

Surprised By Love: An Exploration of Mark's Gospel—Part 2

Week 3: In Jerusalem (Mark 11:1 – 12:44)

1. Was there anything in the message on Sunday that stood out to you? What was most helpful for you? In what ways did it stretch your thinking?
2. In the message, the speaker read a quote from John Lewis that said, “Speak up, speak out, get in the way. Get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” Read Mark 11:15-19
 - In what ways did Jesus get in trouble? Was it good trouble? Why or why not?
 - Where do you think Jesus found the spiritual strength and mental fortitude to *speak up* in a way that was so costly? What spiritual practices do you think were essential to public actions?
 - In what ways are Jesus’ actions in Mark 11:15-19 a model for us?
3. Read Mark 12:28-34 (The Greatest Commandment)
 - What is the difference between “love” as a noun and “love” as a verb? While we often talk about love, do you think the world is good at actually loving people? How about loving God? Why or why not?
 - Cornell West said, “Justice is what love looks like in public.” In what ways is Jesus’ love on public display when he stages a protest in the temple (Mark 11:15-19)
 - Loving God completely is radical and costly. Can you think of some examples of the costliness of love in your life?
 - What do you think it actually means to love God with all your *heart, soul, mind, and strength*?
4. Read Mark 12:41-44 (The Widow’s Offering)
 - Why do you think Jesus said the widow’s gift is greater than the other gifts that were given? What principle is Jesus teaching in this passage?
 - How do we avoid being like the teachers of the law who prioritized looking good (Mark 12:38-40) above loving God and those in need?
 - It’s been said, “You can give without loving, but you can’t love without giving.” Do you think this is true? What can we do to make sure our giving comes from a place of love?
 - What is one way you can show your love for God more clearly this week? What is one way you can love your neighbor (i.e., someone in need) more this week?

Practice for the week: Sacred Reading of Scripture – Mark 12:28-34

This is a way of praying with Scripture that has been used for centuries by followers of Jesus and is often called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for sacred or divine reading. A regular practice of *Lectio Divina* cultivates the ability to listen deeply to Scripture and allow God's presence to open our lives. It helps us

listen for the still small voice of God speaking to us personally here and now and to grow in awareness of God's presence with us, in us, and around us. We interact with the text of Scripture, but unlike Bible study, we do not analyze or dissect it. We listen in quiet and allow the words to settle into us as we quiet our thinking to receive them deeply into our hearts.

There are many ways to engage with Lectio Divina, but four steps are commonly used: read, meditate, respond, and rest. (If you prefer to listen to the Scripture rather than read it, there are some great apps and websites for that, such as www.biblegateway.com.)

Read: Read the passage of Scripture. This is best done slowly and intentionally with an awareness of God's presence speaking through the text. Simply listen for God's voice in this moment. Don't search or seek out the meaning on your own, but rather wait and listen for something to emerge. When a word or phrase seems to settle on you, take it in and just sit with it in silence.

Meditate: Read the text again for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, and ask how this is applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

Respond: The third reading is for the purpose of responding back to God, expressing honestly whatever is happening in your heart and spirit as a result of listening. There may be joy, tears, awe, reverence, even confusion - give any emotion or thought that arises freely to God at this time. And listen for how God might want you to turn, move, or act because of what you've heard.

Rest: Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence and simply seek to love and be loved by God. Anytime distracting thoughts arise, just return to the word that stood out in the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this "sacred word" to symbolize all your love for God and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and allow the light and love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.