



Holy Week

EASTER AT COMMON GROUND

MONDAY

MARK 14: 1-11



BE WITH JESUS:

Today's reading is set two days before the Passover Festival. Jesus' death would be in two days' time and although he has shared this with his disciples, his followers have missed it. Let's read together, paying special attention to how Jesus responds to each person.

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot."

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. ⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

- Pause and reflect on the various people in this account. Who do you most identify with, why?



BECOME LIKE JESUS:

Mark starts the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection by contrasting the devotion of a humble woman with the deceitfulness of the religious authorities and the disloyalty of Judas, one of Jesus' disciples.

When Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (see John 12), breaks open a jar of perfumed oil and sets about pouring it over Jesus' head, she has interrupted their evening in an unexpected and lavish way. Unconcerned about how the homeowner

would react or the disciples' criticism, or even her brother and sister potentially being embarrassed, Mary had only one person's thoughts and welfare in mind. She wanted to be with and worship Jesus, knowing that he had told them that he was going to die. When she faces resistance and judgement, Jesus comes to her defence. Jesus says to her criticsers that she had anointed him to prepare for his burial.

Mary of Bethany seems to be the only person who took Jesus seriously when he spoke about his death. She believed in his cross. Her love to him arose because in some way she knew he was about to die for her.

- In what way do Jesus' actions show us how we are to relate to those around us?
Pause now and ask Jesus to help you become more like him as you reflect on the kind of person he is.
- What do Mary's actions teach you about worship?



LOVE LIKE JESUS WOULD LOVE:

Think about how Jesus responds to all these people around him, knowing what was going to happen to him soon: From dining with his friends and followers, to accepting the worship of a woman who had seen and believed the great worth of Jesus, to predicting who would betray him and yet still treating him as a welcome friend, to knowing his disciples would abandon him and yet still wanted to be around them to love and teach them.

- What actions might God be prompting you take as you consider his goodness and grace through today's scriptures?
- Spend some time bringing these considerations before God.
- Ask him to prepare you for this evening's service where we will hear more about Mary and what she teaches us about worship and sacrifice, and how as lavish as her gift was, there was an even more lavish gift at that dinner.

TUESDAY

MARK 14: 12-26



BE WITH JESUS:

- Reflect on the scripture for today. Ask Jesus now to show himself to you as you read through it.

¹² *On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"* ¹³ *So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'* ¹⁵ *He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."*

¹⁶ *The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.* ¹⁷ *When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.*

¹⁸ *While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me."* ¹⁹ *They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"* ²⁰ *"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."* ²² *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."*

²³ *Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. ²⁵ "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."* ²⁶ *When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*



BECOME LIKE JESUS:

In order to understand Jesus' suffering at the end of the gospels, Tim Keller in his book, "The Reason for God" says we must remember how he is introduced at the beginning of the gospels. Jesus was not created. He was not only around when everything was created, but he took part in creating everything. For all eternity he had lived in a relationship of absolute intimacy and love. At the end of his life, he was cut off from his Father; for the first time in eternity, he experienced the wrath of his Holy Father as if he were the most vile and evil being (instead of us). There may be no greater emotional pain than the loss of a relationship one desperately wants.

As Keller points out; if a mild acquaintance condemns or criticizes someone, and says they never want to see them again, it is painful. If a friend or dating partner does the same thing, it is significantly more painful. If a spouse does this, or a parent, the psychological damage is infinitely worse.

Keller asks: "Who can grasp what it would be like to lose not just spousal love or parental love that has lasted several years, but the infinite love of the Father that Jesus had from all eternity?"

On the night Jesus was arrested, he was facing betrayal on all these fronts - from acquaintances, from his disciples, from the Jewish religious rulers, from the justice system, from a disciple he knew would betray him, from his closest friends who were to desert him in his most needed hour. But when his Father turned on him, condemned him, and poured infinite wrath and judgment on him, Jesus' sufferings and stress would have been eternally unbearable. Later, as he would grapple with the reality of what he was about to go through, Jesus started to go into a state of shock, so much so, that he sweated blood.

Jesus had likely been thinking about what was going to happen to him for the whole evening. Definitely over supper where he was giving thanks, singing praise to his Father and fellowshiping with and teaching his disciples.

- As you reflect on this section of the story, what about Jesus draws you to him more? How would you like to become more like him? Pause now and reflect and then ask him to make you more like him.



LOVE LIKE JESUS WOULD LOVE:

In his final hours, Jesus was living the first and second commandment – to love God above all else and to love others as himself. In his obedience, in these final hours of Jesus' life before being crucified, we see the life of a man who gave all glory to God through everything: in the face of death and betrayal, in the face of betrayal from friends, in the face of injustice and religious hypocrisy, and in the face of condemnation from his Father. In the face of all of this, Jesus loved God and loved others. One of the most astounding things for us to witness is how Jesus glorified God on his last day. When most people would be self-focused, Jesus was still focused on loving God and loving others. He shows us a true worshipper's heart.

Jesus, on the night that he was to be betrayed, ate with his disciples. Even knowing what was coming; he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and shared it with his followers. Then he took the cup and after thanking his Father again, gave a short teaching on its symbolism and alluded to what was about to happen to him. Then he sang a hymn to his Father with his friends.

- Spend some time worshiping Jesus in prayer and ask him to empower you to love others as he calls you to, as he demonstrated to us in his life and death.
- Ask him to prepare you for this evening's service where we will hear more about what Jesus teaches us about worship and communion.

WEDNESDAY

MARK 14: 27-42



BE WITH JESUS:

²⁷ “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’” ²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” ²⁹ Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” ³⁰ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same. ³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” ³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

- Once again, we are presented with many people in the story alongside Jesus. Pause and reflect on the various people in this account. Who do you most identify with, why?



BECOME LIKE JESUS:

In our story it is now late Thursday night. Jesus and His disciples are walking towards the Mount of Olives, which is a hillside not far outside the city walls of Jerusalem. As they are going along Jesus is talking to them.

Once again, Jesus is warning and explaining to his disciples about what is to come. They were probably in jovial moods from dinner. But Jesus worried for them, knowing

what was coming. He was still trying to warn them, to push them towards God, who would guide them and protect them. God would be of help and comfort to them if they just remained faithful and trusted in him. Jesus knew they would fall away, they would run, but there would come light at the end and God would remain faithful even when they were unfaithful.

And so, Jesus, again and again, points them towards God for their needs. But the disciples seem oblivious and even arrogant to their own weakness. They deny both the spiritual danger they are in (running from God's side as the darkness rolls in), as well as their friend's torment.

Jesus shows us the true way to face circumstances that are beyond our control, beyond what we want. He went to God, over and over, to seek guidance, get strength, and prepare himself for obedience to what he knew God was calling him to do. He knew what God could do in his human weakness, and that was why he wanted his disciples to pray also. So that they too would find their strength in God and not fall into temptation.

Jesus was ready to meet what was coming, but the disciples were not. They had not believed Jesus' warnings, nor listened to his call to prayer and watchfulness. As a result, they were unprepared. The whole group go to meet the soldiers but only One of them is ready.

- What stood out to you about Jesus' character in this account? What do you feel you can learn from him? Pause and ask God to fill you with more of his Spirit now, making you more like Jesus, reflecting his confidence in and deep dependence on God.



DO WHAT JESUS DID:

Give some consideration to how Jesus treated each person in this story; how he spoke to each person, as well as how he approached God.

- What does Jesus demonstrate to us about how to love God and others in this account? Ask him to help you do the same today.

THURSDAY

MARK 14: 43-72



BE WITH JESUS:

- Today's scripture focuses on the trial of Jesus, and his close friend's denial. Ask Jesus now to show more of himself to you as you read through it.

⁴³ *Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.* ⁴⁴ *Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard."* ⁴⁵ *Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him.* ⁴⁶ *The men seized Jesus and arrested him.* ⁴⁷ *Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.* ⁴⁸ *"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?"* ⁴⁹ *Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."* ⁵⁰ *Then everyone deserted him and fled.*

⁵¹ *A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him,* ⁵² *he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.* ⁵³ *They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together.*

⁵⁴ *Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.* ⁵⁵ *The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.* ⁵⁶ *Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.*

⁵⁷ *Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him:* ⁵⁸ *"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'"* ⁵⁹ *Yet even then their testimony did not agree.* ⁶⁰ *Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"* ⁶¹ *But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"*

⁶² *"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* ⁶³ *The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked.* ⁶⁴ *"You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.* ⁶⁵ *Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.*

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. ⁶⁸ But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. ⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." ⁷⁰ Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.



BECOME LIKE JESUS:

Jesus suffers a betrayal as one of his disciples leads his enemies right up to him. He also suffers a betrayal by the religious leaders. They were the ones who were leading God's people at the time, but the very people who should have been pointing people towards the Messiah (who they had been preaching about), were the one's seeking his elimination because of their pride and fear of losing power. Then his friends desert him.

It is always especially painful when the very people who should be receiving God's call and grace, are the very ones who hate it most. We also know what it is like when our faith/church family cause us pain. Jesus knows what it feels like. He went through it himself.

Jesus then faced physical harm at their hands. He is slandered, misrepresented, endured burning-hot hatred, he is ridiculed and beaten. Yet, Jesus still was without sin. He demonstrated through the worst day imaginable, how to face injustice in a manner worthy of God and worthy of his calling.

- Are there any areas of your life that you can see freshly how Jesus would be able to sympathise - based on today's scripture? Why not spend some time bringing these to him and asking him to help you?



LOVE LIKE JESUS WOULD LOVE:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet he did not sin. (Heb 4:15).

- If Scripture tells us that God's suffering is proof that he sympathises with our pain, how might our pain help us sympathise with and love others? Ask God to help you to use your own journey and testimony to love and help others.

FRIDAY

MARK 15:1-39



BE WITH JESUS:

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. ² “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” Jesus replied. ³ The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.”

⁵ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. ⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. ¹² “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. ¹³ “Crucify him!” they shouted. ¹⁴ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” ¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ^[28] ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down

now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).^[b]

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. ³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”



BECOME LIKE JESUS:

The people were looking for a Saviour. They even knew their bibles well. But when the Son of God was in front of them, they were not capable of realizing who he was. They did not know God.

Their hearts were full of jealousy and spite. Their spiritual knowledge was combined with spiritual blindness. So, the guilty Barabbas was released, and the innocent Jesus was condemned. This illustrates the position of every man and woman - we are the guilty ones (like Barabbas), and Jesus is innocent. But Jesus died and so we can be released.

- How might we sometimes miss God when he is right in front of us? Ask him now to open your eyes and heart to be able to see and hear him as he works in your life.



LOVE LIKE JESUS WOULD LOVE:

- What does Jesus demonstrate to us about how to love God and others in this account? Ask him to help you do the same today.

SATURDAY

MARK 15:40-47



BE WITH JESUS:

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

⁴² *It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.*



BECOME LIKE JESUS:

The Gospels focus on the events leading up to Jesus' death on Thursday and Friday of Passover week, as well as Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. Yet, little is told about the Saturday in between. We know it was the Sabbath and in Luke 23:56, there is a simple mention made that they (the disciples and followers of Jesus) rested on that Saturday, according to the commandment.

It is likely that Jesus' followers were doing on Saturday what they were doing on Sunday when Jesus appeared in their midst: meeting together behind closed doors for fear of the Jewish leaders and sharing their collective grief at the loss of their friend, teacher and the ministry that had begun.

The one they hoped was the Messiah had been killed as a criminal. They hadn't understood Jesus' teachings about his impending suffering and death before the crucifixion took place, and it wouldn't be until Jesus appeared to them the following day as the risen Saviour that they even would begin to fully understand what had actually happened.

- How might we sometimes be in danger of missing out on hope because we forget the words of Jesus and focus instead on our circumstances? Take some time now to ask God to help fill you with hope and strength in your areas of doubt, or in your difficult circumstances.



LOVE LIKE JESUS WOULD LOVE:

- Spend some time praying for yourself and other people you know who are facing difficult times. Pray for those who are in a waiting space – where things seem dark, difficult, and hard to understand. Pray that the peace and hope of God that defies understanding would fill your minds and souls as you focus on the one who would bring glorious, eternal hope on Easter Sunday.