

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, October 2-8 (B) – Mark 10:2-16

Living in Christ: *Love*

Focus Question: *What does God intend for marriage?*

word of life

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” Mark 10:14 (NRSV)

Read Mark 10:2-16

Once more Jesus is tested. This time the test focuses on the age-old question of divorce. The Pharisees were well aware of the differing teachings concerning divorce. At least since the time of Moses, acceptable reasons for divorce had sparked heavy debate. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2 NRSV) At this point, the discussion does not suggest the possibility of a woman divorcing her husband. Keep in mind Mark is written during the first century culture. Some viewed women as property to be easily discarded.

1. *What would Jesus need to say to pass the test by the Pharisees?*
2. *Why has this question been around for centuries?*

Jesus simply reminds the Pharisees of the teachings of Moses allowing a man to dismiss his wife with a certificate. The key aspect of the response lies in what comes next. Moses allowed divorce due to the hardness of heart, so that wives and children might be protected. (See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.) It was a way to offset cruel and inhumane treatment of husbands towards their wives when they were finished with them. No longer were husbands to put out a wife like garbage, ostracized from the community and society. Minimally, a certificate would allow a woman options for her future.

3. *How have laws about divorce changed since biblical days?*
4. *How was Moses attempting to bring decency into the divorce?*

Nevertheless, God does not intend divorce to be the outcome of marriage. God desires the union of marriage to be a sacred joining together of two persons. “Two shall become one flesh.” (Mark 10:8 NRSV) The standard established by God is a high one, based on God’s love unifying two into one. When the two are split at death or divorce, there is a painful severing of one flesh. The separation of this union is not to be felt like a splinter under the skin, but a splitting of one’s flesh.

5. *How does Jesus raise the standard for marriage?*

Inside the house and away from the crowd, the disciples ask Jesus more questions. At this point, Jesus equalizes the possibilities. Husbands or wives who divorce are held to the same standard. Women in the first century would have not been able to divorce their husbands. In a strange way, Jesus turns things upside down by this radical teaching.

Jesus emphasizes the standard of love in all circumstances and in all relationships. God intends for marriage to be a life-giving union. Yet, reality reveals some marriages do not realize God’s intended union. The two who have been joined remain separated, living disjointed lives. Jesus does not take time to deal with exceptions, but is interrupted by the disciples who are restricting the children from coming to him. This is where Jesus becomes indignant. “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:14-15 NRSV) Again and again, Jesus turns things upside down.

6. *What are options when marriage no longer reflects God’s union of two persons?*

word among us

The church wedding was a like a fairy tale with friends and family from faraway places. The pastor spoke appropriate words during the sermon, and the blessing was uttered with confidence. Everything concerning the wedding went on schedule with gorgeous pictures to serve as a reminder.

Yet after the wedding gifts were put away and the thank-you cards were written, troubles began to creep into the marriage. The newlyweds realized they had nothing in common, nor did they particularly like each other. Somehow they had become so caught up in planning the perfect wedding; they ignored their own deteriorating relationship. Neither one had the skills nor motivation to try to build a foundation for marriage, nor did they turn to God for guidance. Instead, they chose to lead independent lives, becoming strangers to each other.

They chose not to divorce, but knew they were not living as a unified body blessed by God as one flesh. They developed unhealthy patterns of deeply wounding each other through their daily words and actions.

1. *What does God intend for marriage?*
2. *How can good people marry, but not experience God's blessing of unity? (Use this case study as an illustration.)*
3. *Under what circumstances might couples consider divorcing?*

Unfortunately, that phrase "hardness of heart" in Mark 10:5 does not just apply to those who lived in the first century, nor is it limited to the marriage relationship. Hardness of heart is a human condition that can open the door to the worst treatment of others. When hardness of heart creeps into a marriage, the relationship withers and dies. People may continue in the marriage, but there is neither life nor God. Those marriages are in need of resurrection, a gift from God to restore the unity and love. It might be argued that every marriage is less than God intends because two sinful human beings are involved. Marriage and all relationships are in need of God's presence.

4. *What counsel might you give to those who find themselves in a marriage that is less than God's intention?*
5. *What role does God play in renewal of marriage?*
6. *What are the possibilities of new life in marriage if both do not desire it?*

The disciples who restrict the children from coming to Jesus have missed the point. Their concern is with their own personal status. They cannot see Jesus reaching out to all, particularly to those with no status. Again and again, Jesus points to God's kingdom. This is true in all relationships, including marriage.

As disciples, we are called to align our lives and our relationships with Jesus and his vision of God's kingdom. Ultimately, Jesus is concerned with God's reign and the manifestation of that reign in our lives and our treatment of others.

Prayer

Gracious God, grant your grace to fill our relationships as we seek your reign in our lives. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 19:1-9

last word

This week, find a way to encourage someone's marriage.



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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, October 9-15 (B) – Mark 10:17-31

Living in Christ: *Sacrifice*

Focus Question: *What am I willing to sacrifice to follow Jesus?*

word of life

“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” Mark 10:21 (NRSV)

Read Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus travels, many people come to him for healing or teaching. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine a man running toward Jesus and kneeling before him. This man’s question is fundamental and sincere, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17 NRSV)

1. *What do you surmise from the title “good Teacher?”*
2. *How might have the man expected Jesus to answer?*

Jesus responds to the question by referring to the commandments, but this is not new information. All these laws were familiar to the devout man kneeling in front of Jesus. This disciple is ready to move to a deeper level. Jesus looks at him, loves him, and speaks candidly. Jesus asks the man to sell everything and give money to the poor. These words send the rich man away in grief and shock. He cannot comply because he has too much.

3. *If Jesus loved the man, why not give him an easier answer?*
4. *How does the answer of Jesus reflect love?*
5. *How might giving away his possessions have helped this man?*

Jesus turns his attention to his disciples and the topic of wealth. Those with riches will have a difficult time with the sacrificial nature of faith. His illustration is of a camel being threaded through the eye of a needle. The absurdity of the image is striking. The disciples are as shocked as the rich man who knelt at the feet of Jesus. Who has a chance of ever being saved?

6. *What is your reaction to Jesus’ teaching on wealth?*
7. *Was Jesus serious about those with wealth?*
8. *What does wealth have to do with salvation?*

Jesus puts it all in perspective. It is unfortunate the rich man has already departed and does not hear the final words about eternal life. Ultimately, there is nothing anyone can do to earn salvation and eternal life. No matter how hard a person tries to get a camel, elephant, dog or cat through the eye of a needle, it is not going to happen. Eternal life is about God’s actions, not human. “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” (Mark 10:27 NRSV)

9. *Does this mean the rich man does not need to give away his possessions?*
10. *Is this hope for a rich person who cannot give away their possessions?*
11. *What is the message for the poor?*

Peter takes all of the words of Jesus to heart. His concern is a personal one. What about himself and some of the disciples who left their wives, jobs, and homes in order to follow Jesus? Is this what Jesus is talking about? Jesus affirms anyone who sacrifices for Jesus or for the good news.

12. *What is the main message of Jesus?*

word among us

The pastor's sermon focused on the trappings of wealth for those who want to follow Jesus. It was a longer sermon than usual because the congregation was quite wealthy. Afterward, an older, distinguished man stopped to shake the pastor's hand as he was leaving the church. He stared long and hard at the pastor and said, "Preacher, why don't you start making disciples and stop talking about money."

1. *How might the preacher have responded to him?*
2. *Give other examples when Jesus mentioned money.*
3. *What is the connection between discipleship and money?*

Later that day, the same pastor spent time with the confirmation class instructing on tithing. The youth looked at the pastor with disbelief as they learned about the privilege of giving. They were a bright group so it was easy for them to figure out a tithe (10%) of their babysitting and mowing monies. They wanted to know if people actually tithed their income.

4. *Is tithing practiced by your congregation?*
5. *What are the spiritual benefits of putting aside the first fruits for God?*

In some congregations, people avoid the stewardship committee or the weeks when the congregation asks for financial commitments for the coming year.

6. *Why do people in the church get skrimish about discussing money?*
7. *How does the way we spend our money reflect our priorities?*

Jesus was well aware of the trappings of wealth. He knew that possessions can take over our lives. Jesus does not speak harshly, but offers his warnings out of love.

8. *Would it have been more loving not to ask the rich man to give up his possessions? How so?*
9. *Would you prefer pastors to soften the message so as not to disturb you? Explain.*
10. *Imagine trying to thread a camel into an eye of a needle. What would be a contemporary example of this?*
11. *How do you feel as you hear Jesus' words on wealth?*

In this discussion on eternal life, Jesus changes the focus from the efforts of humans to the action of God. "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27 NRSV) We cannot earn our salvation, but we turn to God in humility, trusting in God's grace. As we experience that grace and love made known in Christ, we in turn will seek the ways to share generously with those in need. We may reach a point where giving a tithe is too little.

Someone once said that we cannot "out-give" God, but we can try.

12. *What does it mean to try to "out-give" God?*
13. *As a disciple of Christ, what role does money play for you?*
14. *What do you hope to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

God of possibilities, give clarity to my use of money and possessions. Amen

Dig Deeper

Luke 8:1-3

last word

Take time with your household budget and review your monthly giving to the work of Christ.



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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, October 16-22 (B) – Mark 10:35-45

Living in Christ: *Serve*

Focus Question: *How can I share God's love by serving someone this week?*

word of life

“But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” Mark 10:43-44 (NRSV)

Read Mark 10:35-45

The brothers James and John were quite bold when they came forward to make their request of Jesus, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” (Mark 10:35 NRSV) How many students make such a request of their teacher? The irony is Jesus had been trying to instill in them just the opposite attitude so that they would ask the question, “Teacher, what do you ask of us?”

1. *What is your reaction to the question asked by James and John?*

Jesus listens to their request to sit on his right and left side in glory. Obviously, they have been listening to Jesus teach of the coming of the kingdom of God, and they want a good seat. Jesus continues the conversation by asking if they can drink from his cup and share in his baptism. Their reply is short, “We are able.”

2. *What does Jesus mean by sharing in his cup and his baptism?*
3. *How can these disciples be so confident?*
4. *When Jesus dies on the cross, he is joined by someone on his left and his right. Are these disciples ready for that?*

Even though these disciples do not seem ready to follow Jesus through a path of persecution and death, Jesus predicts that each will be able to share. Yet, Jesus cannot promise them a special seat for eternity.

5. *Do you think the brothers would have been satisfied with this response?*
6. *What is Jesus trying to say to these brothers?*

The other disciples are angry and upset at James and John for approaching Jesus with such a self-centered request. Jesus uses the opportunity to teach all of the disciples about status and leadership in the new community. Leaders are not to act like those who lord their position over others. Once more, Jesus turns things upside down. “But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:43-44 NRSV)

7. *Describe the role of a leader as taught by Jesus.*
8. *Give an example of how Jesus led by becoming a servant.*

Perhaps James and John thought they were making a simple request by asking for reserved seating when Jesus comes into his glory. Yet, by the end of the discussion, they probably were confused. Somehow in the new community described by Jesus, the better seat is actually the worse seat surrounded by other servants. Jesus gave those brothers something to ponder as they sorted out the seating chart in glory.

9. *What would you like to say to James and John?*

word among us

HELP WANTED!

Need leaders who will serve. No experience necessary.
Must be good at washing feet. Apply at your local church.

Imagine running that advertisement in your local newspaper or in your own church newsletter. Imagine the conversation such an ad might spark.

1. *What else might be included in the advertisement?*
2. *What might be a television commercial for a servant-leader?*

James and John wanted to have a good seat at God's banquet feast and a front row to enjoy the glory of Jesus. Their boldness is quite striking when they ask Jesus, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." (Mark 10:35 NRSV)

3. *Have you ever approached God with a similar attitude? Why or why not?*
4. *Is their request reasonable?*
5. *How do we learn to say to Jesus, "We want to do whatever you ask of us?"*
6. *What if Jesus asks us to do something too difficult? What options do we have?*

Seminars teach people how to be leaders, but not many include a session on leading by becoming a servant. Yet, Jesus promotes a new type of leader. Before his death, he demonstrated this leadership style by getting on his knees and washing the feet of his disciples. (John 13) That night, he commands them to love one other as he loved them. That love includes the extreme action of dying for them.

7. *Define a leader.*
8. *How does that definition match the teaching of Jesus?*
9. *How does one learn to be a servant-leader?*
10. *Whom do you know who is a servant-leader?*
11. *Reflect on any current roles of leaders. What changes might you need to make in your approach to leadership roles to more fully reflect the teaching of Jesus?*

Jesus will ask his disciples, "What is it you want me to do for you?" That is a wonderful question to ponder in our prayer. Take a few moments for silence. Allow God's presence to descend upon you. Imagine Jesus coming to you and calling you by name. Imagine Jesus asking you, "What is it you want me to do for you?" Try to be clear as to your request.

Now take a few more minutes in prayer. Again, imagine Jesus coming to you and calling you by name. This time, imagine you asking Jesus, "What is it you want me to do for you?" Be still and listen.

12. *What did you learn from this lesson?*

Prayer

Jesus, you came to us and lived among us as one of us. Teach us follow your example and willingly serve. Amen

Dig Deeper

John 13:1-11; 31-35

last word

List your roles as a leader (including with children)
and try to apply the teachings of Jesus in each role.



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Daily Discipleship

October 31, Reformation Day (B) –John 8:31-36

Living in Christ: *Be Freed*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to be freed in Christ?*

word of life

“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36 (NRSV)

Read John 8:31-36

On Reformation Sunday, Lutheran congregations gather in worship and sing Martin Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” The first verse describes God breaking the power of the oppressor’s rod and winning salvation. Because God sent the champion of Jesus to fight, we are set free.

The assigned lectionary on Reformation Sunday is from the Gospel of John. The theme is one of freedom. Jesus knows he brings freedom for those who live in him and stay connected to God’s word. He tells the Jews, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32 NRSV)

1. *What kind of freedom is Jesus describing?*
2. *What does it feel like to be freed by Jesus?*
3. *What does it mean to be “truly his disciple”?*

The Jews who are listening to Jesus are insulted. They are proud of their family heritage to Abraham and his relationship to God. Abraham traveled freely as he followed God to the promised land. Those Jews who are listening to Jesus seem to forget about the years their ancestors spent enslaved in Egypt. This is a critical memory lapse. Every year at Passover, they gather to tell the story of their ancestors crying out to God and God’s response of freedom. Of all people, the Jews should relate to the hardships of slavery and the joy of freedom.

4. *How do you explain the memory lapse on the part of the Jews?*
5. *What kind of freedom are the Jews considering?*

Jesus is talking about the freedom from sin. Not that anyone stops sinning. By nature, humans are sinful and live enslaved to the power of sin. Left to ourselves, we mess things up badly. Even on our best days, we fall short of God’s expectations of us. Falling short includes both things we have actively done and that whole category of things we never get around to doing. Guilt is not a stranger to the Christian. Yet, Jesus sets us free from that guilt.

6. *What healthy role can guilt play in our lives?*
7. *How do we deny the power of sin in our lives?*

In order to claim freedom, one has to be freed from something or someone. The Jews struggle with admitting their own dependency. Their pride blocks them from hearing the words of Jesus and receiving his gift of grace.

8. *What does it feel like to be freed by Christ?*
9. *Imagine this same conversation taking place with freedom-loving USA citizens. Can the message of Jesus be heard by any group who has political freedom? How so?*

word among us

I believe that Jesus Christ – true God, son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary—is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*

Read aloud this section of the *Small Catechism*.

1. *What words or phrases catch your eye?*
2. *What does Luther say we are freed from?*
3. *How does Jesus free us from those things?*

In his younger years, Martin Luther struggled with the power of sin in his personal life. He did not feel worthy to come before God. As a human, he knew he fell short again and again.

4. *What else do you know of Luther's struggles to claim God's grace in his life?*
5. *What does it feel like to be burdened by the power of sin?*
6. *Can you relate to Luther? How so?*

Finally as Luther studied the book of Romans, the message of Jesus reached his troubled heart and spirit. He discovered God's grace. (See Romans 3:19-28.) Ultimately, Luther discovered his salvation was not based on his futile attempts to be right and perfect with God. Instead, salvation is about God and God's gracious love towards humanity as recipients of such a gift. In the case of Luther, God's Word found in Romans set him free.

7. *What are other ways to explain God's grace?*
8. *What makes God's grace so difficult to grasp?*
9. *Why is it so difficult to trust God to be God?*

Like Luther, we are invited to place our trust in God's grace made known in Jesus Christ. That's where true freedom comes. Jesus urges us to stay in God's word, to know the truth, and to be set free. That invitation includes a certain degree of discipline not always associated with freedom. This gift of freedom does not mean doing whatever we want, whenever we want. After Luther discovered the freedom of God's grace, he invested the rest of his life, time and energy sharing that good news with others.

10. *What are we freed to do?*
11. *How is life different now that we have been set free by Jesus?*

Prayer

God of power and might, free us once more from all which enslaves. Amen

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 3:19-28

last word

Each day this week,
take a few moments
to breathe deeply and
ponder your freedom in Christ.



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Daily Discipleship

November 1, All Saints Day (B) – Matthew 5:1-12

Living in Christ: *See God*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to see God?*

word of life

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Matthew 5:8 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5:1-12

During the Old Testament times, not all followers of God wanted to see God. They feared death would come to anyone who set his or her eyes on God. The prophet Isaiah is one example of a person who cast his own eyes on God *and* lived to tell others.

1. *Who else in the Old Testament saw God and lived?*
2. *Tell the story of that person.*

Since Jesus was God made flesh, people could see God and live. Yet not all who walked with Jesus, heard his sermons, or witnessed his miracles believed they were seeing God. Instead, they looked for hidden meanings, trickery, and false motives.

3. *What prevented people from seeing God in Jesus?*
4. *What were people looking for?*

Nevertheless Jesus blessed people through his deeds and words. Those who were healed and transformed by Jesus told others of the good news. Despite Jesus asking them to keep quiet, they simply could not, but they were compelled to tell others of the ways Jesus had blessed them. Sometimes this blessing came in unexpected ways.

5. *Give examples of times when Jesus surprised someone with a blessing.*
6. *Describe characteristics of those whom Jesus blessed.*

Early in his ministry, Jesus taught the crowd about God’s way of blessing. This collection of blessings, the beatitudes, is found in Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:20-26. Blessings come to the least. Blessed are those who are in poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger, the merciful, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. How can this be? Most would not choose such a path, yet those who find themselves embracing those characteristics can experience a deep, resounding and unmatched blessing from God. Their spirit can be buoyed and lifted by the grace of God in such a way that often defies description. The blessing is not reserved for the future.

7. *What do you hear in these blessings?*
8. *What is surprising about the beatitudes?*

On All Saints Sunday, we remember those faithful who have died as well as those faith-filled who still walk on this earth. Each year, many churches read this text as part of the lectionary. We give thanks for the ways God has blessed us through others. For each person of faith who has shared life’s journey, we are blessed and are invited to see God more clearly. When our hearts are pure, we catch a glimpse of God through those around us.

9. *What does it mean to have a pure heart?*
10. *What does it mean to see God?*
11. *What does God look like?*

word among us

Tension mounted at the congregational meeting. Some people were scowling at one another and voices were rising. The division in the congregation had been brewing for some time, but most of the heated conversations were held behind the scenes or on the edges of the parking lot. Finally, those with strong convictions were gathered in the same room. The president of the congregation looked nervous, unsure of how to facilitate the discussion.

1. *Have you ever been with a divided congregation?*
2. *What advice do you have for the president?*

Just before the room was about to erupt, a man hesitantly stood up to speak. All eyes turned to him. He was a new member of the congregation and had been unaware of the conflict. Thus he was taken by surprise at how quickly the meeting had disintegrated into mean-spirited comments. He could not believe these were Christians in action.

Most knew the speaker was an earthy man who made a living with his hands. His long hair was a remnant from his hippie days. When he spoke, his voice was calm, clear, and sad. His love for his new-found church family was evident. How could such good people be tangled up in such a disagreement? Where was Jesus Christ in their words? Where was Jesus Christ in their actions? He spoke with clarity of purpose, but his disappointment came through his voice. He spoke with a pure heart.

3. *How did the man reflect a pure heart?*
4. *Describe persons you know who have pure hearts.*
5. *How does a person acquire a pure heart?*

The beatitude states, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8 NRSV) Those who are pure in heart cannot help but see God in others and in all situations. So often, their presence in a circumstance points to the company of God. Consequently the pure in heart see God at work where others cannot because they expect to be joined by God.

6. *What is it like to be present with someone who is pure in heart?*
7. *When you are with someone pure in heart, what changes in you?*

To be pure in heart does not necessarily mean to be quick to speak. Many times, the pure in heart need time to focus on the voice of the Spirit to serve as a guide. While others are talking or venting their frustrations, the pure in heart are listening intently, discerning, clearing their hearts of self-serving motives and selecting words to reflect the goodness of God. Sometimes, they appear to be burdened by the weight of the moment, struggling to offer words or actions to reflect God. If we look carefully, we can see God through the pure in heart.

8. *What would it mean for you to have a pure heart?*
9. *If having a pure heart were a goal, what would be the first steps?*

Prayer

Mighty One, send your fire on my spirit and purify my heart. Amen

Dig Deeper

Luke 6:20-26

last word

Throughout your day, place your hand on your heart and pray for God to make it pure.



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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, November 6-12 (B) – Mark 12: 38-44

Living in Christ: *Give*

Focus Question: *How did Christ exemplify a giving spirit?*

word of life

“But she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:44 (NRSV)

Read Mark 12:38-44

Jesus does not hesitate to use the lives of others as examples to teach his disciples. He warns his followers not to be like the scribes and those in religious authority who reflect false piety. Specifically, they wear long robes so people will treat them with respect. They need the best seats and take advantage of the widows. Throughout it all, these religious leaders utter long prayers, unable to identify the disconnection between their prayers and actions.

1. *How would you describe these religious leaders?*
2. *What are the disciples disconnected from?*
3. *What is Jesus hoping for his disciples?*

Take a moment to skim the parallel passage in Matthew 23:1-36. This extensive list of woes challenges the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus seems to have little patience for those who teach justice and compassion but give so little.

4. *Why does Jesus take any time dealing with the issue of hypocrisy?*
5. *What would it mean to follow the example of the scribes?*

The treatment of widows was a good test of how justice was lived out in a community. Without a husband, the widow in Jesus' day had no means of income and relied on the compassion of others. There were no pensions or savings accounts to assist widows. It was bad enough to ignore the widows, but Jesus describes the scribes as actively harming them. His words are strong as he portrays the scribes as ones who “devour widows' houses.”

6. *What might it mean to “devour widows' houses”?*
7. *Give a contemporary example of this.*
8. *Why is important to care for the widow?*

Jesus proceeds to watch the people put money into the treasury. Some of the rich put in large sums. Jesus points to a widow who places in two copper coins worth a penny. Just a penny! Why get excited about a penny? Notice the irony of selecting a widow as a prime example of giving. Perhaps it is not irony but simply the way Jesus chooses to teach.

9. *How difficult is it for the rich to give?*
10. *Compare the difficulty of giving between the rich and poor.*
11. *Is it a fair comparison? How so?*

In the story of Jesus, the rich gave out of their surplus while the widow gave out of her poverty. In fact, she put everything she had into the treasury.

12. *Why would she give it all away?*
13. *How do you imagine she continued to live?*

word among us

The employers gathered in the fourth floor meeting room to brainstorm about helping the community during the coming Christmas season. No one was surprised when Agnes raised her hand and spoke first. Each year, Agnes came ready, overflowing with ways to reach out to those in need. Her giving spirit was inspiring. This year, she passionately suggested food baskets and Christmas gifts for needy families with children.

Tears filled the eyes of those in that room. Each employer knew Agnes' story. In the spring, her house caught on fire destroying all her possessions and her youngest child was badly burned. As a single mother, she was slowly rebuilding her life after the tragedy. As the employees listened to Agnes, they knew this was so typical of her, ready to lead the charge and give all she had to help others. A few of the employees began to catch the eyes of each other. They knew without saying a word, they would secretly gather food and Christmas gifts for Agnes and her family, giving them a Christmas they would not forget.

1. *What might we learn from Agnes?*
2. *How can people who have so little give so much?*
3. *How can we keep the giving spirit alive throughout the year and not just at the holidays?*

Jesus desired the disciples to not just talk about care, love, and compassion, but to demonstrate their faith through tangible acts of giving. He didn't mean for his followers to give money, time, or possessions only when it was easy or convenient.

4. *How does a disciple develop a giving spirit?*
5. *Take a moment and squeeze your hands together. Now open them. Describe that sensation. How does the opening of your hands relate to this story?*

The widow gave with a willing, joyful spirit. Her action demonstrated a deep trust in the Giver. She did not seem embarrassed about such a small gift, nor did it prevent her from giving. She gave out of her faith.

6. *What is the message in the widow's gift?*
7. *What happens to us as we give freely?*
8. *What tips would you give someone who is hesitant to part with money?*

Most people don't wake up with giving hearts. Most learn from watching others. Some people reflect great joy as they give of their time, talents and treasury.

9. *How would you describe your giving patterns?*
10. *How do you decide what to give to the work of the church?*
11. *How might we support others in giving?*

Prayer

Holy Spirit, open our hearts so we might more freely give. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 23:1-36

last word

Throughout the day, open
and close your hands
as you pray for Jesus
to open your life to be more giving.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, November 13-19 (B) – Mark 13:1-8

Living in Christ: *Live Expectantly*

Focus Question: *How do I live “expectantly”?*

word of life

“This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.” Mark 13:8 (NRSV)

Read Mark 13:1-8

Chapter 13 of Mark is often called the “Little Apocalypse” because it describes the end of time. Some scholars compare this chapter with other apocalyptic writings such as the book of Daniel or Revelation. Yet, it does not have some of the characteristics of other apocalyptic literature, such as symbolic images and visions of the future. This chapter’s description leads the reader into the description of the death of Jesus.

The setting is the temple. The disciples remark about the architectural structure of the building. The large stones catch their eyes and interest. Like a good teacher, Jesus uses their question as a teachable moment, but he does not proceed with a class on geology, engineering, or architecture. To the surprise of the disciples, Jesus describes the destruction of the temple. (Mark 13:2)

1. *Describe the temple of Jerusalem. (Check to see if your Bible has an illustration of the temple. Sometimes these illustrations are found in the back of Bibles.)*
2. *What might have been other reactions to the destruction of the temple?*

After the conversation at the temple, Jesus moves to the Mount of Olives where the large temple could still be seen. His inner core of disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew ask additional questions about the end of time. Their questions are basic—when and what signs? They desire to be ready for the end, but are unclear of the details. Jesus issues the disciples a sharp warning about those who want to lead them away from the teachings of Jesus. To add confusion, some of the false teachers will come in the name of Jesus.

3. *Describe someone who might want to lead the disciples astray.*
4. *How can the disciples be prepared for that type of person?*
5. *What does it mean to come in the name of Jesus?*

Jesus dispels any hope of peace as a sign of the end times. It is just the opposite. Things will get worse. There will be wars and rumors of wars as nations fight each other. There will be cosmic destruction as earthquakes and famines cause havoc in this world.

6. *How do you feel as you listen to this description?*
7. *Have you ever thought the end was near?*

Despite the dismal appearance, Jesus describes this as a beginning. The old must pass away. Just as women experience great pain in childbirth, so must the world go through birth pangs. God’s reign will triumph over the destruction.

8. *How might the world experience birth pangs?*
9. *What is the birth described by Jesus?*

word among us

Remember when the world prepared to turn over the calendar from 1999 to 2000? Some prepared for the end of the millennium by building underground living quarters. Others stored food, water, and supplies in their homes. Many purchased protection for their computers. A few spent their money on a huge party expecting no tomorrow. On New Year's Eve night, the sky was full of fireworks.

1. *How did you bring in the year 2000?*
2. *What other ways did people deal with their fears that the world was coming to an end on January 1, 2000?*
3. *What other times have people wondered if the end of time was near?*
4. *How concerned are people today about the end of time?*

Each year during the church season of Advent, we prepare for Christmas, but we are also reminded of the second coming of Christ. We believe his second coming will usher in the end of time as we currently know it. We don't know when or how Christ will come again. Since the details are vague, we are encouraged to be ready.

5. *What do you associate with Advent?*
6. *How do you feel when you hear someone discuss the end of time?*
7. *What will it be like when Christ comes again?*
8. *How often do you think about the second coming of Christ?*

Soon many will celebrate Thanksgiving. Traditionally, we gather around the table and give thanks for the ways God has blessed us during the previous year. Read through Mark 13:1-8 again. Despite the negative things to occur, listen for the ultimate victory of God.

9. *What if anything in this passage stirs an attitude of thanksgiving?*
10. *Do you ever wish you would know more about the end of time?*

Jesus describes the wars, earthquakes, and famines that occur before the birth pangs. Things are destroyed before God births something new. We are invited to live expectantly, trusting all is in God's control, even when things look bleak.

11. *What does it mean for you to live expectantly?*
12. *What makes it so hard to live expectantly?*
13. *What new thing is God birthing in your life?*
14. *How might you get ready for the end of time?*

Prayer

Great Alpha and Omega, you give this day as a gift. Teach us to live expectantly, witnessing your grace. Deepen our trust in your ultimate control. Amen

Dig Deeper

Daniel 12:1-3

last word

Imagine this is your last day on earth
and ponder ways to spend it
as a disciple of Jesus.



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Daily Discipleship

Christ the King Sunday (B) – John 18:33-37

Living in Christ: *Listen*

Focus Question: *How do you listen to the voice of Jesus?*

word of life

“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” John 18:37 (NRSV)

Read John 18:33-37

The setting is Pilate’s headquarters in the early morning. The reader of the Gospel of John becomes acquainted with Pilate in the previous verses found in John 18:28-32. Take time to review that section. Pilate approaches the crowd to learn about their accusations towards Jesus. They accuse Jesus of being a criminal, but this confuses Pilate. If their accusations are true, then the Jews should be able to deal with such a criminal by their own laws. But the crowd wants Jesus to die, and they do not believe they can punish someone by putting him to death. Thus, they involve Pilate and request he condemn Jesus to death.

1. *What is your first impression of Pilate?*
2. *How would you describe the crowd?*

Pilate leaves the crowd to question Jesus alone. He is baffled and asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33 NRSV) Pilate seems to be pondering whether Jesus is a political threat, but Jesus does not give simple answers to Pilate. Jesus does not respond as a subordinate who is trying to please the person in power and authority. Instead, Jesus wants to know how Pilate comes to such a question. Has Pilate heard about him?

3. *Describe Jesus in this scene.*

There is no uncertainty. Pilate announces he is not a Jew and reminds Jesus of the accusations of his own people. Pilate’s question is straightforward, “What have you done?”

4. *What possible criminal activity has Jesus done?*
5. *If you were in a similar situation, would you try to defend yourself? How so?*

Jesus speaks of a kingdom, describing a royal reign not of this world. He uses human logic. If Jesus had a kingdom on earth, then he would own land and control an army who would battle on behalf of Jesus. The kingdom of Jesus is not like other kingdoms from this world. Pilate does not quite follow the teaching of Jesus. Pilate wants a direct reply and asks, “So you are a king?” Pilate seeks an answer of “yes” or “no.”

6. *What makes the words of Jesus so complex?*

Jesus gets more specific. He came into this world to establish a new kind of kingdom, but not everyone is open, ready, or interested. That does not prevent Jesus from pointing to the truth and continuing with his mission. Those who listen to Jesus are drawn to truth. Pilate interrupts him, “What is truth?” (John 18:38 NRSV)

7. *How would you answer the question, “What is truth?”*
8. *How would you describe the kingdom of Jesus?*

word among us

Traditionally the last Sunday of the church year is Christ the King Sunday. We sing triumphant hymns and adorn the altar with white. Many times, we try to lift up the theme of God's reign, but it is not unusual for this Sunday to get lost between the celebrations of Thanksgiving and the preparations for Christmas.

1. *What do you know about Christ the King Sunday?*
2. *Why end the church year with such a celebration?*
3. *How might a congregation celebrate Christ the King Sunday?*

Most of us have not lived in countries ruled by a monarchy. Many of us in the United States have had history lessons about living under a monarchy and the struggles to claim independence. We covet our freedoms and would not easily return to a time or place where a monarch ruled. Thus, it might be difficult to grasp the positive aspects of Christ as our king.

4. *What is your impression of living under the reign of royalty?*
5. *How would you describe the perfect ruler?*
6. *What can happen when humans get power?*

It is a major decision to give up one's independence and willingly choose to follow someone else, even Jesus. The temptation is to claim independence and not depend on anyone else. That is sin at work in us, drawing us from the goodness and love of God made known in Jesus Christ. Yet, at some point, we decide if Jesus is trustworthy.

7. *What evidence do you have to suggest Jesus is a worthy king?*
8. *Why trust in Jesus?*
9. *What benefits are experienced when we allow Jesus to rule our lives?*
10. *What makes it difficult for Jesus to rule?*

If we claim Jesus to rule our life, then it follows we are to listen to the one who wants to lead us. We seek ways to discern his will and not jump to our own devices. "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37 NRSV) That is not an easy process. It becomes a daily struggle to follow Jesus and to allow him to truly lead us.

Yet, this is the task of daily discipleship. Each day, we commit our lives to following Jesus, accepting him as our teacher and savior. In the process, we are blessed by those with whom we share the journey of faith, the opportunities to witness to the love of Christ, and the joy of living connected to Christ.

11. *What does "Daily Discipleship" mean to you?*
12. *What do you hope you remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Ruler of creation, rule our lives with your grace and your wisdom. Help us to follow you and be your disciples each day of our lives. Amen

Dig Deeper

Daniel 7:9-14

last word

Each morning, make the sign of the cross
on your forehead
and ask Jesus to rule your life today.



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