servant or a slave.

The spirit has already moved me down the road to faith service rather than seeking status. After reading Mark I am strengthened in my resolve and pray for support in my efforts.

I regret the subject of life after death stirred up further feelings of irritation and how tough it is to be a Christian. Some theologians, scholars and senior church leaders are suggesting beliefs fundamental to the Christian life are misguided and should be changed. One example: there is actually no life after death and the idea is based on fundamental misinterpretation of the Bible.

It is hard enough to be a Christian in this secular world without basic beliefs being undermined. No wonder western societies are drifting away from belief in God and attendance at churches.

Don't chastise me for being disappointed and irritated. I am just telling it as I feel it. It isn't actually the gospel that is irritating; it is the context already in my mind as I read it.

But the spirit is actually converting my downbeat feelings enough to motivate me to do more to bring people to Jesus, so the result is positive. It seems irritation can be as powerful as inspiration.

I pray that God will hold my faith intact and keep me focussed on the teachings of Jesus that are clear, inspiring and good for the entire world.

*Doug Hamilton, Parishioner, All Saints' Erin*

**Wednesday, March 26 Mark 10:46-52 Healing of Bartimaeus**

Throughout the gospels we encounter the wonders of Jesus' teachings and healings. Often surrounded by crowds the miracles of Jesus are revealed.

Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, obviously knew of these teachings and healings. When he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is near he immediately calls out for help. How did Bartimaeus know about the healings of Jesus? Had Bartimaeus always been blind? What were the sights first viewed by Bartimaeus? How was he embraced by the crowd?

As in today's world a level of trust builds when we know of a person's reputation and we may seek advice or help. Bartimaeus knew of Jesus's reputation and despite some crowd disapproval, called forth. The land around Jericho would have been sparse and dry but crowds gathered close.

Today, we also feel crowds. With constant media bombardments relaying conflict and breaches of trust, how do we continue to trust and demonstrate our faith? Do we show disapproval of those less fortunate?

We need to use this Lenten time to look through the eyes of Jesus, to learn, to understand and to reach out to others.

*Isobel Boyle, Parishioner, All Saints' Erin*

**Thursday, March 26 Mark 11:1-33 Entry into Jerusalem**

When I think how this will end, or seem to end, Jesus executed, his followers in flight or in hiding, it's hard to watch Jesus enter Jerusalem.

When I think of all that pain and fear and confusion, I understand the pleading of Jesus in the garden on Thursday, just before (cut off from the crowd that protected him all week) he is betrayed and arrested.

When I think how often it ends, or seems to end, for so very many of us, in pain, violence, confusion – when I think how it always ends, or seems to end, in death, in the victory of death, I am mindful of the bold and courageous thing that the Father is asking the Son to do, a thing that begins and ends helpless in loving human arms.

Ride on, then. Into the face of fear and hate and the plotting realpolitik of the religious authorities. Into the place where the powerful borrow their power from death. Into the certainty of loss, defeat and your broken wretched body. Ride in the protection that seems like no protection at all, that in the end prevails. In majesty. In love. You ride for all of us.

*Michael Thompson, General Secretary, Anglican Church of Canada*

**Friday, March 27    Mark 12:1-27            Parables and Questions**

Do you feel his frustration? Jesus' frustration with the Pharisees and Herodians, who try to trap Him. Why? He asks them. Why are you putting me to the test? Have you not read this scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?"

Do you feel his disappointment? Jesus' disappointment with the Sadducees who ask him about whose wife she will be in the resurrection? Jesus knows from their questions that they too do not know the scriptures. "Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God."

How easy it is for us to put God to the test when we do not know the scriptures. How can we know the power of God not of the dead, but of the living if we do not know the scriptures? Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is our eternal Teacher. Let us be worthy and faithful students of the gift of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. I invite you therefore, in the name of the Lord, to observe a holy Lent by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

*Connie Phillipson, Priest, Diocese of Niagara*

**Saturday, March 28            Mark 12:28-34            Greatest Commandment**

Sometimes we make living faithfully very difficult!

With all good intentions we “church people” set out, explicitly or implicitly, a list of things to do to be a good Anglican.

When asked to prepare a portion of Mark for a biblical storytelling event held in my Episcopal Area in March 2014 I chose Mark 12:28-34 because it takes me back to the heart of what is essential.

The scribes regularly disputed with Jesus, trying to prove he was not faithful to their traditions. In the exchange a scribe asks “which commandment is first of all?” and Jesus’ answer goes to the very heart of faith - Love God with heart, soul, mind and strength and Love your neighbour as yourself. On this they agree.

As a bishop my life can be consumed with seemingly important meetings, lengthy discussions or arguments over questions of proper Anglican practice and theology, worries about the sustainability of parishes and clergy and can get mired in a fog of “stuff to do”.

This passage clears my head and sends me back to the heart of my faith - Do I love God wholeheartedly? If so - how does my life and ministry show it? Do I love my neighbour as myself? If so - what am I doing to live that?

To answer these is enough.

*Linda Nicholls, Bishop, Diocese of Toronto*

### **Monday, March 30 Mark 12:35-13:37 Questions and Warnings**

I am sitting in our public library, reading Mark’s predictions about upcoming disasters and wondering if I should warn those sitting around me.

Maybe I should stand on top of a table, and in my most dramatic Moses voice proclaim, “People beware, get ready, coming soon, without warning – wars, earthquakes, famines, violence.”

No doubt, some joker would shout back, “Watched the national news last evening, did we?”

“I have good news too,” I would retort, “In the midst of it all God will arrive riding on a cloud with great power and glory to save us.”

While the security guards personally ushered me outside, people would resume their silent pursuits of reading, entertainment and education.



Perhaps later some would react to my warnings, but most would dismiss me as another religious nut looking for attention.

I wonder how Jesus felt when he tried to warn his disciples.

Mark brought these warnings and dire predictions together in one chapter for a reason. Why?

I suggest you reread this passage and look for answers; they are woven throughout.

Then read Psalm 23, verse 4 and reflect on God's promise of to be always with us – no matter what we face in this life.

*Hollis Hiscock, Editor, Niagara Anglican*

## **Tuesday, March 31    Mark 14:1-11    Anointing at Bethany**

Since Lent last year, I have been incredibly challenged to be "kind".

A Jesuit priest called Father James Martin from American Magazine, set a challenge for Lent on YouTube asking that rather than give something up, we should - be kind.

He gave three ways to achieve this:

1. Don't be a jerk!
2. Honour the absent.
3. Always give people the benefit of the doubt (from St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises).

In this passage from Mark 14, Jesus rebukes the people who were angry with the woman who poured expensive perfume over his head.

She performed this act from her heart and Jesus honoured her for that by saying she would always be remembered for her act of love and kindness.

He says (verse 7) that the poor will always be with us and that we can show kindness to them whenever we wish, but He would not always be with us.

My questions are: Do we show the poor kindness whenever we can? And not just the poor but to everyone we meet? In every action or word?

If every one of us showed kindness with purpose, our world would be turned upside down.

What about making it part of everything you say and do this Lent?

Here is the link to the YouTube video clip from Father James Martin:

<http://youtu.be/90q8fVNkPPU>

*Wendy Joy, Biblical Storyteller, Belfast, Ireland*

### **Wednesday, April 1 Mark 14:12-72 Passover, Garden and Betrayal**

We can speculate on Judas' motivation, but his decision to betray Jesus sets in motion a series of tragic events that will lead to both their deaths. Shadows begin to fall. As much as we associate shadows with darkness, they only exist because of light. Without a light source, there can be no shadow. When faced with shadows we can focus on the object casting the shadow or look to where the light is coming from.

We know Judas as the betrayer, yet who among us hasn't hidden the dark places of our hearts and minds behind a mask of respectability, despising those who can see beneath it? Who among us hasn't profited at the expense of another? I can't believe that given the opportunity, Jesus wouldn't have returned Judas' kiss, saying what he had said to countless others: "Your sins are forgiven".

At some point, we all find ourselves in the valley of the shadow of death; but do we choose to remain there in the darkness, identifying with the shadows or do we turn and look for the light of Christ's forgiveness, knowing that however long the night, the sun (Son?) will rise.

*Daniel Brereton, Priest Associate, St. John's Dixie Mississauga*

### **Thursday, April 2 Mark 15:1-32 Jesus Before Pilate**

Shakespeare said it best in Hamlet: "To thine own self be true." So often, we get caught up in trying to fit in, be popular, be trendy, we are actually letting others define us.

In this passage Jesus gives us the example of authentic living. He does not cede his identity to Pilate's question of title; he does not give in to the peer pressure and taunting of the swept-up-in-the-moment crowds. By contrast, we see Pilate yield to the unsubstantiated whim of the angry mob, demonstrating his intention to appease the masses rather than to do what was right.

In our own lives, we are often faced with similar challenges of identity: are the characteristics we show the world authentic? Do we embrace or deny our individuality in

the scrutiny of the public? Do we allow our identity to be influenced by the Spirit or by the media?

While we must answer these questions for ourselves, I share some advice on discernment once given me by a wise priest: "You are a child of God. Be true to yourself, and be true to God."

*Laura Marie Piotrowicz, Rector, Manitoba*

**Friday, April 3    Mark 15:33-41            The Death and Burial of Jesus**

One of the common themes among all four Gospels is that Jesus cried out before he died. Two of the Gospels, Mark being one of them, say that Jesus asked God why He had forsaken Him.

This passage has always posed many questions to me, and disconcerting ones at that. It seems that Jesus is asking God why He had chosen not to rescue him from the crucifixion, thus allowing his human form to die.

If Jesus' faith was strongest of us all, then why did he appear to question it at the moment of death? Are we not taught, through the many miracles of Jesus explained by faith, that our faith should be unshakeable? Does this imply some sort of fallibility? And how does fallibility translate to our own personal approach to faith?

Even though we have a small ability to exert some influence over the path taken by our lives, our faith is in the acceptance of God's guidance and that it is ultimately his plan for us.

When my time comes, I wonder if I will ask the same question.

*Chuck Williamson, Treasurer, All Saints' Erin*

**Saturday, April 4    Mark 16:1-8            Resurrection of Jesus**

Recalling our celebration of Epiphany and the journey of the Magi who laid their gifts before the Christ-child, as I read this final passage from the gospel according to St. Mark, it struck me that those same gifts of frankincense and myrrh were deeply connected to burials in the ancient world.

They were gifts that pointed to the events that brought Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus and Salome to an empty tomb. They too make this journey carrying

with them spices associated with a burial but this journey begins, not in the context of wonder and great joy, as it did for the Magi. This time the women were filled with desperate grief, a good measure of fear and I am sure they came not knowing what to believe in any more.

I was left thinking about all the many ways I have come before God over the course of my life and my ministry, and have done so experiencing the whole range of emotions that we find in these two journeys. What has been true for me is what was true for the women as they reached the tomb. We find that we are in the hands of a loving and transforming God who never ceases to surprise us.

In the glory of the Resurrection we encounter the reconciling power of God's love that heals and makes all things new.

*Michael Bird, Bishop, Diocese of Niagara*

**Thank you to Canon Susan Wilson and her team of commentators.**