

THE LAST WEEK



PHPC LENT 2020

PHPC TABLE GROUPS

The Concept:

In the life of faith, we are invited to move from Christ's Table in worship to a common table outside the walls of the Church—our everyday tables are one place where we live out the grace we experience at Christ's table. Meals around tables are also a reminder of Jesus' intention and willingness to eat with anyone. Tables are a radical extension of God's grace in the world.

PHPC Table Groups are a way that we gather in community to make spiritual sense out of our lives and the world. They are a chance to form meaningful connections through food, fellowship, and Bible study.

HOW IT WORKS

Weekly Rhythm

Table Groups meet weekly for an hour and a half. During the first half of the meeting, groups participate in Bible study together with a guided curriculum. For the second half, groups engage one another in two guiding questions rooted in ancient Christian spiritual practice: "For what moment this week am I most grateful? For what moment this week am I least grateful?"

Each session closes with prayer, sharing joys and concerns.

Bible Study and Discussion (45min)

Each week's scripture text is centered around three questions: What? So, what? And now, what? These questions are intended to offer insight into the scripture text, to cause you to consider why that insight is significant, and to help you think about how people of faith are called to respond.

PHPC Table Groups do not have to have a single leader. Instead, groups follow a model of shared leadership and responsibility. Everyone in the group has the opportunity to facilitate the discussion (if you desire). At your first gathering, your group will decide who will facilitate each week. Other group responsibilities include snack coordinator, timekeeper, and someone to keep track of prayer requests. Opening prayer, content, and Bible study discussion questions are provided in the curriculum.

For what moment this week am I most grateful?

For what moment this week am I least grateful? (45min)

For centuries, prayerful people have found discernment and direction for their day and for their life by identifying these moments. The very act of asking these two simple questions on a daily and weekly basis allows you to pay more attention to the presence of God in your everyday life. Asking those questions at any particular group meeting might not seem significant. But asking the questions in the presence of others on an ongoing, weekly basis is a practice that the Holy Spirit can use to change your life drastically. This time is not for sharing joys and concerns. (That happens later!) This time is not intended to solve problems. It is a time to practice listening to others. It is a time to practice discerning God's leading in your life.

Continue with Service and Fellowship

At the conclusion of the eight weeks together, we strongly encourage groups to continue their spiritual growth and fellowship with one another by gathering for a time of fellowship or a service opportunity. Suggestions for service can be found in the back of your booklet.

Determine What's Next

Decide as a group if you would like to stay together and engage in another study of your choice and/or if you would like to stay together for future Table Group studies.

Choose an End Date

Groups grow, thrive, and eventually lose their impact and become stale. While the timing may differ, it is natural for most groups to travel through these different stages. At this time, decide as a group how long you want to continue meeting: six months, eight months, a year? When you arrive at an end date, it is a celebration coupled with a bit of sadness. The group ceases to meet, but friendships continue.

Why do we end a good thing, you ask? Some will need a break, some will want to take on new leadership roles and start new groups, and others will want to join new groups to meet more people. We call this divide and multiply. To divide and multiply is healthy for the overall ministry and for the individuals.

THE BOOK OF MARK

Written around the year 70, the Gospel of Mark is the earliest narrative account we have of Jesus of Nazareth. While seven of Paul's thirteen letters are the earliest Christian documents, and a major part of Jesus's teaching was likely written down in the 50s or early 60s, none of those sources formed a narrative account.

Mark is also the shortest gospel, with only 16 chapters compared to Matthew's twenty-eight, Luke's 24, and John's 21. But its importance is greater than its relative brevity might suggest. Mark forms the foundation for the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and sets out a threefold narrative pattern that Matthew and Luke also follow:

Part 1: Galilee, where most of Jesus' public ministry happens (Chapters 1-8)

Part 2: Journey to Jerusalem for the Passover (Chapters 8-10)

Part 3: Jerusalem and Jesus' final week, including confrontation with the authorities, execution, and discovery of the empty tomb (Chapters 11-16)

Mark also offers a unique look at Jesus' ministry. Much of what is most familiar about the story of Jesus is not in the Gospel of Mark. For example, there is no birth narrative or stories from Jesus' early years. There is also no story of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. Instead, Mark tells an urgent account of, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" in whom the Kingdom of God has come near, and those who will learn to follow in his "Way."

BOOK OF MARK READING PLAN

One of the best ways to learn more about the Bible is to spend time reading it each day. Included below is a daily reading plan for the Book of Mark as a supplement to your weekly study.

February 27: Mark 1:1-13

February 28: Mark 1:14-28

February 29: Mark 1:29-45

March 1: Mark 2:1-12

March 2: Mark 2:13-22

March 3: Mark 2:23-28

March 4: Mark 3:1-35

March 5: Mark 4:1-20

March 6: Mark 4:21-34

March 7: Mark 4:35-41

March 8: Mark 5:1-20

March 9: Mark 5:21-43

March 10: Mark 6:1-6

March 11: Mark 6:7-13

March 12: Mark 6:14-29

March 13: Mark 6:3-44

March 14: Mark 6:45-56

March 15: Mark 7:1-13

March 16: Mark 7:14-23

March 17: Mark 7:24-37

March 18: Mark 8:1-26

March 19: Mark 8:27-38

March 20: Mark 9:1-13

March 21: Mark 9:14-29

March 22: Mark 9:30-41

March 23: Mark 9:42-50

March 24: Mark 10:1-12

March 25: Mark 10:13-31

March 26: Mark 10:32-45

March 27: Mark 10:46-52

March 28: Mark 11:1-14

March 29: Mark 11:15-25

March 30: Mark 11:27-33

March 31: Mark 12:1-12

April 1: Mark 12:13-40

April 2: Mark 12:41-44

April 3: Mark 13:1-23

April 4: Mark 13:24-37

April 5: Mark 14:1-25

April 6: Mark 14:26-52

April 7: Mark 14:53-65

April 8: Mark 14:66-72

April 9: Mark 15:1-20

April 10: Mark 15:21-41

April 11: Mark 15:42-47

April 12: Mark 16:1-8

THE LAST WEEK

This study takes an in-depth look at some of the stories from Jesus' last week as narrated by the Gospel of Mark. While holy week is an important season for Christians, it is also particularly emphasized by the writer of Mark's Gospel. In comparison to Matthew, Luke, and John, Mark alone goes out of his way to narrate the last week of Jesus' ministry on a day-by-day and, eventually, hour-by-hour basis.

Chapters 11-16 in the Gospel of Mark—about forty percent of Mark's text—narrate Jesus' final week in Jerusalem. Tuesday is the longest day in Mark's account of Jesus' final week. The largest portions of the text describe what happened on Tuesday (total of 115 verses), Thursday (60 verses), and Friday (47 verses).

Taking a deeper look at Jesus' last week is in part about understanding this specific time in his ministry against the backdrop of Roman imperial control in collaboration with religious authorities of the day.

JERUSALEM

From the beginning, Mark's story of Jesus and his message about the kingdom of God is aimed at Jerusalem. The whole story is moving toward Jerusalem. In fact, six of Mark's sixteen chapters take place in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was not just any city. It had religious meaning as a place of sacred geography for Jews. It also had meaning as an occupied territory by the Romans, where it became the center of a domination system, a social system marked by three distinct features. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan explain in *The Last Week*:

“Political Oppression

In such societies the many were ruled by the few, the powerful and wealthy elites: the monarchy, nobility, aristocracy, and their associates. Ordinary people had no voice in the shaping of society.

Economic Exploitation

A high percentage of society's wealth went to the coffers of the wealthy and the powerful. How did they manage this? By the way they set the system up, through the structures and laws about land ownership, taxation, indenture of labor through debt, and so forth.

Religious Legitimation

In ancient societies, these systems were made legitimate or justified with religious language. The people were told the king ruled by divine right, the king was the Son of God.” (page 7)

Understanding this worldview and context is essential to understanding and grappling with Jesus' teaching in Mark. The first chapter of Borg and Crossan's book is recommended as a supplemental resource.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Common English Study Bible

The Last Week by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan

Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written by Marcus Borg

The Cross in Context by Suzanne Henderson and Mitri Raheb

TIPS FOR STUDY

There are essentially two movements in Bible study: **What did it mean back then?** (discerning context, history, scholarship) and **What does it mean today?** Start by reading the overall introduction in your study Bible, learning some of the history and context for the Gospel of Mark.

Forget what you already know or think you remember.

Read what's actually in the text, approaching it with humility and with as few preconceptions as possible.

Mark up the text.

What stands out to you? Look for connections, contradictions, conundrums. What questions does it raise? Circle, underline, highlight, and annotate. Write it down in your own words.

Ask, "Why was it important for people to write this down?"

Or, "What was going on in their world that this was important to them?" These are some of the best questions to ask when reading the Bible. People wrote, compiled, and edited these stories because they spoke to some of the deepest questions about life.

Wonder what connections in the text draws you toward today.

Where does the text inspire you or make you think more? Where do you see connections to the here and now?

Find opportunities for reflection with others—your friends, family or small group. Scripture is meant to be read, studied, and wrestled with in community. Together, we dance with a text, probe, and question.

WEEK ONE

Mark 11:12-19

Written by Rev. Mark Brainerd

WHAT?

Jesus' humanity is on full display as this passage opens. He is hungry. Then, he becomes angry. After the big parade and welcome Jesus had received the day before in nearby Jerusalem, he and his disciples set out from Bethany heading back into Jerusalem. Along the way, he sees a fig tree off in the distance, and he has his heart set on some plump, juicy figs for breakfast. But when they get closer to the tree, they see leaves and more leaves, but no fruit. He is so put out by this that, within earshot of his friends, he curses the tree, saying, "No one is going to eat fruit from you again—ever!" This was not the best start to his week.

They go on to Jerusalem and arrive at the Temple, where he fumes at what he sees. It's like a flea market, and he's having none of it. He forces them out, but before they go, he tells them, "My house was designated a house of prayer for the nations; You've turned it into a hangout for thieves." This makes the people think, so much so that they are mesmerized by what Jesus has to say, which puts the high priests and scholars into a tailspin. They begin pondering how they can get rid of him.

SO WHAT?

In reality, Jesus is not cursing the fig tree simply because he is hungry and there is no fruit. His action is symbolic. In the Bible, the fig tree sometimes represents Israel. So Jesus is saying that Israel has leaves and looks as if she is bearing fruit, but in reality there is no fruit.

Jesus then enters Jerusalem and goes into the Temple, driving out everyone who is selling and buying goods in the Temple. This is an example of how the people looked as though they were bearing fruit but were not. People came from all over to worship in the Temple. It was not reasonable to bring an animal from home to worship; so many would buy the animal when they arrived in Jerusalem. Merchants in the Temple were making it easy for people to worship by selling the animals in the Temple complex itself. While that seemed like a good idea, it was not God's idea.

NOW WHAT?

This passage in Mark gives us the opportunity to ponder for ourselves how our faith is manifesting itself or not. We might consider how our practices are helping or getting in the way of a meaningful relationship with God and with our neighbor.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some examples of how we sometimes bear lots of leaves but no fruit? What is the difference between leaves and fruit? What is required for us to be able to bear fruit?
2. Do our actions hinder others from worshipping God? Think about our pew in worship, our Sunday school class, our church study or fellowship group, etc. Do our conversations or fellowship times together welcome or hinder guests or others in your group from worshipping God because of what you do or do not do?
3. What might we do to nurture the spiritual fruit in our lives? What are ways we can foster spiritual growth, not only in our lives but also in the hearts and lives of those with whom we share life?

NOTES

WEEK TWO

Mark 11:27-33

Written by Rev. John Roper

WHAT?

During the summer growing up, a group of us would gather occasionally for a pick-up baseball game. This particular Saturday, I suggested what the sides should be for a fair game. Mickey Lassiter, who was older, said, "Who died and made you king?"

In Mark 11:27-33, once again we see that Jesus and his disciples are marching into Jerusalem, a town that has cheered Jesus and received his judgment. Jesus is on the way to the cross and causing quite a stir. He has calmed stormy waters. He has healed and taught with authority and cleaned out the temple. We are not surprised that the local leaders are appalled at the audacity of his actions and his bold claims.

The conspiracy that took root in Mark 3:6 has come to full bloom. This small-time Rabbi has become more than an annoyance for the big-time power brokers. So, this "cabal of conspirators" confronts Jesus with a loaded question: "By what authority are you doing these things?" Of course, they know the answer to the question because they know that political authority resides in Rome. Their dishonest question is intended only to put Jesus to the test.

SO WHAT?

Jesus answers their question with a question. He reminds them of the ministry of John the Baptist, who died by the hand of Herod. "Well," asks Jesus, "was John a prophet of God or not, and better yet who gave Herod authority to murder him?" The subtext of the question is, "With what authority will these conspirators shortly deem Jesus a candidate for the cross?"

Was John's ministry the plan of God or merely the delusion of a crazy man? Was it justified or a clear symbol of Rome's broken reign? The cabal suddenly have their backs against the wall. The people loved and respected John. Trapped, they answer, "We do not know."

As we march with Jesus during this season of Lent, we also have to answer a related question: Do I trust Jesus to have total authority in my life?

NOW WHAT?

You see, Mickey, no one died and made me king. But Jesus died on the cross and God crowned him king and gave him complete authority over our lives. The first sentence of Mark's Gospel reads, "Christ, the Son of God!" To realize that is to find complete joy. If we fail to realize that—well, it's game over.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Will I turn to Jesus as I determine how I live my life before God?
2. Will I look to him as I choose whom to love?
3. Will I look to him as I decide how I spend my money?

NOTES

WEEK THREE

Mark 12:41-44

Written by Rev. Dr. Sarah Johnson

WHAT?

It is late on Tuesday and Jesus and his disciples are gathered in the Temple —not the Temple's inner sanctuary, which was quite small, but the large outer open-air courtyard that was typically a site of teaching and preaching, especially during the Passover. Representatives of the authorities in Jerusalem have been challenging Jesus with a series of questions in the presence of the gathered pilgrims. The authorities plan to arrest Jesus, but first they want to discredit him before the people.

Their questions have been pointed, challenging Jesus about the source of his authority, taxes to Caesar, the resurrection, and the Greatest Commandment. Jesus has responded in equally challenging ways, often turning the questions back on them. It is now Jesus' turn to ask some challenging questions and offer some teaching in response.

Jesus begins by indicting the self-important practices of scribes who wear long robes, expect recognition in public, and offer long prayers for the sake of appearances. He also criticizes them for "devouring widows houses." Scribes were doctors of the law, clergy whose long years of study made them official interpreters of God's word. This also made them part of the literate class, often working for the wealthy, engaging in tasks such as drawing up loan agreements and then foreclosing on a widow's property when the loan could not be repaid.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, widows (along with aliens and orphans) are special objects of God's compassion, for without a man to provide for them they had no income, no access to land or property, and no legal recourse to claim those things. They were some of society's most vulnerable people. The Torah was clear that how the vulnerable were treated was a measure of the justice or the injustice of the society.

And then, almost as if to demonstrate his point, Jesus exposes the presence of a poor widow in the temple. It is significant that she is named as a poor widow. In some circumstances under Roman law, a woman might be lucky enough to inherit her husband's money if he was a man of means. But that was not this woman's circumstance. She was not a rich widow or even a poor married woman. She was a poor widow with no income, no rights, or any recourse to do anything about it. And yet, as Jesus reveals her presence, we observe that she has come to worship—perhaps to hope—and to support the mission and ministry of the Temple. Uncurling her fingers, she drops two copper coins, every last bit she had to live on, into the Temple treasury.

SO WHAT?

What do you think Jesus wants us to see in this poor widow? It is clear that she is an invisible figure to everyone around her. Why go to so much trouble to point her out?

Many who read this story see the poor widow as an example of selflessness and unfettered generosity. Even though she has been ignored, here is a poor widow who gave all she had to the church, holding nothing back. There have been many sermons on giving that challenge us to be generous as this widow was generous.

But I think that there is something missing from that interpretation. I cannot help but wonder if we really want to celebrate the story of a vulnerable woman whom society has forgotten giving the last of what she has to the very people, places, and systems that failed her? There is indeed something poignant, something pure about her gift. And yet, her circumstances seem more like tragedy than moral example. And what is more, Jesus never commends her actions saying, "Go and do likewise."

I think that instead of celebrating her, Jesus wants us to see her, *really* see *her*, and to lament. Jesus wants our hearts to break open over a faith, a city, a society that has forgotten to see and to care for the most vulnerable among us.

NOW WHAT?

During Lent and holy week, we traditionally consider Jesus' passion. That is, his suffering (from the Latin *passio*). But I think this parable invites us to consider a second meaning of passion: that which Jesus was unwaveringly committed to.

Jesus was first and foremost passionate for the kingdom of God. Marcus Borg writes, "His unwavering commitment to incarnate the justice of God that demands for all a fair share of a world belonging to and ruled by the covenantal God of Israel...It was this first passion for God's distributive justice that led inevitably to the second passion of Pilate's punitive justice."

How do you see the presence of the poor widow inviting you to participate in this two-fold passion of Christ?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The story of the poor widow follows a story about the teachers of the law. Why do you think that is? What do the two stories have in common? How are the scribes and the widow described differently?
2. The kingdom of God is a primary theme throughout the Gospel of Mark. What do you learn about the values of the kingdom of God from this parable?
3. Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says, "The health of the divine economy is measured by a poor widow's budget. If she is not doing well, the rest of us are not doing well." What do you think about this?
4. Who are the vulnerable in our society today? What people and circumstances do you think Jesus calls us to see in our current context?

NOTES

WEEK FOUR

Mark 12:1-27

Written by Rev. Caroline Braskamp

WHAT?

As Holy Week progresses, Jesus' conflict with the religious and political authorities increases, like a pot about to boil over. In our passage, Mark 12:1-27, Jesus engages in three rounds of verbal sparring with various groups of religious and political leaders about the nature of his authority.

In verses 1-12, Jesus tells the Parable of the Vineyard to a group of chief priests, elders, and scribes who have just asked him where his authority comes from. This parable would have been familiar to Jewish ears: God is the owner of the vineyard, and the vineyard represents God's people, Israel. The tenants working the vineyard are the religious leaders, the slaves who are sent to check on the vineyard are the prophets, and the son of the owner is Jesus. Jesus condemns the religious leaders and the Temple system through this parable, foretelling his own death and promising them that the "stone that the builders rejected will become the cornerstone" (a quote from Psalm 118).

In verses 13-17, two new groups of people come to test Jesus: the Pharisees, a Jewish group focused on faithful living; and the Herodians, representatives of the Roman authorities. These two groups ask Jesus whether paying taxes is lawful. Jesus responds by asking the Pharisees to show him a denarius, a silver Roman coin worth about a day's wages (and the amount of an individual's census or poll tax).

On the front of the coin is a side profile of the Emperor Tiberius with the words, "Caesar Augustus Tiberius, Son of the Divine Augustus." The coin itself proclaims that the Emperor is the son of God, and Jesus catches the Pharisees with one in their pockets. Jesus cunningly skirts the question by saying, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

And in verses 18-27, a final round of people comes to test Jesus: the Sadducees, a Jewish group connected with the priests; and the Sanhedrin, who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead. They present a test case to Jesus: a woman has married a man who dies, and then she marries his brother according to the law of Moses - six times. Their question is, "So whose wife will she be in the resurrection?"

The Sadducees attempt to present Jesus with a *reductio ad absurdum* argument: they begin with the opposite position to the one they believe, and then take it to its logical and absurd conclusion, thereby showing the initial position to be false. In response, Jesus uses the Scriptures to show that God is the God of the living—and therefore that the Sadducees are wrong in their understanding of the Scriptures and God's power.

SO WHAT?

Jesus challenges the authority of each religious and political group he meets. In the first section, the Parable of the Vineyard, Jesus challenges the chief priests, scribes, and elders—those involved with the Temple and its sacrificial system. Jesus says to them, “I have authority over the Temple and all who serve there because I am the cornerstone.” Jesus condemns their violence towards the prophets, himself, and anyone offering a corrective voice to the religious system.

In the second section, the question about taxes, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and the Herodians. Jesus says to the Herodians, “I have authority over all earthly governments, because I, not Tiberius, am the Son of God.” Jesus says to the Pharisees, “I am the one you should live faithfully for; all things come from me and will return to me.” Jesus condemns the Pharisees and the Herodians for confusing earthly authority with eternal authority.

In the third section, the question about the resurrection, Jesus challenges the Sadducees. He says to them, “I have authority over God’s law and all of the Scriptures—and I use God’s word to give life to all people.” Jesus condemns their use of the law to maintain their own power through patrilineal property rights.

NOW WHAT?

If you are reading or hearing this, you are probably a religious insider yourself. In this passage, Jesus warns us against three things:

1. Giving too much power and authority to church leadership
2. Focusing too much on “right” behavior
3. Using Scriptures to promote our own agendas

We can use church structures, behavioral norms, and the Scriptures themselves as weapons against others. They were certainly all used that way against Jesus.

Instead, Jesus invites us to loosen our grip on the religious tools of church leadership, holy living, and the Scriptures—for the power of each of these comes from God and not from us. If we loosen our grip, then we can stop wielding them with our earthly power over others and invite God to wield them with divine power to transform us.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where do you see God's power at work in our congregation?
2. What is one sphere in your life where God wants you to live more faithfully—family, work, neighborhood, church, government?
3. What about Jesus' good news is challenging to you? What do you have to let go of to believe it and live by it?

NOTES

WEEK FIVE

Mark 14:43-50

Written by Rev. Dr. Bob Poteet

WHAT?

In these few verses from Mark 14, we read of the fulfillment of scripture, which Mark has previously incorporated into his gospel: the “Son of Man must suffer...be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed” (Mark 8:31). In the two verses preceding our text we read, “The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.... See, my betrayer is at hand” (Mk 14:41-42).

Mark’s Gospel, written around 70 CE, is believed to be the earliest of the four gospel accounts, and the later three gospel narratives add detail to Mark’s skeletal story. Our text comes from the part of the gospel account that portrays the passion and death of Jesus in chapters 14-15. Judas, one of the 12 disciples, has agreed to betray Jesus. (14:10)

Jesus had supped with his disciples in the Upper Room declaring, “one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me...” (14:18) and following supper, had gone out to Gethsemane and prayed, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will but what you will” (14:36). Jesus found his disciples asleep not once but three times while in the garden to pray.

And as Jesus was speaking to them, Judas appears with the violent, armed posse, crying out “Rabbi,” which literally means “my great one,” a term which according to Professor Douglas Hare, “could be used of any religious teacher.”

Judas kisses Jesus, his prearranged signal to identify him, so Jesus is arrested. He is taken away to face trial and crucifixion. An unnamed onlooker gets caught up in the moment, in the violent arrest, and cuts off the ear of the slave of the high priest, presumably Caiaphas.

And the disciples “deserted him and fled” (14:50). We know the rest of the story—Jesus is tried before the Sanhedrin, Peter denies Jesus three times, Jesus is taken before Pilate, and is crucified, buried and raised on the third day.

SO WHAT?

On this Good Friday, how does this text speak to us? Our focus first must be on Judas, one of the disciples. He “sold out” for monetary gain. He betrayed his Lord. He denied his allegiance to his “Lord and master.” And, according to the narrative, his treachery was planned, not impulsive.

He strategized and agreed to betray his allegiance for money. And we need to note the reactionary response of the onlooker in the crowd who got so caught up in the demonstration of violence and the arrest of Jesus by the gang that he cut off the ear of the high priest’s slave. We do not know who this person was. In John’s Gospel the deed is attributed to Peter. (John 18:10)

Raymond Brown in *The Death of the Messiah*, concludes that “the swordsman must have belonged to a group other than the disciples or the arresting party.”

In Mark’s account of the incident, we note that the onlooker is “caught up” in the unrest and violence. Pheme Perkins in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* comments, “The episode is the kind of random violence that breaks out among an armed, angry crowd.” We do not know but we can appreciate how a person might react in the face of violence.

NOW WHAT?

On this Good Friday, toward the end of Holy Week, we too identify with Judas. He, like us, had professed his faith and allegiance to Jesus as Lord and master; yet he betrayed Jesus. When push came to shove, he chose the attraction of financial gain. He sold out. He responded and reacted to the pressure.

You and I may not betray our Lord so blatantly, but we do deny our Lord. In our worship, we include in our liturgy our corporate prayers of confession: we deny, look the other way, compromise, and rationalize, yet we are comforted in the reassurance of God's amazing, undeserved grace. We declare, "We are saved by grace through faith. Thanks be to God!" We often say or think, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Recall the words that we sing in our worship each Good Friday: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble..." because we realize we are guilty of betrayal, denial, and avoidance. We were there. We are there.

And consider these words from the hymn: "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded:

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain:
Mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve thy place;
Look on me with thy favor, and grant to me thy grace.
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to thee.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think most motivated Judas to betray Jesus?
2. What do you think was running through the mind of Jesus as he saw Judas approaching?
3. Is there a distinction in your mind between betrayal and denial?
4. Can you identify or recall instances where you got “caught up” in the passion of the moment and responded over aggressively or violently?

NOTES

WEEK SIX

Mark 11:1-11

Written by Rev. Sarah Are

WHAT?

This text is the sacred text we read every year on Palm Sunday. It is the beginning of the end, the beginning of Jesus' final week. For many, I imagine this text to be familiar; however, when we take time to slow down with the text, there are several details that cannot help but jump off the page.

For example, I am struck by Jesus' pattern to send his disciples out in pairs (v. 1). Jesus frequently asks challenging things of his disciples, but he never asks them to do so alone. This text is no exception.

I am struck by the note that the colt will have "never been ridden" (v. 2). This is a small detail, but an important one, for animals used for sacred acts were supposed to be clean, reiterating the holiness of this powerful moment.

Another detail that cannot be overlooked is how risky and radical both Jesus' actions and the crowd's actions are. Processions like this one had historically been reserved for government officials and war heroes. Jesus was neither of those things, and yet the people treat him as such! To make matters even more significant, 150 years prior to that moment, a Jewish war hero by the name of Simon Maccabeus processed into Jerusalem after a battle that helped secure Israel's peace.

The people at that time responded with a conqueror's parade and threw palm branches and coats in the street with shouts of "Hosanna!" Simon's parade and Jesus' parade look almost identical, which makes it easy to wonder if the people once again were hoping for a military victory against Rome, which would have certainly been enough to make Rome nervous.

SO WHAT?

This text is significant because, in many ways, the radical nature of that moment lays the groundwork for the crucifixion. Before we consider the complex political layers to this story, the parade might simply appear to be an indicator of the people's love and appreciation for Jesus.

However, when we take into consideration how politically risky this was with the echos of previous military parades, we are able to see that Palm Sunday was Jesus making an intentional statement that likely served as the tipping point for his arrest and murder. During this parade Jesus accepts the title of the Messiah and peacefully challenges the empire of the day.

NOW WHAT?

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, he peacefully protests the oppression of the empire. He does not show brute force or act in violence, as the people expected in a Messiah. Instead he is peaceful, convicted, gentle and intentional. I think this is a challenging reminder that we are called to align our lives with the call of the gospel instead of the empire, and that from time to time, such an alignment may require bravery and peaceful action.

I also think this text can remind us that we are called to walk through challenging seasons together. Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs to retrieve the donkey, and then the disciples stick with him throughout the parade and into the night. So may this remind us that we cannot get through hard days alone. We need one another, especially in our discernment about how to be people of faith.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Knowing that parades were often reserved for royalty, political leaders and military rulers, and were typically strong displays of military force and wealth, how does Jesus' humble processional compare, and what does that teach us about what Jesus valued in this world?

2. Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. Do you think they knew that this parade would end in death? If so, what is your perception of them, knowing that they stayed through the end? If not, what do you think they perceived their grand entrance to be about?

3. The text concludes with the sentence "Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve." Some believe Jesus was taking a look at the city to say goodbye. Some believe Jesus was taking a look around him to see if he was safe. What do you make of this sentence, and the fact that Jesus then left Jerusalem for the night?

NOTES

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE

Ronald McDonald House

4707 Bengal St
Dallas, TX 75235
214-631-7354

North Texas Food Bank

4500 S. Cockrell Hill Rd
Dallas, TX 75236
214-330-1396

SoupMobile

3017 Commerce St
Dallas, TX 75235
214-655-6396

Vickery Meadow Learning Center

6329 Ridgcrest Rd
Dallas, TX 75231
214-265-5057

Vickery Meadow Food Pantry

8482 Walnut Hill Ln
Dallas, TX 75231
972-437-9950

The Salvation Army

5302 Harry Hines Blvd
Dallas, TX 75235
214-424-7000

Minnie's Food Pantry

3033 W Parker Rd
Plano, TX 75075
972-596-0253

Habitat for Humanity

2800 N Hampton Rd
Dallas, TX 75212
214-678-2300

Genesis Women's Shelter

Dallas, TX
214-946-4357

CitySquare

511 N Akard St
Dallas, TX 75201
214-823-8710

Brother Bill's Helping Hands

3906 N Westmoreland Rd
Dallas, TX 75212
214-638-2196

Heart House

8515 Park Ln #304
Dallas, TX 75231
214-750-7637

We Over Me Farm

3837 Simpson Stuart Rd
Dallas, TX 75241
214-379-5457

North Dallas Shared Ministries

2875 Merrell Rd
Dallas, TX 75229
214-358-8700

Austin Street Center

2929 Hickory St
Dallas, TX 75226
214-428-4242

Hope Supply Co.

10480 Shady Trail Suite 104
Dallas, TX 75220
214-630-5765

Bonton Farms

6915 Bexar St
Dallas, TX 75215
972-982-2245

The Stewpot

1835 Young St
Dallas, TX 75201
214-746-2785

Mi Escuelita

4231 Maple Ave
Dallas, TX 75219
214-521-4530

The Birthday Party Project

2143 Farrington St
Dallas, TX 75207
972-290-0908

COMMUNITY

We want the time with your small group to be organic and flow with your own group's rhythm and discussion. If your group is having a great discussion and does not get a chance to answer/respond to all of the discussion questions...that is OKAY! Please do not feel limited by the curriculum; remember that it is merely a tool to help guide your group's time together.

Start and finish on time - honor people's schedules

Be open and vulnerable yourself

Smile - creating a warm and welcoming environment

Ask open ended questions

LISTEN

Emphasize confidentiality

Pray for your group before they meet and throughout the week

Allow time for community building and relationship forming

Be prepared but not over prepared

Remember that your role is not to LEAD the conversation but to facilitate the group's discussion

PRAYERS

Dear Lord, we raise up all of the prayers spoken aloud today and we lift up the prayers that each of us holds in the silence of our hearts. We thank you for your endless blessings, and we pray that a spirit of gratitude blooms within each of us. Be with us as we leave here today, and may we be a beacon of light and hope as we go out into the world. Amen.

Father, thank you for all the marvelous things you have done today. Thank you for your love that you have revealed to us, and for the love that we share together as your body. We pray for all the words you have sown into our hearts today. May they take root and produce wonderful things, things of beauty and great blessings to many. As we leave this place now, thank you for walking along side us. May we be alert to your promptings and live in your endless love and grace. In your Son's precious name we pray. Amen.

Dear God, we thank you for the opportunity to gather together today. May everything we do begin with your inspiration and continue with your help. We ask that you guide us throughout the week, that all of our thoughts and actions would reflect your holy will, and that you would grant us the grace to love you and our neighbors more perfectly. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dear God, we rejoice in your greatness and power, your gentleness and love, and your mercy and grace. May we each strive to love and serve you in every aspect of our lives. Hear us as we pray together, saying: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Thank you, Lord, for your presence with us today. As we depart from this space now, we ask you to bless us throughout the remainder of the day and guide us safely home. Do not let the learning and conversations of this gathering die, but, instead, may they continue to ruminate within us and bear fruit in our daily lives so that we may better serve you and your people. We ask this in the name of Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.