

Week 2: The Gospel of Mark

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Read Mark 1:9-15. What is the author trying to communicate here? What are we being made aware of as readers? What darkness, conflict and foreboding do you sense? What hope do you see here? Why do you think the author introduces these themes so early in this gospel?
3. Read Mark 1:21-22 and Mark 6:1-3. Given what an inspired and effective teacher Jesus is, why do you think the people seem to reject him? Can you think of any modern-day examples of this kind of rejection and dismissal?
4. Read Mark 3:20-22. How would you imagine Jesus felt about all this? Which of these two sources of rejection would have been most painful? Have you ever experienced this kind of misunderstanding and rejection yourself? What impact did that have on you? Have you ever misunderstood someone else and then later seen them in a completely different light? What changed your mind about them?
5. Read Mark 1:40-45 and Mark 8:27-30. Why do you think Jesus always seems to be keeping his identity secret?
6. Read Mark 8:31-35. Jesus redefines what it means to be the Messiah. Why do you think Jesus says he has to suffer? Is this something that happens to him or something he chooses? Why do you think Jesus says his followers will inevitably suffer? In what ways could this be a positive, redemptive force in our lives and in what ways a destructive one?
7. Break into groups of 2-3 and share about ways in which you are struggling or suffering at the moment. Then take some time to pray for one another.

Practice for the week: Sacred Reading of Scripture – Mark 1:1-15

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 stillness 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. The scripture is printed below, and you might prefer to listen to it rather than read it (there are some great apps and websites for that such as www.biblegateway.com).

- **Read** the passage twice through, slowly and gently. Let the words flow over you. Savor each phrase, believing that God is present and has something for you. No need to search, simply listen for a word or phrase that somehow speaks to you or touches you. It might attract or even disturb you. Spend some time in silence with the word or phrase, just resting in it and allowing it to sink into your heart. Then read the passage slowly again.
- **Reflect** or meditate on the word or phrase that stood out. How might it be speaking to you or challenging you? Allow memories, thoughts or situations evoked by the word to rise up gently. Allow God to reveal to you how the word or phrase applies to your life. Ask, "What meaning does this have for me here and now? What does God want me to know or to see?" Spend time in silence, reflecting on the phrase and allowing it to interact with your life. Now read the passage again.
- **Respond** to God. Open your heart to God and openly and honestly share how you feel about your experience with the passage. These may be questions or doubts, or prayers of thanksgiving, petition, confession, lament, or praise.
- **Rest** in God's presence. Allow your prayers to gently fade away. Let go of your thoughts and move into a time of simply resting in God's presence. Open your mind, heart and soul to the fullness of God's love and peace. Rest.

Mark 1:1-15 (NIV)

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way - a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"