



Why the Gospel Is Good News: **Sermon 1: Incarnation & Invitation**

Reading: Mark 1:1-20

Background:

The gospel of Mark is the earliest gospel, written between AD60-70 (just 30 years after Christ and around the time of the deaths of Paul and Peter due to persecution by the Roman Emperor Nero) by John Mark. John Mark was not a “famous” figure in the church at the time. But significantly, he had been a young co-worker with Paul, Barnabus (his relative: see Colossians 4:10) and Peter.

As the church was growing and as some people were trying to dilute and stop Christianity, John Mark wrote this gospel to formally write down the essential truths of the Christian faith. To do so, John Mark drew on his personal experience and relationships, especially with Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13; 2 Peter 1:15), to write this compelling book. This perhaps explains the sense of urgency in the text, the brevity of the gospel and its unusual literary style for the period. It’s helpful to remember that Mark wrote the first gospel and in so doing created this new literary genre.

Commentators suggest that John Mark had the following purposes in mind when he wrote this wonderful gospel:

1. To make the good news of Christ (the gospel) available to non-Jews (the Gentiles)
2. To encourage those Christians who were being persecuted
3. To defend the faith against attack
4. To explain the significance of the cross

Building on from what we learnt about the birth of Christ in our Christmas teaching series, this series is designed to help us to grow in our understanding of the Christian faith and live as disciples today, as we focus on the person, work and mission of God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We’ll do this over the coming weeks that will lead into Easter.

Ice-breaker:

Give some examples of good news? What is it that makes this news good and worth sharing?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

1. Mark begins by establishing the identity of Jesus. Reading verses 1-11, how does Mark do this?
2. a) Why do you think Jesus is immediately subjected to temptation by Satan in the wilderness?

b) How does Satan try to tempt Jesus? In what similar ways, does Satan continue to try to tempt us, the followers of Jesus today? How are we to respond?
3. What is the “*good news*”? (verse 14-15) Why is it good news? What is the “*kingdom of God*”?
4. (verses 14-20) Put yourself in the shoes of Simon, Andrew, James and John? Why do you think they responded as they did? How would you have responded? What does this episode tell us about Jesus and His call upon our lives?
5. From what you have considered, how has your understanding of the identity of Jesus, the good news and our response to being members of the kingdom of God been affected?

Conclusion:

Conclude with a time of sharing and prayer.

Helpful Hints:

1. a) By intentionally breaking with the convention of time of beginning the description of someone by establishing their lineage and providing biographical information, Mark wants to make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah by immediately describing him as “the good news” (gospel). At the time, his readers would have understood this reference as boldly hijacking its usage by the occupying Romans.

For example, in 9BC, the following inscription about the Emperor Octavian was written and then displayed prominently throughout the Roman Empire:

‘Because providence has ordered our life in a divine way... and since the Emperor through his epiphany has exceeded the hopes of former good news, surpassing not only the benefactors who came before him, but also leaving no hope that anyone in the future will surpass him, and since the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of his good news...’

The word translated here as ‘good news’ is the Greek “euangellion”. This word was

originally used to describe the reward given to someone bearing good news, and then came to refer to the good news itself. There are various examples of times when the word was used to refer to celebrations such as the Emperor's birthday, the anniversary of his coming to power or even a royal visit. But immediately at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, we find the word used in a different way - to make bold claims about the story he will tell: *'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'*

Mark is announcing the fact that this is not just a story about a great teacher, guru or leader. This story is about the work of God, and those familiar with the propaganda of the Empire would have understood that the story was meant to be understood as one which was in direct competition to the claims of Rome.

b) This gospel in set a moment in history when living under Roman occupation, the Jews were in a state of despair. It had been more than 400 years since they heard from God through a prophet (Malachi) and so they were fearful that God had left them. Not so, Mark declares. This is why in Mark 1: 2-3 we read a quote which Mark has knitted together from two different Old Testament sources. He refers to Isaiah 40:3, the promise of a homecoming road prepared in the wilderness, offering comfort to those who have found themselves in exile. And he also quotes from Malachi 3:1, a reference to a messenger figure who will speak for God. This is Mark's way of saying that the story he is about to tell is the direct continuation of the one Malachi spoke of - and that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah that Isaiah and others had prophesied.

c) The gospel begins not in Jerusalem but in the desert. This is significant. Theologian Dick France has written that the desert was seen by Israel as "a place of hope, of new beginnings." Following their release from slavery in Egypt, The people of God were taken into the desert. This was where God made them his people as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

In a later period of moral decline, the prophet Hosea (Hosea 2:14,15) spoke of the wilderness as a place where for the people of Israel to rediscover their love for God.

d) John the Baptist resembles an Old Testament prophet (e.g. his leather girdle evokes memories of Elijah see 2 Kings 1:8) and also exercises a similar ministry in the desert. He warns of God's judgement and significantly calls *all* people, not just the Jews, back into a living relationship with the living covenant God. What's more, his ministry also alerts people and points them to *"...one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie...(who) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

e) To demonstrate that Jesus is *"..the stronger one..."* (the Messiah), Mark has Jesus enter immediately after John has prophesied. By being baptized by John, Jesus involves himself in the movement of renewing the people of God in preparation for the final judgement of God. He is the one who will cleanse and heal. He is the living water. He identifies himself as the Messiah.

Arising from the water, Jesus has an extraordinary experience (verses 1011). In first century Judaism, the opening of the heavens signified the revelation of heavenly

secrets (see Isaiah 64:1). Jesus is given a personal revelation of God and (verse 11) a voice from heaven declares *"You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* This recalls Psalm 2:7, a psalm that depicts God anointing kings in the line of David. Commentators therefore suggest that God is anointing his son, Jesus, for his ministry on earth. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus as a dove from heaven confirms this.

2. a) The testing of Jesus was part of God's plan. It relates back to Deuteronomy 8:1-5, from which Jesus also quotes in His first reply to the Devil (see Matthew 4:1-11). We are meant to see this and take note.

In Deuteronomy 8: 1-5, Moses recalls how the Lord led the people of God in the desert for 40 years *"to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."* Here at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus is subjected to a similar test. Through his obedience to God and resistance to Satan's temptation, Jesus demonstrates that he is the true Israelite, the true follower of God. And unlike Adam who gave into temptation and plunged the world into sin (Genesis 3), Jesus (the new Adam) was faithful and thus demonstrated his qualification to become the Saviour of all who would receive Him. Also by resisting Satan's temptations, Jesus again shows that he is the *"powerful one"*.

What's more, it was important that Jesus was tested as we are, so that He becomes our *"merciful and faithful High Priest"* (Hebrews 2:7) and therefore be *"able to help those who are being tempted"* (Hebrews 2:15; 4:15-16) i.e. us.

Finally, through His witness, Jesus becomes the model for all believers as and when they are tempted. We are and can overcome Satan's temptations by focusing on God.

2. In verses 14-15, Jesus begins his ministry with an announcement of the in-breaking of the "kingdom of God." Again, this key phrase is one with roots in the Old Testament - the longed for time when God would intervene in human history and reign with justice in His complete way (see Zechariah 14:6-9). The kingdom of God is wherever God is and where He reigns.

The theologian, N.T. Wright, helpfully adds, "For Jesus, the kingdom was coming not in a single move, but in stages, of which his own public ministry was one, his death and resurrection another and His glorious second coming and judgement the final stage. Then, the kingdom of God, his new salvation order, would be complete."



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 2: Authority, Prayer & Healing

Date: February 20, 2013

Reading: Mark 1:21-39

Background:

The sense of urgency in Mark's gospel continues as, following the calling of the first four disciples, Jesus immediately travels to Capernaum. Right from the beginning of his gospel, Mark wants the reader to realize that Jesus was on a mission. And this mission comes from his identity as the promised Messiah.

Ice-breaker:

Can you think of someone who has impressed you when you met them or saw them in person? What impressed you about this person and why?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

1. Following the convention of the time that allowed visiting teachers to participate in worship services in the synagogue (which was at the centre of the community) at the invitation of synagogue leaders, Jesus begins to teach. *"The people there were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."* Mark 1:22

How and why do you think Jesus stood out from the other religious leaders?

2. Read verses 23-27. What does this episode reveal about the authority of Jesus? (Note: the title given to Jesus by the demon that was possessing the man.)
3. Read verses 29-34. What does this episode reveal about the character, power and mission of God? (Note: it took place "after sunset" after a full day of ministry for Jesus.)
4. In what ways do you think people are 'imprisoned' today? How does Christ set people free? Is anyone in your group willing to give a personal testimony of how the Holy Spirit has set them free?
5. Read verses 35-39. What can we learn about how we are to live and serve Christ, both individually and as a church, from the way in which Jesus often withdrew, either individually or with the disciples?

Do you agree that time with God is a core part of our ongoing spiritual transformation?

How do you set time aside to abide in Christ? How do you spend this time with God?

Conclusion:

Share how you spend time with Christ and encourage and help each other. Consider committing to do this and invite friends to help you by holding you accountable and praying for you.

Conclude with a time of prayer.

Helpful Hints:

3. Theologian Ben Witherington¹ helpfully explains that Jesus' healing of Simon's mother-in-law was controversial for those who were witnessed and heard about it:

'Though there are later stories of rabbis taking the hand of another man and healing him, there are no such stories of rabbis doing so for a woman, and especially not for a woman who was not a member of the healer's family. In addition, there is the fact that Jesus performed this act on the Sabbath. Thus, while touching a nonrelated woman was in itself an offence, and touching one that was sick and therefore unclean was doubly so, performing this act on the Sabbath only compounds the social offence.'

Mark then writes of how the compassion shown to this one woman is extended to many others. At the end of long and full day, Jesus does not turn anyone away who comes to Him for healing. Biblical scholar Ched Myers² notes that, *"From the very beginning Jesus the healer experiences the incessant press of needy masses... The way Jesus responds to these destitute subjects despite opposition dramatizes his preferential ministry to the poor."*

In this short account, Mark continues to reveal more about Jesus and what life in the kingdom of God is like.

¹ B Witherington, "The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary", (pub: Eerdmans, 2001) Page 98

² C Myers, "Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus", (pub: Orbis, 2008) Page 144



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 3: Faith in Action

Date: January 27, 2013

Reading: Mark 2: 1-17

Background:

In this opening section of Mark (Mark 1-8:26) in which Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God, our reading gives more evidence to reveal the identity of Jesus and the nature of life in the kingdom of God. The miraculous signs accompany his teaching and reveal more about his character, authority and purpose. They invite a response – both then and now.

As C.S. Lewis famously wrote in “Mere Christianity”:

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice.

Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”

Ice-breaker:

Can you remember an occasion when you have invited someone to a special event? Who did you invite and why?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Mark 2:1-12 (note: for a fuller account see Luke 5: 17-26 & Matthew 9:2-8)

1. From Luke’s account, why do you think the friends of the paralysed man brought him to Jesus? What does their action reveal about themselves and the nature of friendship?
2. Think of your friends and your loved ones. How have you/can and do you invite them to an encounter with Jesus?
3. It is thought that the house belonged to Simon Peter or as Tom Wright suggests perhaps Jesus. From Mark 2:5, what does Jesus reply to the man’s sudden arrival through the roof teach us?

4. Read Mark 2:6-7. Why do you think the Scribes and Pharisees felt so alarmed and threatened by the offer of personal forgiveness that Jesus gave to everyone?
5. Read verses 13-17. Tax collectors were not popular people. Tom Wright compares Levi to a traffic warden “working for a government you hated and wanted to get rid of?” What does this episode tell us about Jesus?

Can you think of people today who are “unpopular” because of the work they do or who and what they are associated with? How would you react if they came to St. John’s? How would Jesus react?

Conclusion:

Take a few minutes to consider the variety of people whom you see and interact with in your daily life. How can you appropriately begin to share the transforming love of Jesus with them? Do you support this with personal prayer?

Helpful Hints:

3. Jesus recognized the bold action of the paralyzed man (*note: remember he must have agreed and wanted to meet Jesus himself*) and his friends demonstrated faith. They chose to go to Jesus. Nothing was going to stop them because of their belief in Jesus and what he could do. Evidence that they believed he was the Messiah.

Seeing the paralysed man, Jesus looked at him compassionately and healed his real need, which was to be forgiven of his sins. To be forgiven and restored to relationship with God. To be adopted into the kingdom of God through his faith.

A feature of the kingdom is wholeness (shalom). An integral part of wholeness in the kingdom of God is physical wholeness. Accordingly, in an imperfect world, as a sign of the kingdom of God breaking in and bringing transformation, the paralysed man is healed and set free – physically, spiritually, relationally, emotionally and also financially. He can now walk and work. He is no longer imprisoned on his mat and dependent on others.

4. Knowing that only God can forgive sins, the religious leaders believed that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. How could a carpenter from Nazareth be the promised Messiah? As custodians of the law, it was their duty to stop this man.

If Jesus was the Messiah, as his healings, teaching and followed appeared to suggest to so many, then they would have to accept him, change their understanding of faith and lose their job and position in society. Jesus threatened their whole way of life.

Importantly, Jesus was teaching that God’s love was for all people not just the Jews exclusively.

5. At the time in which Jesus ministered, there were a number of different groups within Judaism. Each group had different ideas about how 'freedom', brought by the Messiah, would come for the Jewish people. Zealots were willing to participate in an armed struggle against the occupying Romans to free the Promised Land. The Essenes were committed to strict adherence of the law and to living simply, often in separated sections of towns or villages or in religious communities. We know little about the Sadducees, apart from the fact that they were religious conservatives and often in disagreement with the Pharisees.

Pharisees were a small but highly respected group who were committed to keeping the Jewish law as faithfully and diligently as possible. *"Pharisaism was reputed for high ideals and was, in the words of (the Jewish historian) Josephus, 'extremely influential among the common people.'"*³ It's easy for us to criticize the Pharisees, but we need to keep in mind that their behaviour was driven by their reverence of God's law and a desire to see Him work in powerful ways again in Israel.

Eugene Peterson helpfully comments: *"The Pharisees had become a little rigid through the years, true. They needed some reforming, some livening up, yes. But they could very well serve as a solid base to work from... There was much to admire in the Pharisees. Every Jew owed a debt of gratitude to the Pharisees for keeping Jewish identity alive. I don't think we appreciate the Pharisees nearly enough. They need to be honoured far more than has been common among Christians. All the same, it is obvious that Jesus did not work out of a Pharisee context."*⁴

One area of life that Pharisees were particularly concerned about was 'table fellowship.' *"Even everyday mealtimes were highly complex events in which social values, boundaries, statuses and hierarchies were reinforced. Anyone who challenged these rankings and boundaries would be judged to have acted dishonourably, a serious charge in cultures based on the values of honour and shame."*⁵

For Jesus to enter the home of Levi, a tax collector working on behalf of Rome, must have been scandalous to most people at the time. If we think about how collaborators were regarded in Nazi-occupied countries during World War II, then we have some idea of how Levi was thought of by most of his fellow Jews. Tax collectors were pariah figures who were disqualified as witnesses in a Jewish court, even their touch made a house unclean. Yet in Mark 2:17, Jesus demonstrates that these are exactly the sort of people he has come to save and to be in relationship with. Jesus came for everyone. All are loved and invited into an intimate personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus. What's more, Jesus goes out to look for and invite everyone to come and follow him and become his disciples. As the Jews understood from rabbinic training, to follow and become like their teacher – that is Jesus.

³ J Edwards, Pillar New Testament Commentary (pub: IVP/Apollos, page 87)

⁴ E Peterson, *"The Jesus Way"*, (pub: Hodder, page 212-213)

⁵ SS Bartchy, *"IVP Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels"* (pub: IVP, page 796)



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 4: The Kingdom of God: 3 Parables

Date: February 3, 2013

Reading: Mark 4: 21-34

Background:

Jesus has called his twelve disciples (Mark 3:13-19). Crowds are thronging to him and following him as he continues his teaching about the Kingdom of God. His teaching is accompanied by signs (miracles) that attest to his divinity, character, purpose and the nature of life in the kingdom of God that is available today through Jesus. Opposition from the established religious groups continues as Jesus engages with them (see Mark 3:1-5) leading to the beginning of a plot against him.

Mark continues his gospel by recording a series of parables in chapter 4. Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. In the parables, Jesus teaches by making reference to everyday things/situations/events that people at the time could relate to.

Brian McLaren offers three helpful insights about the ways in which parables work⁶ :

- There is often a hidden message that becomes apparent at the end of the story.
- Like many good stories, parables often contain surprises, twists at the end of the tale. For example, the plant emerging from the tiny mustard seed turns out to be the largest of all!
- The stories are frequently puzzling and appear to be open to a variety of interpretations. This is a form of teaching that seems to ask more from listeners than the simply communicating facts or instructions. McLaren notes that, "With a clear and easy explanation, hearers can listen and achieve understanding, and then go on their way, independent of the teacher. But when a parable confounds them, it invites them to ask questions, so they continue to depend on the teacher himself, not just their independent understanding of his words."

In Mark 4, Jesus begins his first block of teaching through parables. By intentionally telling four parables one after another, Jesus wants us to understand what he is teaching and to understand that it is very important. He is teaching about the kingdom of God and life in the kingdom of God.

In summary, the kingdom of God can be understood as the rule and reign of God. Jesus is King and invites everyone to new life in relationship with God as beloved citizens in his Kingdom. Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is work in progress and will be completed after Christ's return and judgement day when everything will be perfect as God intends. (Note: Jesus used the term "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably.)

⁶ Brian McLaren, *"The Secret Message of Jesus"* (pub: Thomas Nelson, pages 44-47)

As chapter 4 begins with the parable of the sower that is well known, I have omitted it from our study. But it is important to remember that this teaching precedes the three parables that we will consider. They build on the teaching contained in this parable.

Ice-breaker:

Share your experiences of growing flowers, vegetables and fruit from bulbs/seed.

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Mark 4:21-34

1. Look at verses 21-25. Verse 22 seems to suggest that the message of the kingdom of God has been hidden for a long time, but the time has now come for it to be revealed. Jesus is the light of the world. Just as a lamp is not to be concealed, so Jesus is destined to be revealed and to fulfill his purpose of bringing the transforming light of the kingdom of God to all.

The extent to which God can work in someone's life depends on how obedient they are to him (verse 24). How the light grows in and through a disciple.

- a) Looking at verses 24-25, how do you feel?
 - b) How can we consciously and unconsciously conceal the light of Christ in us and fail to live fully in His light and point others, who are in darkness, to new life in his light?
2. Read verses 26-29. Only Mark records the parable of the growing seed. What do you take away from Jesus' teaching in this parable?

Take a little time to prayerfully consider how the Holy Spirit speaks to you personally about your ongoing spiritual growth (transformation).

3. Read verses 30-34. In your opinion, what is the main point of this parable?
4. Why do you think Jesus spent so much time speaking in parables instead of providing rules or instructions like the rabbis?

Does the fact that Jesus used stories so often provide any lessons for us, in terms of how we communicate the Gospel in our daily lives? Consider also the importance of the example of Jesus' character and daily living gave to his 'authenticate' his teaching. We are to live the gospel. In the words of an old saying, "we are the fifth gospel"

Conclusion:

Take a few minutes to think, reflect and pray together to discern how you may grow in Christ and live the gospel this week? Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit.

Consider agreeing to be accountable to each other and share together next time how you progress in your discipleship.

Helpful Hints:

1. Verse 24-25 build on the preceding verses (21-23) and the parable of the sower. Jesus wants us to understand that the more we grow in His truth now, the more we will receive; and if we do not respond to what little truth we may know already, we will not profit from this fully.

Openness to the kingdom of God unlocks the promise of God doing further work in the life of a disciple (verse 25).

2. The parable of the sower stresses the importance of suitable soil for the growth of the seed and the success of the harvest. In this parable, Jesus emphasizes the power of the seed (i.e. the gospel message). In a way that is mysterious to the farmer (verse 27), the seed has the intrinsic capacity to grow and flourish.

Verse 29 is an allusion to Joel 3:13 where harvest is a figure of speech for the completion of the kingdom of God.

3. The main point of this simple parable is that the kingdom of God seemingly had insignificant beginnings. Think of Jesus birth, upbringing and life as a carpenter in Nazareth. As John 1:46 reveals, Nazareth was a place that was looked down upon by people at the time. The kingdom of God was introduced by the despised and rejected Jesus and his 'unimpressive' disciples (by worldly standards. Yet look at how the kingdom grew in the next three years and how the kingdom of God continues to grow through history (and today) as we await its' completion.



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 5: Kingdom Coming: Obedience & God's Provision

Date: February 10, 2013

Reading: Mark 6: 6b-12, 30 -44

Background:

As we have already caught glimpses of, the choice and training of the twelve disciples was a crucial part of Jesus' mission. The task of spreading the good news about eternal life would rest with them after his death, resurrection and ascension. Now he sends them out for the first time, with power to heal. He gives them their instructions (some only temporary, see Luke 22:35-36) and warns them of the kind of reception they are likely to get, both now and in the future. They are to expect hardship, trust in God's care and fear no-one!

Feeding the 5000: (See also Matthew 14: 13-21 & Luke 9:10-17) John the Baptists death casts a real shadow over Jesus. Jesus is desperately tired and hard pressed. Yet instead of being annoyed or irritable with the pursuing crowds, his heart goes out to them.

Unlike many other miracle stories, this one is not about healing. And as you are beginning to hear, **it's not primarily a story about "sharing what you have"** as it is sometimes reduced to. This is *not* primarily a story about stewardship or a child's faith, or about a lesson about Jesus feeding the hungry, nobody was going to starve. Those are all good things to teach, and can be taught from the story, but they are not why Jesus did the miracle. **He was not teaching about children or gifts. Instead, he had spent all day teaching, and needed to let the crowd and authorities know WHO had just done the teaching.**

Like MOST miracles that Jesus performed, the feeding of the 5000 is meant to tell the Disciples, the crowd, the religious leaders, and us as well, JUST WHO HE IS, that he was indeed the promised Messiah with full authority to turn the world on its head. Jesus wants us to know WHO he came from, and why people should listen to him, and BELIEVE IN HIM.

He isn't just a compelling teacher, he is the Son of God. And the passage makes the point!

Ice-breaker:

Can you think of a time when you have felt burnt out?
 What in your life contributes to a sense of over-activity or burn out/
 How does it affect your spiritual life?

Reflection: Perhaps whilst listening to Worship song, take a piece of paper and assess your current spiritual life. Is it fresh and vital? Weak and mechanical? Pressured? Hardly there? Give thanks that the Lord cares about you wherever you are in your walk with him.

On your paper write an honest (and confidential) letter to God telling him exactly where you are currently?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Mark 6:6b-12 & 30-44

1. Do you like to prepare for things?
2. What do Jesus' instructions to the Twelve tell us about the kind of ministry they were to have?
3. What differences are there between Jesus' approach to the crowd and that of his disciples?
4. Can you identify times in your life when tiredness has blunted your desire to care for others? (Share with the group)
5. Jesus invites the disciples to 'a quiet place to get some rest'. Do you ever 'Go with Jesus' to a quiet place? Or do you find it hard to do this?
6. Are there any 'tips' for finding a quiet place, that work for you, which you can share with group?
7. Note how Jesus provides for the peoples needs, he feeds them physically and spiritually. Can you share stories of how Jesus has provided for your needs?
8. Is there any 'practical' way you could 'feed' others?

Conclusion:

Spend some time listening to God, perhaps in silence. Ask the Lord what priorities he wants you to have. Are there people whose needs you are neglecting that you could make time for? Are there people who are taking up too much of your time that you need to cut back in seeing? Ask God for his discernment.

Helpful Hints:

WHAT IS THIS STORY MOSTLY ABOUT?

The purpose of most miracles.

Most miracles in the Gospel are primarily intended as “signs” pointing to Jesus’ identity and authority. According to three of the Gospels, this miracle takes place immediately after John the Baptist’s death, and in John the miracle takes place after Jesus talks about his authority, --so the miracle is properly understood as "a sign" revealing Jesus’ true identity, and how seriously people should take his words. This is no mere "rabbit". To further drive home the point, the story after this one in two of the Gospels is Jesus walking on the water, ...another revealing of his identity and power.

“You give them something to eat”.

This curious command to the disciples found in each Gospel account is not a commandment to “feed hungry people”. Rather, it is Jesus saying, “you give what you have got and let me do the rest!!”

The number “12”

12 signifies “complete”, “full”, or “authority” to the biblical audience. 12 Disciples, 12 Tribes of Israel, 12 Patriarchs, 12 Temple gates. --12 baskets of food left over. Once again, Jesus is symbolically signaling who he is... the Son of God with full authority to speak, heal, and forgive.

Jesus’ miracles also tell us that Jesus cares about our basic needs.

Nobody would have starved that day had he sent them into the villages to look for food (as the disciples suggested), nevertheless, Jesus gave them bread and fish after a long day of giving them spiritual food. Time and again in the Bible, we see the connection between the presence of God and blessing of abundance. Manna from heaven, water into wine, living water, 5 loaves and 2 fishes (and I’m sure you can think of many more!). “And all ate and had their fill.”

There’s a meal going on here.

Jesus frequently invited people to eat with him, ...Pharisees, sinners, and outcasts, -- and some refuse his invitation. It was one thing to listen to a teacher, but quite another to break bread with someone alleged to be the Messiah. So when Jesus says, “You give them something to eat”, Jesus is issuing a challenge and an invitation.

Does this meal foreshadow communion? Perhaps. Both meals reveal Jesus as Christ and invite us to join him.



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 6: When religion Gets in the way of God

Date: February 10, 2013

Reading: Mark 7: 1-23

Background:

One of the problems with Mark chapter 7 is that it is very much rooted in the 'Jewish' world and unless you are 'in it' you won't get the point. In this chapter, all of Marks accounts of Jesus' healings stop, and we are drawn into a debate, focusing on a controversy about the interpretation and practice of Judaism by Jesus and his followers.

Right from the outset Jesus' teaching on religion brought him into conflict with the Pharisees. For them tradition (the oral teaching of the Rabbi's which supplemented and interpreted scripture) was binding. But Jesus never hesitated to denounce tradition wherever it watered down or undermined scriptural principles. The Pharisees ruling on vows is a case in point. The Pharisees were concerned not with hygiene but with religious 'cleanness'. Mankind's real problem is not dirty hands but a 'polluted' heart, which no amount of washing can clean. In this passage Jesus comes into conflict again with the Pharisees as he exposes their wrong thinking.

Ice-breaker:

- What religious traditions influence your life? Is that influence good or bad?
- Make a list of three or four religious habits you have. Evaluate whether they help you to feel closer to God or whether they make you feel more distant.

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Mark 7: 1-23

1. Are there any traditions you have as a family? Good ones or bad ones – how did they start? Why did they start?
 2. What specific complaints does Jesus raise against the Pharisees' approach to tradition?
 3. What sorts of traditions do we observe today that get in the way of really honouring God?
 4. How does Jesus' view of becoming 'unclean' differ from that of the Pharisees?
 5. In what ways do we sometimes emphasise appearance over internal reality?
 6. How does Jesus standard of uncleanness cut across the differences between Jewish and Gentile traditions?
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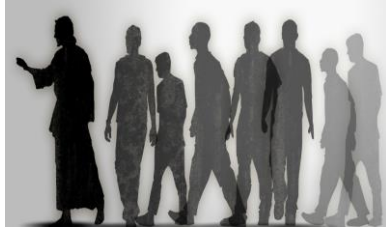
7. What style of worship enables you to engage with God?

Conclusion:

Spend some time in God's presence (perhaps listening to an appropriate CD). Offer a bowl of water, soap and a towel and if people are willing to come and wash their hands as a symbol of asking God to wash them clean on the inside and create in them a pure heart.

Helpful Hints:

2. Isaiah 29:13 is referred to here. Isaiah roundly denounced the religious leaders of the day and Jesus uses a quote from this prophet to describe the tradition of the elders as 'rules taught by men'.
3. It's easier to point the finger at someone else's tradition rather than our own. (eg. 'Those fuddy duddies with their organ and candles, so out of date, how can that honour God!' or 'those youngsters trying to make worship like pop concert! How can that honour God' Try to get group members to identify traditions they actually are comfortable with that may not always honour God. Help them to see that their attitude toward the tradition and toward those who don't find it helpful may be what determines whether and how it honours God.
5. Many of the traditions of the elders were embellishments on the Old Testament ceremonial law. Which therefore meant that observance of the law and the traditions served to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles. If after some time the group is still struggling with this question ask 'What aspect of our relationship with God do the ceremonial law and traditions emphasise – the external or the internal? What standard does Jesus' standard emphasise? Jews and gentiles obviously differ on the external issues, but do they differ on the internal ones?



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 7: The Cost of discipleship

Date: February 24, 2013

Reading: Mark 8: 27-38

Background:

The place where this conversation occurred is 'Caesarea Philippi' which is quite a walk from 'Bethsaida' where we read Jesus had just healed a blind man, a man whose eyes opened to the realization of God, the messiah standing before him. Why did Jesus take the disciples such a distance? Perhaps it was to give the disciple's time to think, to process all they had seen. So that when Jesus asks the question 'Who do people say I am?' they had had time for their eyes to be opened to the Messiah standing before them!

This is pivotal part in Mark's gospel, from this point on Jesus begins to stress the suffering which lies ahead. In this passage, Simon Peter speaks for all the disciples in asserting his belief that Jesus is the messiah, and Jesus sees in him the man of rock (Peter) which he will become after the shattering experience of denial and forgiveness. It is Peter, the natural spokesman, who will be responsible, more than any other, for the formation of the church at Pentecost. In this passage Jesus begins to prepare his disciples for the suffering that is coming. But the recent promise has gone to Peter's head. The 'Rock' becomes an obstacle. God's spokesman turns devil's advocate

Ice-breaker:

Using Post-it notes placed on each others backs. Play the game 'who am I?' Each person is to ask others in the group random questions to try and ascertain which name is on the post it note on their back. (These could be famous sports personalities, to famous celebrities, which the group leader will have prepared in advance) e.g. Questions such as; 'I am on TV? Am I famous for a sport? Does it involve a ball? etc. (give 10 minutes for this)

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Mark 8: 27-38

1. Have you ever had to try and explain what you do? Your job, your role, to someone who clearly doesn't understand? How did it make you feel?
 2. Have you ever been put in the awkward position of trying to explain who someone else is, when you actually don't know them very well?
 3. In response to Jesus question of who people are saying he is, the disciples tell him John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets. Why would people think Jesus was any of these?
-

4. Right after Jesus acknowledges Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus begins to explain what must happen to him. Why do you suppose Peter reacts so strongly to what Jesus has said?
 5. Why does Jesus respond so harshly to Peter?
 6. How is Peter like the blind man in verses 22-26?
 7. What does Jesus say it means to acknowledge him as the Christ and to follow him?
 8. Is your life characterized more by seeking to lose your life or to save it? Explain your thinking?
-

Conclusion:

Who do you say I am? It's a question Jesus asks each of us and the answer we give ultimately determines our destiny. But our answer involves more than what we say with our lips. Our real answer is to be found in the way we live our lives.

C.S. Lewis made famous a set of contemporary alternative responses to Jesus' question. He proposed that Jesus was either a legend, a liar, a lunatic or a Lord? In your heart of hearts, what is your response?

Perhaps whilst listening to a Christian piece of music, write down all your response and give reasons for this, thinking back through the studies on the first half of marks gospel.

Helpful Hints:

3. The group may wonder why people would say that Jesus was Elijah. Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would return before the day of the Lord (Mal 4:5) As a result, the Jews of Jesus' day expected a prophet like Elijah to come before the Messiah.

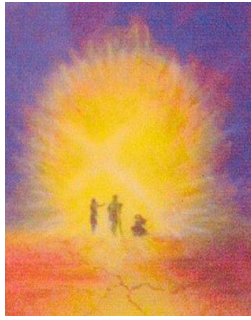
4. Peter's view of the Christ (or the Messiah) was likely that of his fellow Jews who expected a political leader, someone who would liberate them from Roman rule and restore their national pride. Such a view left no room for suffering and death.

5. (see point 4) God's kingdom of salvation will only be established through Jesus suffering. Any opposition to this must come from the enemy (Satan) Even Jesus' right hand man is capable of thinking in mortal ways and not looking at things through God's perspective. This is a challenge for all of us, not only to think but also to live from God's perspective.

6. We are so used to seeing Peter's confession as a clear realization of who Jesus is that we often fail to see that only gradually did he learn what it meant. Peter's understanding needed a second touch as well.

7 & 8. Tom Wright in 'Mark for Everyone' points out that 'this passage makes it clear that following him is the only way to go. Following Jesus is, more or less, Mark's

definition of what being a Christian means; Jesus is not leading us on a pleasant afternoon hike, but on a walk into danger and risk. Or did we suppose that the kingdom of God would mean merely a few minor adjustments in our ordinary lives?'



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 8: The transfiguration

Date: March 3rd, 2013

Reading: Mark 9: 1-13

Background:

The Transfiguration is perhaps one of the most well-known passages in the gospels. We need to note that this amazing event takes place up 'a mountain'. Frequently in scripture, hugely important events occur 'up a mountain'. The mountain is believed to be the 9000ft Mount Hermon, as it is only 12 miles north east of Caesarea Philippi. The tradition that it was Mount Tabor does not really fit with the geography. Peter wants to prolong the moment for as long as possible, perhaps Moses and Elijah will stay if they make shelters for them, like the tent (tabernacle) where God was present in the Old Testament before the temple was built. The glory of the transfiguration and everything he saw on that day was imprinted indelibly on Peter's memory (2 Peter 1:16-18)

'Within the inner cloud, we see the reality of Jesus' work. He was continuing and completing the tasks of the great prophet Elijah and behind him, of the greatest prophet of old, Moses himself. Both of whom, interestingly, had disappeared from view rather than died in the ordinary way, surrounded by friends and family. Legends had developed about their being somehow spared 'proper' death. Now they reappear, with the veil of ordinariness drawn back for a moment and Jesus is with them, shining with a brilliant light'. (Tom Wright; Mark for Everyone)

The Apostles are sure now that Jesus is the Messiah. This special glimpse of his glory, given to the inner three, must have been tremendously reassuring through all that lay ahead. Moses, (Israel's great law giver) and Elijah (the first great prophet) converse with Jesus about his coming death.

Ice-breaker:

- Can you share any stories of 'Mountain top' experiences – good or bad?
- Have there ever been any times, when you (like the disciples in verse 6) have been so nervous/scared/terrified, you haven't known what to say?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Mark 9: 1-13

1. Put yourself in the place of Peter, James and John in verses 1-12. What do you see and hear?
-

2. As a good Jew, what significance might you have attached to the presence of Elijah and Moses with Jesus on the mountain?
 3. Jesus' transfiguration occurs six days after Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power' (9:1) What connection do you see between the transfiguration and Jesus' promise?
 4. The statement in verse 7 'Listen to him!' probably alludes to Deuteronomy 18:14-22. How can we listen to Jesus today?
 5. Are you able to share with the group times when you believe you have heard/ been obedient to God?
 6. How has this helped your faith to grow?
 7. To what events is Jesus referring when he says 'Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him'?
-

Conclusion:

What holds you back from seeing the full glory of God?

The disciples themselves were amazed by what they witnessed. It no doubt changed them and increased their faith. Can you share any moments in your life that you can describe as 'transfiguration' moments. Events that have transformed who you are and increased your faith? A Possible opportunity to share individual testimonies.

N.B. Perhaps ask group members if they would be willing to share their testimony during a church service – please speak to one of the clergy team.

Helpful Hints:

2. Moses and Elijah are representative of the law and the prophets. What company does then put Jesus in? The prophecies in Deut (18: 14-22 and Malachi 4:5 reveal even further the significance in their presence).

3. At least five events present themselves as possible fulfillments of Jesus' prediction – the transfiguration, the resurrection, the ascension, the day of Pentecost and the second coming. The second coming is the only one of these not to occur within the time frame Jesus mentions. All the rest anticipate the full glory of the second coming, giving glimpses of the power that will be fully revealed then.

4. Listening involves obedience. When your mother or father used to say to you 'did you hear me?' S/he wasn't asking a question about your hearing ability but about your obedience.

(If time allows you might preface this question by saying; in this account God's voice is heard for a second time in Mark's gospel, the first being in 1:1. What purposes are accomplished by God's affirmation here?)

7. Remind the group how in Ch 1 John the Baptist was fulfilling the role of Elijah (as predicted by Malachi). Then look at what happened to John in mark 6: 14-29. William Lane in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark states ' It is necessary to assume that the phrase 'even as it written of him' has reference to the prophet Elijah in the framework of his historical ministry (for example see 1 Kings 19:2-10) No passage of scripture associates suffering with Elijah's eschatological ministry'.



Why the Gospel Is Good News

Sermon 9: Obstacles to Faith

Date: 10th March 2013

Reading: Mark 10:13-31

Background

In this part of Marks gospel we see Jesus interacting with two entirely different sets of people: children, who the disciples see as a nuisance and a rich young man, who seems to have everything, yet comes to Jesus to ask what he could do to receive eternal life.

Children in ancient times were not looked at in the same we see our children, in fact in some cultures children were not even deemed fully human until they reached adulthood, yet here we see Jesus telling his disciples off and in fact telling them that people have to be like children to enter the Kingdom of God.

Just like today, the rich young man would have been held up in high esteem because of his wealth and the fact that he lived a good clean life keeping to the laws. He would have been somebody who people thought would have no problem entering the Kingdom of God.

So what type of person is God looking for in his Kingdom people and what does Jesus teach us about how we should be?

Icebreakers

When are you most likely to lose your patience with little children? When do you most like them?

Or

If you are working or when you did work did you choose the job

- a) For money?
- b) Fulfillment?
- c) the chance to make a contribution?

Study:

Read: Mark 10: 13-31, Exodus 20:1-16

Ideas for discussion points

- a. Why would the disciples want to keep the children away from Jesus?
- b. But what childlike qualities was Jesus encouraging?
- c. The rich young man asks a question in verse 17, what do you think might have been missing in his life?

- d. By choosing wealth over a loving relationship with Christ, what was the rich young gaining and what was he losing out on?
- e. Comparing these two types of people what is Jesus teaching us in these passages?
- f. Being honest what are your top priorities in life right now ?
- g. How much do you think your commitment to Jesus Christ and his way of life influences your own values? a lot, a little, not as much as you would like, not at all really.

Conclusion

If Jesus were to evaluate your life what would he say holds you back from being totally committed to God. (Perhaps wealth, apathy, family or friends, habits, temptations, doubts about issues of faith, fear of being labeled as strange, or something else?)

Name one thing you can do this week to let go of material things and one thing you can do to embrace Gods Kingdom.

How would you like the group to pray for you?

Helpful Hints

In Exodus we are given the full Ten Commandments of Gods law, but Jesus points to the first two commandments as being the most important of all, in fact Jesus tells us the rest of the commandments hang on the first two. (Maybe read them out again).

In these teaching Jesus is showing the disciples that the most important person in our lives should be God, yet we are given an example of somebody who puts other things first.

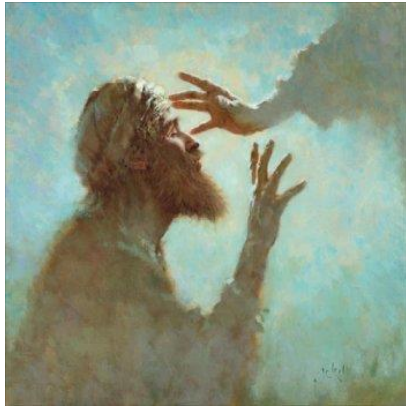
Jesus has compared the helpless dependency of children who rely on others to care for them against a young man who thinks he is totally in control of his life. Jesus tells him how he can enter but he cannot or will not leave his wealth.

Jesus teaches that we cannot get into the kingdom of heaven on our own merits or efforts.

There is nothing we can do to save ourselves, we cannot buy our way in to heaven, we cannot earn our way in, we can only rely on the grace of God.

We can only enter when we turn to God, realizing our weakness and sinfulness and having faith and trust in the saving power of Jesus.

The world to come will be different from this world; many who are the greatest now will be the least important. It is people who come to him as children in need that he accepts, because when we accept our need we have humility, we have to trust and have faith, also we are more open to serving others and most of all serving God.



Why the Gospel is Good News

Sermon 10: Journey to Sight

Date: 17th March 2013

Reading: Mark 10:32-34; 46-52

Background

We have come to the third prediction by Jesus regarding his death, or the fourth if the private discussion with the disciples on their way down the mountain of transfiguration is taken into account. This is Jesus' fullest warning yet, we are told that the disciples are astonished and that some are afraid, they have a sense of foreboding, but still the disciples have failed to understand the full implications of what will happen to Jesus.

Maybe it is because Jesus is talking about a resurrection three days after his death, the Jewish people believed in a resurrection at the end of times, but had no concept of a resurrection before then.

The second reading is all about a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, who finds a way to Jesus even though all the disciples of Jesus try to block his way and rebuke him. (remember last week how they tried to turn the children away). But we see that Bartimaeus through his perseverance and faith is rewarded by being healed and he receives his sight and he too follows Jesus.

Two sets of people who are blind: one set, the disciples who heard what Jesus said, but could not see intellectually what he meant and another who could not physically see but upon hearing him and through faith received sight.

Bartimaeus, knows what he wants, we see no wavering in prayer for him. We see that his faith was persistent despite others trying to keep him quiet and away from Jesus and that same faith made him a follower.

Ice breaker

If you had one week to live, how would you spend your time?

Or

How do you respond if a beggar approaches you?

Study (see helpful hints)

Read Mark 10:32-34; 46-52

- a. What did your parents want you to be when you grew up?
- b. How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus described what was going to happen in Jerusalem?
- c. How would you feel if one of your family or friends told you they were going on a very dangerous mission or to a dangerous place, because they believed God called them to do it?
- d. How does the blind man get Jesus' attention?
- e. In what area of your life would you like Jesus to open your eyes so you could see more clearly?

- f. How is Bartimaeus different to the rich young man from last week?

Conclusion

Blindfold one of the group, and the rest of the group to talk to each other, stand the person who had the blindfold on and lead them around the room (be careful remember health and safety!).

Reflect together how it felt for the person blindfolded and for those trying to help them, do you have stories when you need help because of lack of vision (maybe at night or in the fog or driving on wet motorways)?

Helpful Hints

Mark records more of Jesus' miracles than his sermons.

Jesus asks the blind man an obvious question (v51) but that question allows the man make a choice and to tell Jesus what it is he wants to see.

Notice Jesus does not tell the man that he is healed, Jesus says "Go your faith has healed you" The man has not earned his cure, but it is given in a response to his faith commitment.

Jesus did miracles to convince the people of who he was and to confirm his true identity - God.

Although Jesus carried out amazing healings, miracles and taught many things about God the Father, we see in the opening verses (32-34) what his ultimate mission was.



Why the Gospel Is Good News
Sermon 11: Jesus' Triumphal Entry
Date: 24th March 2013
Read: Mark 11:1-11

Background

Psalm Sunday is the day we now remember as the first day of Holy Week and during this extraordinary week, events took place that would change the world forever.

It begins with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem where the crowds are euphoric in their joyful victorious celebration.

Their Saviour had come! The Jews expected God to bless them with a Messiah who would come as a conquering warrior sent to free them from Roman tyranny and oppression.

The Messiah had indeed come, but not in the way that the people imagined or wanted.

What they actually got was Jesus riding into the city on a donkey; a symbol of peace.

What they got was Jesus who had come as a suffering servant.

What starts as a festivity would within the week deteriorate into what appears to be the worst week ever. But we are talking about this week and next week has not come yet.

Ice breaker

What is the closest you have come to meeting a world leader or celebrity?

Study

Read Mark 11:1-11

Ideas for discussion

- What was unexpected about the way Jesus entered into Jerusalem?
- What kind of Messiah did the crowd think he was?
- How do you think Jesus felt in light of their incorrect perceptions of the kind of Messiah he was?
- What do you find most significant about the triumphal entry into Jerusalem?

- How did Jesus ride into your life? As a conquering hero forcing you into submission? As a gentle king bringing you peace? Or maybe as a white knight rescuing you?
- How do you see Jesus in your life now?

Conclusion

Light a candle, play some quiet music and spend time reflecting on how Jesus came into your life. End by giving thanks and praise for all that he has done for us as humanity and for each of us as individuals.

Helpful Hints

During this week the great Passover festival would take place. See the initial Passover in Exodus 12-37-51.

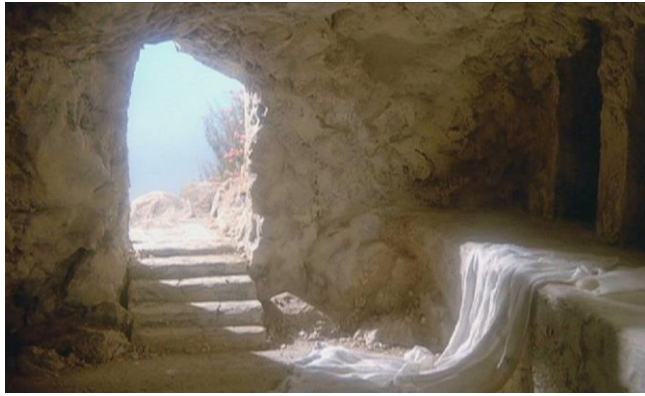
Early in the Old Testament, the regal, messianic depiction of donkeys is expressed in Jacob's prophecy concerning his twelve sons. See Genesis 49 10-11. Here Jacob predicts the great dynasty of David, and the greater kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the donkey motif is born here in this regal prophecy.

Donkeys, not horses, were ridden by rulers. King David rode on donkeys, as they were a royal gift to the king (2 Samuel 16:2). Solomon, David's son, rides his father's mule into Jerusalem for his coronation as king (1 Kings 1:38-40).

In the Bible, the donkey is a sign of humility, labour, and strangely enough--regal authority; the horse, however, is a sign of human strength, pride, and war.

The people cried Hosanna, this is an exclamation of praise and literally means Save or Rescue.

When the people spread their garments on the floor they were following a tradition of accepting a king See 2 Kings 9:12a-13.



Why The Gospel is Good News

Sermon 12: Resurrection Light

Date: 31st March 2013

Reading: Mark 16: 1-20

Background

He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! A sound of joyful celebration; and yet the disciples did not believe it as they hid like frightened animals in an upstairs room their hopes their dreams shattered in the grief of the one they had followed.

We have been told over and over again how the Crucifixion was not a surprise to Jesus that it was in fact the climax of His ministry, and everything He said and everything He did led to the moment of the cross.

We are told of the women's experience in the garden as they go to the tomb and find it empty.

We see that the work, the authority and power of Jesus has not ended at the cross.

Right from the beginning Jesus knew that He was the Lamb of God, He knew that his mission was to be the sacrifice for the rescue of humanity. During our walk through Mark we have seen again how He preached good news to the poor. How He healed the sick. How He raised the dead. We saw how He taught and how Jesus rebuked, corrected and spoke the truth in love.

But we have also seen how the cross was always before Him and after that His resurrection from the dead. He spoke plainly of the cross and of His rising from the dead. These were events that were going to happen, and He planned His ministry around those events. Why? To show us the love, the grace and the forgiveness of God.

Ice Breaker

What is the most incredible event you have ever seen?

Study

Read Mark 16:1-20

Ideas for discussion points

- Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, were never very far away during the crucifixion and entombment of Jesus (see 15:40-41). What does this tell you about the role of women in Jesus' life?
- Who can you count on in times of trouble?
- How did the women respond to the young man in the white robe who said "He has risen"?
- Would you have had trouble believing the angel's words? Why or why not?
- Do you think the women believed the man (v8), how do their actions support your answer?
- Why do you think the angel asked them specifically to speak to Peter?
- What do you think about the disciples' reaction of disbelief to the news?

Conclusion

Discuss how you came to know about Jesus. What will you remember most from the Gospel of Mark that will sharpen your focus on who Jesus really is?

Have any of the verses or stories really stood out for you?

Choose one small part of Mark's Gospel and read the verse or story silently to yourself. Read it again and see if any word, phrase or verse stand out above the others or speak to you. Take time to concentrate on that word, phrase or verse. Pray to God to open this verse to you through the coming week.

Helpful Hints.

The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20 and finish at verse 8, they are known as the shorter ending. The version we have followed is the longer ending.

Mark does not directly identify the young man as an angel, although his supernatural character is clear in the continuing story.

The word "angel" actually comes from the Greek word *aggelos*, which means "messenger."

The Bible speaks about classes of angelic beings like cherubim (Ezekiel 1) and seraphim (Isaiah 6). We also know the names of two notable angels: Michael (Daniel 10:13; Jude 9) and Gabriel (Daniel 9:21; Luke 1:19,26).

Mary Magdalene spreads the good news. But even when she did the disciples refused to believe, in spite of their sorrow. There is nothing more tragic than the refusal of the disciples to receive such witness, even when it was the answer to their problems. The unbelief of the disciples is a constant theme of Mark's gospel and we see they are still the same here even after the resurrection of Jesus and it is almost as if they in their stubbornness of their sorrow had almost preferred unbelief and despondency to God's joyous truth of resurrection.

The Serenity Bible and Tyndale New Testament Commentaries of Mark have been used as Recourses for the last four sets of house group notes