

# Engaging God

in the

# Wilderness



*Lent Devotional*

2023

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*Listen along to the  
Trinity Music Playlist  
as we engage God  
throughout Lent.*

# Engaging God in the Wilderness

This year, our theme for Lent is Engaging God in the Wilderness. Each day in the guide, we will invite you to spend time in a gospel passage from the Daily Office and reflect on it. This year, the devotional includes the voices of a variety of Trinity's own youth and adults.

We hope that you enjoy learning from your sisters and brothers who are on a journey with Jesus just like you!

After each reflection, you will see an invitation to *remember, listen, look, go, or imagine*. We want to encourage you to follow the prompts when you are able. Likewise, *each Saturday*, we invite you to find a quiet place and sit still as a way to anticipate Holy Saturday when the tomb was found empty. We also invite you to *delight on Sundays*. If you choose to fast something, you can break your fast as a mini-celebration leading up to Easter. This is a way to anticipate Jesus' resurrection.

During Lent, we encourage you to pray about giving up something. That could be your cell phone, social media, coffee, alcohol, chocolate, or something else. Our hope is that by giving up something, you might feel the need for God more strongly and experience more deeply God's love and life in the Spirit. In the guide, you will also notice instructions to delight on Sundays. If you choose to fast something, you can break your fast as a mini-celebration leading up to Easter. This is a way to anticipate Jesus' resurrection.

We hope that by participating in these practices, you will be able to contemplate your own brokenness and sin while also having the opportunity to embody, on a weekly basis, the hope that we have as Easter people!

## What is Lent?

Lent is a 40-day season of preparation for the celebration of Easter. These 40 days are symbolic of the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tested.

To understand a little bit more about why we engage in the Lenten season, we must go back in time.

After 400 years of being enslaved in Egypt, God's people were led out of slavery by Moses. They were free, and yet they entered into the wilderness for 40 years before they reached the Promised Land. For them, the wilderness was a place where they felt tested and insecure. There, they struggled to have sustenance in the way they desired, and they often forgot all that God had done for them. Needless to say, they often faltered. They grumbled, they doubted God, and they turned to worship man-made objects. Can you relate to them? I know I can.

Centuries later, after Jesus was born, he was baptized and declared by God to be His beloved Son. Shortly after, Jesus found himself being led into the wilderness as well. For 40 days, Jesus fasted and was tempted by Satan. The wilderness for Jesus was a time when he was most physically vulnerable and where Satan tested Jesus' identity, appetite, pride and power. Yet, unlike the Israelites, Jesus' response to Satan's tests was to speak God's truth from Scripture. After leaving the wilderness, Jesus spent his ministry pursuing people who needed restoration. They were sick, hurting, or living as outsiders.

During Lent we reflect on the wilderness we currently find ourselves in and spend time thinking how Jesus is always seeking to meet us, just like he did in the gospels.

What an opportunity we have this Lenten season to reflect on Jesus' life and our own lives as we engage God in the wilderness!

Beginning on Ash Wednesday and leading up to Holy Saturday, we invite you to join the global community of believers as we enter into the wilderness like the Israelites and like Jesus. If you follow this guide, you will have the space to reflect on Jesus' life and how he engaged the people whom he encountered. You will also be given space to ponder the places in your own life where you fall short and need an encounter with Jesus.

Along with this guide, we are offering other opportunities to engage during the lenten season. We invite you to participate in Worship & Prayer, Holy Week services, a Wellness Workshop on Anxiety and Depression, and/or the Psalms of Lament class. In these spaces, you will be given the opportunity to learn, lament, and pray.

May God bless you and keep you during this season,

*Adrienne Christian*  
*Evangelism and Discipleship Pastor*





*Winter Night*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1869

Week One

# Ash Wednesday

2.22

Week One

## † Read

Matt 9:1-8: *Jesus and the Paralytic*

## ✧ Reflection - by Sarah Anders

In this time of Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday, we are confronted with our mortality and limitations as human beings. We see this acutely in the life of the paralytic. While we do not know much or any of the back story of this man, we do know that he is being carried by his friends as someone who is surrendered to the mercy of others. Encountering Jesus, he cannot impress Him nor prove himself. And yet, Jesus looks upon him with compassion and moves towards the paralytic in love — a love that not only restores him spiritually, but renews his body.

As you read this story, where do you see yourself in the person of the paralytic?

Is there a circumstance in your life in which you find yourself desperate to experience the movement of the Holy Spirit? What would it feel like to believe that Jesus sees these circumstances and is deeply moved by them?

Invite the Holy Spirit into your time of reflection. In courage and boldness, we can ask Him to meet us in the way that He met the paralytic in this story.

## 👁 Look

As you go about your day today, try to have open eyes. Whether in your home, in your neighborhood, at school or at work, or around the city, take time to notice those around you. Who are the people around you in need of compassion, intentionality or Jesus' healing touch?

# Thursday

2.23

## † Read

Matthew 9:27-30a: *Jesus Heals the Two Blind Men*

## ✧ Reflection - by Harrison Brantley, 9th Grade (Whitefield Academy)

In my life I cry out to God in many different ways. One way I cry out to Him is when I am really struggling with relationships. Another way I cry out to Him is in school. Sometimes I don't have the energy to do school work, and I say, "Jesus, please help me and give me the strength to do this." If I believe in God, just as the two blind men did in the passage, He will help me.

No matter what season we are in, or what we are going through, Jesus' response is, "Do you believe?" He may not help us if we are just praying to Him to get things that we want. As it says in the passage, Jesus asked the two men, "Do you believe?" The two men responded to him and said, "Yes, Lord." Jesus finally replied and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." This demonstrates to us that we need faith in Jesus as we walk through the tough things in life. If we do not have Him in our lives and we pretend we do, He may not help us the way that we need Him to.

## ➔ Go

As you go about your day today, try to have open eyes. Whether in your home, in your neighborhood, at school or at work, or around the city, take time to notice those around you. Who are the people around you in need of compassion, intentionality or Jesus' healing touch?



# Friday

2.24

## ✚ Read

Matthew 10:1-15: *Jesus Sends Out the Twelve*

## ✧ Reflection - by Barrett Grant

At first reading, this familiar passage may not seem to have an obvious link to the Lenten season in which we now find ourselves. We read about the sending out of the twelve apostles and the command to spread the Gospel to the lost sheep of Israel. But as we read further, Jesus' admonition not to take anything for the journey is a reminder for us all. At Trinity, we have often talk about the worldly propensity to live our lives with a scarcity mentality. Having a scarcity mindset ultimately causes us to "close our fists" and miss an opportunity to more fully rely on God. As followers of Christ, ours is a call to trust that our every need will be met by our Father who withholds no good thing from His children.

During Lent, we are invited to enter the wilderness so that we may experience and understand our need for a Savior. The practice of fasting allows us to strip away excess and abundance so that we may see this need more clearly. As you enter the desert this Lenten season—a place where you are faced with your own mortality and limitations—my prayer is that you would become keenly aware of the abundance in your life. Out of an acknowledgement of that abundance, may we all give freely of our time, our talents, and our treasures to glorify God and to serve His people.

Just like it did for the disciples that Jesus sent out, living with our hands open to freely give to others what we have received takes trust. Are there places in your life where you see yourself living with a scarcity mentality? Invite the Holy Spirit to help you to trust Him and share what you have been given, whether that be in relationship to your time, talent or treasure.

## 🌀 Imagine

Imagine yourself as one of the twelve disciples that Jesus has sent out. You've had the opportunity to walk alongside Jesus for years now. You've been with him when he physically healed someone, taught the crowds, and calmed the storm. Now, imagine that He's given you His authority and has sent you out to go in peace and gather those who do not know Jesus. How would it feel to share with others what you have received and also depend on their generosity and kindness? What feelings can you imagine you'd have?



*Moonlit Night on the River*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1871

Week Two

# Monday

2.27

## Read

Matthew 12:1-21: *Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath*

## Reflection - by *Emily Owen, Youth Leader*

I am your typical first-born, a rule-following, type A personality. I often become critical of myself or others when I am not living out those giftings in a loving and healthy way. This tendency of mine is much like the Pharisees who were the “goody two shoes” of Jesus’ day who were constantly looking for any opportunity they could to criticize Jesus. In this passage, we see them putting Jesus to the test to see if he will “break the rules” by healing a man on the Sabbath.

Side note- I know the phrase, “What would Jesus do?” is classic church lingo but it’s actually a phrase I try to ask myself when I face hard situations and honestly praise God that we have the actual gospels (aka this story) to read about what He DID do in hard situations! Now, back to what I was saying...

God created the law to show us our need and point us to Him, but in this situation the Pharisees twisted it to point to perfectionism. Now this is what my type-A tendencies can lead me into - taking a good thing made for my good (observing lent, being a “good” daughter/friend, etc.) and twisted it into some sort of hoop to jump through to earn God’s favor.

Jesus, in His power and loving-kindness healed the man with the withered hand, and in doing so, He reminds us that while the rhythm of the Sabbath is important, love is even more important. Jesus wants to care for our needs and show us that moving in love IS following the law. Just in case this example wasn’t clear enough, Jesus says later in the gospels (Matthew 22:36-40) that the greatest commandment is to love Him first and the second is to love others. Thank you, God, for making that one clear! And that is where the phrase “He would love first” (H.W.L.F) has made its way to the #2 top Christian phrase of our time. What a simple answer to a seemingly complex question!

As you think about your life and specifically this season of Lent, are you following a certain set of rules just because, or are you moved by His love? I invite you to sit on the phrase “He would love first” and invite the Lord to be your “why” in your relationships with your siblings, parents, friends, and people you meet. And if you need an extra reminder, I invite you to scribble W.W.J.D. or H.W.L.F. somewhere. You’ll see it and be encouraged by this simple and awesome truth.

## Remember

Reflect on your life experiences. Remember a time in the past when you or someone around you was so caught up in the “rules” that he or she did not love in the way that Jesus taught. What about throughout history? When might loving like Jesus loved instead of following the “rules” have made a positive impact on an individual or community?

# Tuesday

2.28

## Read

Matthew 12:22-32

## Reflection - *by Scott Barber*

Have you ever seen the optical illusion where the brain switches between seeing the old lady and the younger lady? If not, google it. It is quite fascinating. Like with the illusion, today's passage begins with two groups of people experiencing the same activity yet seeing it so differently.

We witness two postures toward the work of Jesus – one serving as a pathway to encounter and see Him in His fullness and the other blinding its adopters from the same revelation. The crowd showed up that day open and hopeful, believing Jesus would heal the blind and mute a demoniac whom they had brought to him. When Jesus restored this man, the amazed crowd now full of insight asked, “Can this be the Son of David?” At the same time, the Pharisees arrived. They were so convinced of their own righteousness that they failed to see the goodness of Jesus, claiming instead that he was doing the work of the devil.

How easily are we like the Pharisees without even realizing it! They were highly dedicated to following and protecting their view of God, showing up at the temple, memorizing the text, and obeying the letter of the law. They even fasted.

As we move through this season of Lent and engage in disciplines of preparation, may we repent of any pharisaical tendencies and embrace the open, expectant posture of the crowd. May we, too, experience the “Son of David.”

## Listen

Listen to the song, Confession by Mark Dicristina on the Trinity Lent Playlist.

## ✚ Read

Matthew 13:18-23: *The Parable of the Sower*

## ✧ Reflection - by *Katie Wilson*

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus has shared the parable of the sower with a crowd of people. Here in this passage, Jesus is explaining the parable to his disciples. Jesus explains that the seed is the “word of the kingdom,” and the path, the rocky ground, the ground among thorns, and the good soil are different responses to this. As I’ve been reflecting, I think I have responded to Jesus in each of these ways in different seasons of my life. There have been times where I have not understood the words of Jesus and they have immediately been taken away from my heart like the seed on the path. Other times I have eagerly heard and accepted the words of Jesus, but shortly after, I have forgotten or ignored him when a difficult life situation arises like the seed on the rocky ground. Then there are times when I have heard from God, but the distractions of our world have led me to forget or ignore Jesus like the thorny ground. Still yet, there have been seasons where I have heard and understood Jesus, and he has borne fruit in my life. What type of ground are you right now? How receptive are you to what the Lord may be wanting to do in this season of Lent?

What I love about this parable is that while it can seem to be most about the different kinds of ground and how we receive the word of the Kingdom, I think it is actually most about a generous sower. I believe the Lord is one who generously sows seeds. He generously desires to share his words with people just like us, wherever we find ourselves. May we pray that our hearts would be good and fertile soil this season to receive all that God may have for us.

## 👁 Look

As you go about today, look around you at the various plants you see - trees, bushes, houseplants, grass, etc. All of these plants began as seeds. All were sown by the generous sower. Allow yourself space to pray that you may receive more of Jesus, even in this wilderness season of Lent.

# Thursday

3.02

## † Read

Matthew 13:31-33: *The Mustard Seed and the Leaven*

## ✧ Reflection - by Bekah Malpass

Last year, I decided I wanted to learn to make bread. A friend of mine gave me a portion of her sourdough starter, and I was so excited to find new recipes to make. I could already smell the fresh loaves coming from my oven! How hard could it be?

Quickly, I realized that baking bread was not quite as simple as they make it seem on cooking shows. It takes careful attention to detail, making sure you have the precise ratio of ingredients, and it takes time. It takes time for the yeast to develop, for the bread to be kneaded, and for the loaf to bake. There's much more waiting involved in baking than I expected.

I think Matthew 13:31-33 has a lot to do with waiting. In the parable about the mustard seed, the idea of waiting is clear. One is waiting for a small seed to grow into a large tree that is big enough for birds to come and make their home. My attempt at becoming an amateur baker, however, is what reminds me that the parable of leaven is about waiting, too. A small amount of leaven, when given enough time, can double or even triple the size of the dough. Despite my impatience with the process, it's not something that happens right away. It takes time.

I wonder if the same thing might be true of the wilderness. A small amount of faith, if given enough time and space to grow, might yield something better than we could have imagined. This doesn't mean that the waiting won't be excruciating at times, or that there won't be moments in the wilderness where we wonder if we'll ever come out on the other side. But I think that part of waiting well in the wilderness is being reminded that God is God of the small things as much as He is God of the breakthroughs and big events. The same God who cares for the mustard seed walks alongside us in the wilderness. And maybe He uses that little bit of leaven to give us bread for the journey – it just takes time.

Where in your life do you sense the Holy Spirit might be inviting you into a season of waiting? Are there aspects of God's kingdom that are not realized fully yet that you notice in your own life, in relationship with others, or in our world?

## ➔ Go

Spend some time writing a prayer to God expressing those places in your life or in our world that seem to be in a time of waiting for His Kingdom work to break through. Maybe you can see the beginnings of God working already. Is there anyone in your life who has a "mustard seed" size faith? Write down their name(s) and pray that they would experience the love of God and that their faith might grow.

# Friday

3.03

## ✚ Read

Matthew 13:44-46: *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure*

## ✧ Reflection - by Kira Wamsted, 8th Grade (Campbell Middle School)

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.” Isn’t that just a beautiful line of scripture? To me, the way Jesus used parables to describe the kingdom of heaven is a really valuable perspective for me to hear. It gives me something out of real life that I can connect God’s kingdom to and pin down in my mind, like, “Oh, this is what the kingdom of heaven is like.” And the thing that I got out of this passage was that the kingdom of heaven requires sacrifice. I think that can be one of the hardest things to hear, because who wants to hear that the only way they can get into heaven is by giving away all of their possessions and sacrificing their whole lifestyle? But that’s not quite what this scripture is telling us. Actually, there’s a lot of things that it is telling us, but the main one that caught my attention is that God is worth it.

Did you catch that? —————→ **God. Is. Worth. It.**

Completely. One hundred and thirteen percent worth it. God is worth selling all of your possessions just to buy a little field in the middle of nowhere. Let me rephrase that: All of the hard stuff you’re going through today, this week, this month, this year... it is all going to be worth it. Life might feel like the worst thing that has ever happened to you. But you WILL find your treasure in a field, or your one valuable pearl among all the other fakes. It might take a while, but you’ll find the kingdom of heaven. And God will be walking alongside you every step of the way.

While God might not be calling you to sell all of your stuff, there could definitely be other places where He is trying to push you to maybe give up a little bit of time out of your day to spend with Him, or maybe put some of your energy into finally actually trying to be nice to your siblings or friends. Try giving yourself some space with Him this week. You’d be surprised how much easier your relationship with God can get when you make it a habit to set aside some time with Him.

## 🌀 Imagine

Imagine yourself listening to Jesus’ teaching. You are sitting in a crowd of thousands as he announces that there is an incredible treasure located in a large field. What if you had access to that treasure. Imagine that you had access to something worth more than anything that you owned? How would you react in such a situation?



*Night*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1894

Week Three



# Monday

3.06

## † Read

Matt 15:29-39: *Jesus Performs Miracles*

## ✧ Reflection - by Jenny Widmaier

Jesus performs miracles, He heals, He feeds and He satisfies. The crowds went to His feet and without asking questions or requiring anything of them, He healed them.

Jesus wants healing for us, and He wants to satisfy our hunger, but like the four thousand, we must come to Him. Going towards Jesus wasn't easy for the crowds of people, and it is not always easy for us. The crowds traveled far to get to Him. They had no food, and there was certainly suffering along the way. However, scripture tells us that Jesus had compassion on the people and when they reached Him, He took care of all their needs.

Satan works to distract us and uses all the busyness of our lives to keep us from prayer, yet he trembles when we pray. The enemy does not want us to pray because our prayers draw us close to God and when we are close to God we are healed, fed and satisfied.

In what ways have you felt resistance to come close to Jesus? In this Lenten season may we be reminded that even in the wilderness, the Lord is with us. May we draw near to Him.

## ☒ Remember

Is there a time in the past when you intentionally found yourself moving towards God in prayer or another spiritual discipline? What was your need? Did you experience healing, feeling fed or being satisfied by Him? Are there areas in your life now where you need God's healing or provision?

# Tuesday

3.07

## † Read

Matthew 16:13-28: *Take Up Your cross and Follow Me*

## ✧ Reflection - by McKenzie Cunningham, Youth Leader

I'll be honest. I've heard or read this passage dozens of times. And when I run into familiar scriptures, I tend to tune out the words in front of me. So to change things up, I like to pretend that I am in the account that I am reading.

For the last few chapters in Matthew, I've been seeing Jesus do some pretty crazy things – feeding five thousand people (and then four thousand!), walking on water, freeing a Canaanite woman's daughter from demons. Now, in Matthew 16, He's saying some pretty out-there things – talking about giving Peter the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, being killed and raised to life on the third day (which is giving me some concern), and now He's telling me that if I want to come after Him, I have to “take up [my] cross and follow [Him].” I'm still not clear on a lot of things, but what I do know is that crosses are used for execution – a cross means death. So when Jesus mentions it, I'm filled with fear, and I instantly forget all the miracles I've seen.

But here's what I think Jesus is saying to that scared-out-of-his-mind disciple (and to me today): *Child, I want you to be my disciple. It's not easy and there will be things you have to give up along the way, but you will never regret it. Know this – following me means I will always go before you. I will guide you and support you, give you words and strength you never thought were possible. So will you trust me – even in your fear? Will you follow me?*

Take a minute and reflect on the passage. If you were there as Jesus was speaking these words, how would you feel? Confused? Nervous? Excited?

## 🔊 Listen

Now think about the areas of your life where you feel God calling you to something, but you're afraid or uncertain. Try writing a letter from God to you. Then pause. What might He be saying to you in the midst of your fear?

## † Read

Matthew 17:14-21: *Jesus heals a boy with a demon*

## ✧ Reflection - by Jason Faulkner

If we follow Jesus long enough in this beautiful but broken world, we will no doubt encounter those “wilderness seasons” of our lives, times when we are invited to contend with the confusing or mysterious parts of this faith, wrestle with our doubts about or disappointment with God and the Church, and be honest about our war with hope. But do you contend with God? Do you believe that He walks with you in the wilderness and can hold everything you feel about Him? Are you able to ask hard questions of God? Are you able to express your disappointment, confusion, anger, frustration? Let’s use this difficult passage from Matthew as a guide.

1. As you read verse 17, pay attention to the sensations in your body. How do you feel towards Jesus? Can you talk to Him about that?
2. What do you think Jesus means by “little faith” in verse 20, especially adjacent to His phrase “faith the size of a mustard seed”? Is this confusing? (*If you’d like to explore this idea further, take a look at the other places in Matthew’s gospel where this Greek word oligopistos, translated “little faith,” is used by Jesus (Matt. 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, & 16:8).*)
3. This text has often been used as a source of shame among Christians. For example, “If you had had more faith (or faith in Jesus instead of medicine, or if you had prayed more), he/she would have been healed.” Has Scripture ever been used to make you feel shame, or to make you feel like a “not good enough” Christian? Have you experienced harm at the hands of other Christians? Can you talk to God about that?
4. What do you do when you ask God for something and He doesn’t deliver? Have you prayed for healing that never came? Is there a specific disappointment with God that comes to your mind right now? Can you talk to Him about that?
5. What feels most impossible in your life right now? Where is it most difficult to have hope? Can you talk to God about that?

## 👁 Look

As you go about your day today, open your eyes to the people and situations around you. Notice the relationships and circumstances that might feel hopeless to you. As you notice, talk to God about what you see.

# Thursday

3.09

## † Read

Matthew 18:10-14: *The Lost Sheep*

## ✧ Reflection - by M.K. Costa, 12th Grade (Buford High School)

The thought of God Himself searching for us is such a beautiful image. Jesus says to Matthew that God seeks all of us but especially the ones who have lost their way. I see verse 10 as God reminding us that not everyone is at the same spot in their walk with Jesus. That we should not judge others for where they stand. I have found this passage to be very comforting. There have been many times in my life where I have been the stray sheep, but no matter what, God has never stopped seeking me. Better yet, The Lord will never stop loving you. Even though I have lost my way many times, my Father has never turned a cold shoulder towards me.

No matter how long it takes, God will keep pursuing you.

I invite you into a moment of silence. Take some time, sit, and reflect upon your life's journey. Reflect on what your walk with God has looked like for you. Remember, God never leaves us. We are the ones who will shamefully walk away from Him. Let this passage always be a reminder that when you are lost God is walking right beside you and will catch you when you fall.

## ➔ Go

Find time today (or sometime this week) to create a piece of art (a poem, a song or a visual piece) that will help you remember that God is always pursuing you and deeply cares for all of His sheep. Place it somewhere in your home where you can see it easily and often.

# Friday

3.10

## ✚ Read

Matt 18:21-35: *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*

## ✧ Reflection - by *Laura Jauch*

I'm somewhat math minded, so whenever Jesus starts telling stories that involve numbers, I'm curious what the numbers mean. In this story, we've got a really big number and a really small number. In the first century Roman world, a talent was equivalent to roughly twenty years' wages for a common laborer. The ten thousand talents in this story, then, was an unimaginably large sum of money for most people in Jesus' audience. By contrast, a denarius was about a day's wage for a laborer.

The first servant that we meet in this story is trapped in an astronomical, unpayable debt with no real hope of ever settling accounts. However, in this parable the unexpected and unimaginable occurs. The servant pleads for mercy, and the master responds with titanic generosity. Imagine being forgiven such an impossible debt! Imagine the implications not only for the servant, but for the future of his family for generations. What relief, what hope must have filled the servant! And yet, his attitude towards others with debts much, much smaller than his own remains harsh and unsympathetic.

This parable contains both an invitation and a warning for us to consider during this season. Jesus invites you and me to receive and remember God's patience and generosity towards our own debts and to examine our own attitudes and actions towards others in light of such mercy. We are warned against hardness of heart, greediness, and a scarcity mindset against those around us, especially those in our debt. As recipients of God's grace, we can forgive out of fullness and freedom, not begrudgingly or from a place of emptiness. As Jesus taught his disciples, we confess and pray: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

## 🌀 Imagine

Imagine yourself as one of the characters in the parable. What would it have been like to be the king? What might you have felt had you been the master who was owed a debt but chose to forgive the debt instead of making the servant pay it back? What would that be like today? And what about if you were the servant? How would you have felt to have been forgiven so much debt? What might you have been thinking in not wanting to forgive your own servants?



*Night on the Sparrow Hills*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1881

Week Four

# Monday

3.13

## † Read

Matthew 20:29-34: *Jesus Heals Two Blind Men*

## ✧ Reflection - by Haley Naylor

When I read passages like this, I often wonder what faces filled the crowds around Jesus. Was it a mother with her young child who was skipping nap time in order to see what the deal was with Jesus? Did the fellow carpenter join the crowd to hear the words of someone in his likeness? Was it the skeptical? The tired? Those who were weary in heart? I always ache to know what type of people gave up their schedules and rhythms to get a glimpse of a man who could be the one they have been waiting for all along.

While I'm sure this crowd was full of people in need, the two blind men were quickly stirred when they realized that the Messiah was in their midst. They threw aside every social nicety in a desperate attempt to catch one glance of Jesus' eyes. They simply asked for mercy. I love that Jesus asked them what they wanted him to do for them. He didn't assume. Moved with compassion, He touched their eyes and healed them.

The crowd had initially rebuked the men, likely assuming that Jesus did not want to be bothered with the least of these. They likely believed that Jesus had places to be and things to do. This Lenten season, I wonder if there are social niceties keeping us from truly asking Jesus for the things we need. My hunch is that He is still a God who has compassion for His children. He is still a God that wants to move towards us and touch the parts of us that need to be whole again. Could we, like these blind men, be people who call out to God to heal us? May we never be so caught up in the crowd that we forget His deep desire to move towards us.

## ☒ Remember

Take some time out of your day today to go on a walk. Sometimes I find that my mind is more honest when I'm outside of the walls of my home, maybe you would find the same. On this walk, ask the Holy Spirit where you need to be honest about the pieces of you that need to be whole. Is there a relationship in your life that needs reconciliation? Is there a physical ailment that causes you to feel defeated? Have you hit a point where you feel burnt out and just don't know why? Ask Him to be the same God He has always been and move towards you in that. May He be near to you in the wilderness, my friend.

# Tuesday

3.14

## † Read

Matthew 21:1-11: *The Triumphal Entry*

## ✦ Reflection - by *Ann Coleman and Paul Myers*

Jesus, by choosing to ride to Jerusalem on a donkey's colt and by receiving the praises of the people, not only fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 concerning the coming Messiah, but, also, openly acknowledged and affirmed to all Israel that He was their long-expected King. Knowing who He was, Jesus could receive accolades rightfully, and yet, with humility.

Unlike us humans who covet the praise of our fellow man, Jesus, knowing from prophecy that He came as both King and the Suffering Servant, kept this dual identity in mind, and so the humility of the cross was always before Him.

During those times in our lives when we are recipients of worldly praise, and we are tempted to be prideful, how can we learn from Jesus to resist that temptation? Would it help us to reflect on our own identity in Christ and our calling as His disciples during this Lenten season?

An unusual focus when reading Matthew's account of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem would be to ponder the people in Bethpage where the donkey and colt were tied up. Jesus apparently knew that no matter who might object to the disciples taking of the animals, if the disciples merely responded "the Lord needs them," all would immediately say "take them."

Jesus, having passed through Bethpage so often during His walks to and from Bethany, was familiar enough with the villagers that He knew that they all believed He was the Lord, the Son of God, and would not withhold anything from Him.

In this Lenten season, let us reflect on the question.... Is there anything in our lives, that if the Lord asked for them, we would hesitate or even refuse to provide it?

## 🔊 Listen

Listen to the song *Hosanna Song* by Jon Guerra and Paul Zach.



## Read

Matthew 21:33-46: *The Parable of the Tenants*

## ✧ Reflection - *by Michael Dollarhide, Youth Leader*

Reading through chapters 19-21, I am reminded of just how difficult it is to live in a godly, sacrificial way. I am also reminded of how likely we are to repeat our ancestors' misdeeds. In these chapters, we see the Pharisees' insistence that they would have recognized God because of their knowledge of the prophets, yet they completely missed God right in front of them.

I want to focus on Matthew 21:33-46, 'The Parable of the Tenants'. On the surface, this story seems harsh, repugnant, and violent, but how often do we treat God similarly to how the Pharisees treated Jesus? Sometimes, humans can be so willing to hurt others rather than sacrifice a little of ourselves. For instance, if I truly believe everything is from God, then why do I struggle to tithe diligently? Or, when my pastor preaches on a subject that hits close to home, why is my first reaction to become defensive & justify instead of being humble & curious?

I think it is tough to be fully transparent with ourselves, but I want to invite you to reflect and process with me. What areas in your life need adjustment? Where might you be lacking evidence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit? In what ways is Jesus, the Tenant's Son, asking you to notice Him, respect Him or share the harvest that He has given you?

I believe honest answers to these questions are much simpler in practice than we want to make them out to be. God is simply asking for us to act in love, and though it is challenging to love and trust, we need to practice that daily. I truly believe He asks these things of us for our own benefit.

## Look

Take a few moments to reflect on places in your life where you respond like the Pharisees responded to Jesus. Maybe these are areas of disbelief, lack of reverence for God, dissonance between what you say that you believe and your actions.

# Thursday

3.16

## 📖 Read

Matthew 22:15-22: *Paying Taxes to Caesar*

## ✨ Reflection - by Erin Reynolds

If you are like I am, you've encountered this passage many times over in life. There is so much rich, fruitful discussion on what this interaction and teaching reveals to us about the character of God. As I sit with this text from Matthew this year, there is one word that stands out to me – cuts through me – jolts me awake. 'Hypocrites.' Imagining this word coming out of Jesus' mouth can be a bit unsettling. . . as it probably should be. He is naming deceit, pride, and malice among the religious elite of the day. However, I also sense an invitation to see the ever-present compassion flowing through His words.

The Pharisees' disciples have come with an agenda to, in the ESV translation, 'entangle' Jesus with a slippery question. He knows this, of course, and with His rebuke there is a bite.

This word "hypocrite" in the New Testament comes from a Greek word meaning stage actor or pretender, a person who, in ancient Greece, would wear a large mask during a performance. A mask. These people have come with masks on to present a question contrived in the hopes of eliciting a confirmation of their set ideas.

In this season of Lent, as we purposefully enter the wilderness to submit ourselves to a "stripping away," perhaps there is an invitation for us to identify with the Pharisees' disciples - uncomfortable though it may be. Some questions we might consider are: Where in my life do I meet Jesus with a mask on? Where do I approach God acting as someone who knows all the answers instead of simply bringing my perplexing heartache, doubt, or joyful curiosity? Where do I try to encounter God as someone I feel I am supposed to be or wish I could be instead of who I truly am?

Jesus wants us to be honest and open with Him. As we walk into the wilderness, I pray for the grace to move forward in honesty - to encounter our loving Maker who longs to be with us as we are – face-to-face – no mask. And, in this communion, I pray for the grace and courage to ask real questions and for the faith to believe that we will be met with the truth of being wholly and totally beloved. Amen.

## ➔ Go

At some point today, go outside and take a walk – just you and God. Leave any earbuds at home. As you stroll, notice the various facets of God's beautiful creation. Ponder the variety of trees, the animals, the sky. Take it all in. After some time of noticing, ask the Holy Spirit what areas in your life you may live as a pretender and not as He actually created you to be. Take time to seek forgiveness and guidance where needed.

# Friday

3.17

## ✚ Read

Matthew 22:34-40: *The Greatest Commandment*

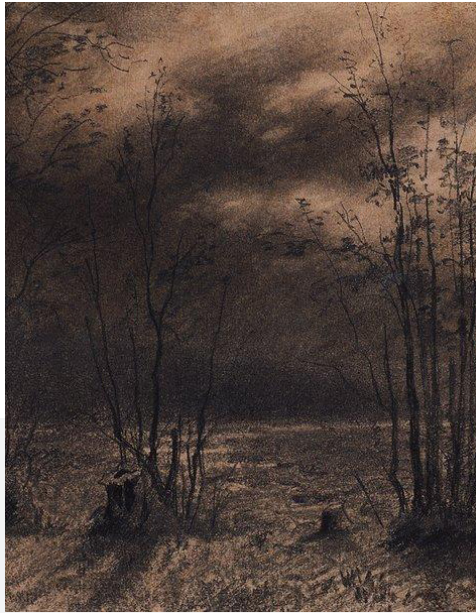
## ✧ Reflection - by *Adrienne Christian*

By the time we get to Matthew 22:34, it is clear that the Jewish leaders had become fed up with Jesus. They did not like that their authority was being put to the test. They also did not accept Jesus' teachings nor his interpretation of the prophets. Their response was to try to trap Jesus. Should we follow the law of culture or the law of God? If a man dies and has no children, who will he marry in the resurrection? What is the greatest commandment? This last question was asked by the Pharisees, those who supposedly knew and kept Jewish law best. Jesus' response to them was simple and to me, focuses on the foundation of all of the law that had been in place at the time in terms of one's relationship with God and with others. He told them, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus' response showed that he knew scripture. He was recounting what Jews would recognize as the "*shema*" which is recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4 after Moses has shared the Ten Commandments with the Israelites. While any practicing Jew would have been familiar with this commandment, it seems like by Jesus highlighting it to the Pharisees, they did not understand. The difference between Jesus and the Pharisees was that he not only knew the law, but he lived it in a way that showed that he grasped the spirit behind the law. The Pharisees, in general, were so caught up in obeying rules that they often missed the experience of actually loving God. Similarly, their legalism sometimes kept them from loving others. Jesus proclaimed to them that loving God and loving neighbor sums up the rules that had been passed down to them.

Man! I can totally relate to the Pharisees. While they deeply desired to follow the rules and please God, somehow they had missed actually loving God and those around them. Their obedience had become a checklist. How many times do I say that I believe something and then show in my actions that deep down I do not actually believe what I say? Or, how often does my desire to follow a "rule" miss God's desire to love those around me?

## 🌀 Imagine

What about you? Put yourself in the shoes of the Pharisees. Imagine yourself as one of the "followers of the law" who now is encountering Jesus. What might have been your reaction? Where can you see your need to remember Jesus' greatest commandment?



*Autumn Night*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1872

Week Five

# Monday

3.20

## † Read

Matthew 24:29-45: *The Coming of the Son of Man*

## ✧ Reflection - by Grace Minnick

As I write this, I'm waiting on a rather unpredictable friend to arrive from Indiana on a whim. Less than 24 hours ago, I learned that this friend would be passing through for the night. I'm sitting here in my living room, laundry done, pillows and blankets ready on the couch, the door unlocked, the entryway light on, and now I'm just waiting. If history repeats itself, my friend - a wonderful free spirit with no use for a calendar or an alarm - could arrive anytime within the next three hours. I admire the type - someone to wrench me out of the carefully curated schedule I try to adhere to like it's a legally-binding contract. At first, when I received the "what's your address? Got room for me to stay over tomorrow night?" text yesterday, I was excited to see a friend from back home, but I was also a little frustrated. A Friday night?! What if I had plans?? (I didn't.) What if I had something important to do?? (Laundry?) But, I knew I needed to stay home and patiently await my visitor. Waiting is difficult, even when you know the schedule. Filling time tonight without knowing the schedule feels unbearable at moments, but it is also proving to be a beautiful, sweet time of rest that is also recharging.

That is the beauty of waiting in the wilderness – having fewer distractions and more time to focus on where I am, what I truly need, and what God wants me to hear from Him.

In the time I've written this, my friend has texted me an ETA and asked if I "need anything from anywhere," to which I replied "I'm out of honey" (the only thing on my grocery list at the moment). As I wait for Indiana and a bottle of honey to arrive, I think about how excited I am to see my friend after years and what an unexpected blessing this is. I also think about how even sweeter still it will be when Jesus returns.

Today's scripture reminds me that no one knows the day and time that He will return, but we wait expectantly for Him. Waiting is difficult. Sitting is difficult. Changing my plans (or lack thereof) and slowing down is difficult. I'm thankful that the Holy Spirit is here to wait with me. I'm reminded of the presence of the Spirit with every breath. Breathing. What a simple, yet profound way to pass the time and engage with God while we wait.

## ☐ Remember

Spend some time reflecting on a time in the past when you had been promised that something would happen, but you had to wait a long time until it actually came to pass. What was waiting like for you? How did you feel as the time passed? If you wish you had waited differently, re-imagine that time and wait in a new way.

# Tuesday

3.21

## † Read

Matthew 21:1-11: *The Triumphal Entry*

## ✨ Reflection - by *Jordan Webner, Youth Leader*

Interestingly, the first two servants received the same reward even though one earned more than the other. Both were invited to “come and share [their] master’s happiness!” From here, we realize what it is that the master cared about. The master didn’t care about his wealth or how much the servants earned on his behalf. He longed to invite them to share in all that he owned! With this, we can see how mistaken the other servant was in judging the intentions of his master. What pleased the master was not skill, and the servants were not rewarded based on how much they earned. Instead they were rewarded based on the intentions of their hearts. Did they serve the master with eagerness and loyalty, or did they assume the worst about the master and seek to repay him accordingly?

I find it troubling, crazy, and encouraging that God doesn’t give “fairly.” If it was up to me, the servant who earned his master five coins deserves more of a reward! After all, he earned more than the other servants! And well, the servant who saved his coin out of fear didn’t lose the coin. In my eyes, this servant certainly doesn’t deserve a reward, but to punish him for his actions seems harsh. Yet, God judges our hearts. He cares more about why we do something than what we do. He gives us every part of Himself and invites us to join His happiness not based on what we have done, but based on whether we have done something out of love for Him. And how can we not love a master who wishes to give us all of his own happiness!

## 🔊 Listen

Take time to read the passage again out loud. Listen to the voice of the servants and the voice of the master as you read. What stands out to you about their heart posture? What might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to notice?

# Wednesday

3.22

Week Five

## ✚ Read

Matthew 25:31-46: *Judgment of the Nations*

## ✧ Reflection - by Luke Baker

My dad runs a nonprofit on the side called Mission 2540. He named it after Matthew 25:40. At least twice a year, he takes trips from Georgia to Letcher, Kentucky, where he delivers school supplies and Christmas gifts to some of the most underprivileged families in the U.S. Out of all places, why Letcher? Well, it's his hometown. It's the community to which he belongs. Where his brothers and sisters live.

Before Jesus gives us the Great Commission, he gives us the Great Compassion in this passage—a call to love and care for fellow Christians as if they were Christ. Seth Godin says you can define a culture with the phrase “people like us do things like this.” The culture of Heaven is compassion. Feeding the hungry. Giving water to the thirsty. Clothing those in need. People like us do things like this.

Jesus cares so deeply about how we care for each other that He uses compassion toward His disciples as the key differentiator between His sheep and the goats — His followers and the world. Our compassion doesn't bring us eternal life, but it is proof of it. It's proof in action. As we wait for Jesus in this Lenten season, it's good to remember that waiting doesn't mean idling. In the desert, Israel walked and Jesus wrestled. As we wait for the Son of Man to take his glorious throne, we can offer compassion to our neighbors in need — especially our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

## 👁 Look

As you go about your day today, ask God to help you open your eyes to the needs of your city. Where might people who are your brothers and sisters in Christ be “hungry” or “thirsty?” How might God be inviting you to show compassion towards them?

# Thursday

3.23

## † Read

Matthew 26:14-29: *The Last Supper*

## ✧ Reflection - by *Bonnie Beauchamp, Youth Leader*

The God who created the entire universe sat down and shared a meal with a group of people who would all betray him in a matter of hours. And He knew they would. And then He had them drink a cup meant to symbolize His forgiveness. He did this all before they each took the action (or inaction) that would betray Him.

I've never been able to get over the fact that the God who created the most beautiful things I've ever seen wants to sit down and have a meal with me. I've never been able to get over the fact that He literally walked in a garden with the first humans. Or that so often in scripture, it describes a person of faith as having walked with God. These are such simple everyday ordinary things. And God wants to do them with us. He invites us over and over into them.

Luke writes that at this same meal, God with us, Jesus, said to His friends, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I die." Think about that. He eagerly desired eating a last meal with the people He knew would betray Him. And, He offered them forgiveness and His very self.

How often each day through my inaction or action do I betray Jesus and others? And my first instinct when I realize it is to hide, to flee, just like Jesus' friends. I don't think, "Well, I'll go sit down and eat with Jesus." And yet, He holds His hand out and beckons to the empty chair at that table inviting me to a conversation with Him, confession, and forgiveness. And He does all of that with some good food.

I often think about Judas' choices after He betrayed Jesus. He ran, he fled, he took matters into his own hands. The other disciples also ran, but in the end, they fled back to Jesus. And Jesus cooked them breakfast and offered them forgiveness. In the end, the only difference it appears to me is that while Judas chose to stay away, the rest of Jesus' friends sat back down at the table with Him, trusting His heart towards them.

That seat at the table is open to you and to me every moment of every day. Each realization of our sin is an opportunity to sit back down, confess, and just be with the God who created the entire universe.

## → Go

I invite you to sit down at your dining room chair for a few minutes in silence and open your hands. Tell Jesus you want to draw near, that you want to sit at the table, and ask Him to bring anything to mind that you need to confess or hand to Him. As He brings things to mind, turn them over to Him, receive the forgiveness He's already offered you, and enjoy Him. Ask to see Him more clearly. Then, go eat something good!



# Friday

3.24

## ✚ Read

Matthew 26:36-56: *Jesus Prays in Gethsemane*

## ✧ Reflection - by Ava Grafton, 9th Grade (St. Pius X)

Dear God,

We thank you for your presence with us. Thank you for your promise to never leave us and to always be by our side. Even when we sin against you or turn away from you. Even on days where we don't think we can do it, we know that you are here with us.

*Amen*

In this scripture, I really saw how Jesus is just like us. He is so human in the way that He asks God for this burden He has to endure to be lifted from Him. He is scared and knows He is going to die. When I'm scared or nervous, I do the same thing. I ask God to take my problems away and to shield me from this seemingly scary obstacle. But Jesus realizes that this is God's will for Him and for the world. And He sees that God is right there with Him through it all. So as I pray to God for help, I see that with everything that is happening to me, I can get through it because I have God beside me. And I take comfort in knowing that it is God's will for me rather than my own.

So, take some time out of your day to pray and ask God His will be done for your life. And that the path that you're on is the one He wants for you, not just the one you want for yourself. If you are going through a tough time, trust that God will use it for your good and that He will be there for you during it.

## 🌀 Imagine

Take a moment to put yourself in the Garden of Gethsemane. Imagine that you are Jesus, and you are on the ground praying to God. Imagine that your disciples are just a few feet away sleeping off and on. You are having an honest conversation with God about how you feel about the pain that you will soon experience. Yet, you also know that God's perspective is better than your own. Take some time to imagine what might be going through your head that prompts you to say, "Your will be done."



*Autumn Night*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1872

Week Six

# Monday

3.27

## † Read

Matthew 27:11-23: *Jesus Before Pilate*

## ✧ Reflection - by *Evan Frilingos, 12th grade (Decatur High School)*

At the verge of crucifixion, Jesus faces evil by remaining strong in silence. Unprovoked, He confronts the crowd and their accusations without anger or hatred. He is able to do so because of his own faith in God's promise; faith so concrete that not even death's imminence could damage it. Witnessing such defiance from Jesus is certainly inspirational, though the task of imitating His stature can become equally difficult. As a Christian, I have always been told to be more like Jesus, but I have often found that when attempting to reach the heights of being Jesus-like I instead find myself lost, demoralized, and confused. Jesus was a human, but He was perfect and in that way alone He is quite inimitable

As a result, I have realized not the importance of being like Jesus, but instead of being with Him. I may not be able to turn water into wine, but I can stand by His side while he performs miracles and silences death without uttering a single word. Therefore, where Jesus goes, I will follow. I am not tasked with paving the road—rather, I traverse the one laid out by Christ. When Jesus speaks, I listen and subsequently find my own voice. Instead of having to encounter obstacles as a single entity and attempting to do so in a Jesus-esq manner, I move forward knowing that Jesus is with me; there is no trouble too great on the entirety of the planet for the One who overcame the world.

Jesus is God! But, let's put that to the side for a moment and imagine Jesus as another man staring into the face of death. Can you do that? Can you look into the eyes of the devil, of sin, of any obstacles, of death, and remain unfazed? The good news is that Jesus found his strength in faith by calling on God the Father. He pleads for God the Father to be with Him in His final hours. Jesus is always with us, but it is up to us to lean on him. If I cannot be Christ, I will do everything in my power to enjoy His proximity.

## ☐ Remember

Remember a time in the past when you felt very low. Reflect on what that was like for you. How did you depend on God during that time? What might the Holy Spirit be teaching you in how you responded?

# Tuesday

3.28

## † Read

Matthew 27:45-56: *The Death of Jesus*

## ✧ Reflection - by Addie Norman

Jesus, who just days before was showered with praise as He entered Jerusalem, was spat on, mocked, and hung on a cross next to the worst of thieves. He was rejected by those in power, He was rejected by his followers, and then He uttered those crushing words: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” As Jesus took on my sin and your sin, God the Father in His holiness had to turn His face away. What a crushing moment. A wilderness indeed.

As we lean into the Lenten season, my “wilderness” will likely look different than your wilderness. Some of my deepest places of wilderness have been seasons when I have experienced rejection (or even perceived rejection) from those around me. As an extroverted people pleaser, my wilderness is typically felt most when I feel forgotten, misunderstood, lonely, or rejected. So this passage, where the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is facing isolation and rejection feels especially profound to me.

And then, in this moment of immense isolation and pain, Jesus breathed His last. And with a snap of a finger, something miraculous happened. The curtain in the Temple (60 feet long, 30 feet wide and over an inch thick) that separated human beings from the Holy of Holies, was torn in two from top to bottom. The significance of this was massive. You and I now have confidence to enter into the very presence of our holy God to be received with love. And this God, with whom we now get to commune, knows and understands all of our pain in a profound way. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). And because He took on our sin, we as His children never have to know a world of being forsaken by our heavenly Father.

Take a moment to reflect on what wilderness looks like for you. What does it mean for you to have a God who understands you in your wilderness moments?

## 🔊 Listen

Put yourself in a dark place that is free of noise and distraction. Listen to the silence.

# Wednesday

3.29

Week Six

## Read

Matthew 27:57-61: *Jesus is Buried*

## Reflection - by *Eloise Seelinger, 8th Grade (Campbell Middle School)*

Take a second to imagine you were the rich man, Joseph. You became a disciple of this amazing man, only to end up taking his dead body to the tomb you created. It's a crazy situation to find yourself in, right? Now switch perspectives to the two Marys watching this happen. Imagine knowing this man, Jesus, and thinking that since He's the Son of God, that He would never die. But now, here you sit, feeling the real sadness of losing Him, the man you put all your faith in.

Life likes to throw unexpected circumstances our way all the time, and lots of times these situations are really difficult. But the best thing to do is to take a second, breathe, and place your faith in Jesus. Even though He did die, three days later He rose again and restored hope and faith in everyone.

Invitation: I invite you to take some time in the days ahead and just pause for a minute. Think about the others around you, what they might be experiencing. Then go and put some kindness out in the world. Go out and take light and hope into people's lives when they need it. Let this time bring a reminder of who Jesus is and what He did for us.

## Look

As you go about your day look around and notice the people in your home, at your school or job, in your neighborhood, or in your city who might be suffering or having a hard time. How might you be invited to shine Jesus' light or offer hope to them?

# Thursday

3.30

## † Read

Mark 1:1-13: *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

## ✧ Reflection - *by Larry Martin*

John the Baptizer shows up in the wilderness to “Prepare the Way of the Lord.” Not only does he prepare the way of the Lord, he also proclaims hope that there is a way out of lostness. He proclaims Jesus. The Gospels tell us that Jesus is, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

As I engage God in the wilderness this Lenten season, I am also considering another meaning of “the Way.” The earliest name for the followers of Jesus (the church) was “The Way.” During this season, I’m making intentional time to look back at my life to note how God has sent specific people into the wilderness experiences of my life to help me find “the Way.” How did my fellow Jesus followers point me to the Way?

What have been some of the wilderness experiences of your life? Consider how the Holy Spirit has sent His followers into your life to point you to Jesus and the way out of your wilderness experiences. What were the experiences? Who did God send? What was the way out?

## → Go

If God brought someone to mind who may have helped you or walked alongside you during a wilderness season, take time to call or write them a note saying, thank you. What a gift it is to be in community as we journey with Jesus.

# Friday

3.31

## Read

Mark 1:21-28: *Jesus Heals the Man with the Unclean Spirit*

## Reflection - by *Garrett Owen, Youth Leader*

One word that sticks out about Jesus in this passage, whether it is in your translation or not, is “Authority.” The dictionary says this is a word that describes somebody that has “the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.”

Think about verses 21-28 when Jesus walked into the synagogue. How did the people react? Scripture says that the people were amazed because he taught out of “authority.” Jesus knew what He was talking about – so much so that an impure spirit was afraid and left a man that was in the temple. Imagine having that much authority to teach the Gospel that an impure spirit had to run when you entered the room. That would be pretty cool.

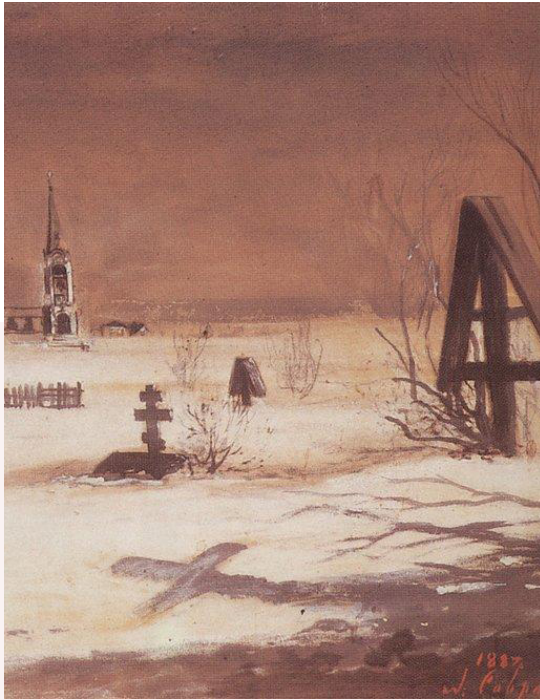
Now, we rarely hear about stories of someone walking into a room and actually seeing impure spirits leave a body. BUT, the same authority that Jesus had on that day, He has given to you, to your neighbor, to your parents, to everyone who believes in Him by dying on the cross. This is the authority of the love of God through the Holy Spirit that you now have access to.

This can look a lot of ways, from being kind to the classmate that doesn't have many friends. Or, it could look like being patient with a sibling that is getting on your nerves. Whatever “impure spirit” or “thing that is against God's nature,” that is around you, know that there is strength and authority from our Lord that you can face these things and win. Big or small.

I challenge you to think about the authority you have by having a relationship with God, the Creator of this world. With God partnering with you, there is no thing that the enemy can send your way that you cannot find victory over.

## Imagine

Spend some time in silence. Then, imagine yourself in the story with Jesus. What might it have felt like to be the man with the unclean spirit before Jesus healed him? And after? What might you have done after having been freed from demonic power? How would you have reacted?



*Rural Cemetery in the Moonlight*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1887

Holy Week



# Monday

4.03

## ⊕ Read

Mark 2:13-22: *Jesus eats with Tax Collectors and Sinners*

## ✧ Reflection - by *Maurice Massey*

Jesus eating with sinners was countercultural to the Pharisees. Jesus responded to their questioning by telling them that He came to save sinners, not the righteous. As disciples of Christ, we must not forget that we are sinners who have been saved by grace. We did not earn the right to sit at the table with Jesus, He gifted it to us. In such a transactional world, it can be difficult to understand this logic because it is simply illogical. The Pharisees actually found it to be scandalous and many people refer to it as the scandal of grace! Jesus invites us to sit at the table with Him, flaws and all. Just after Levi, the tax collector, accepted his call to follow Jesus, he invited others into friendship with Him as well. This is our calling as disciples, to invite our neighbors to the table to receive God's amazing grace that sets us free from the bondage of sin.

## ⊞ Remember

It can be helpful to remember the invitation we received to enter into true friendship with Jesus. Reflect on your life before entering into that friendship. What was your life like before accepting His invitation?

Are there any areas in life where you view God's grace as dependent upon work or ability to earn it?

The Pharisees' view of grace made it impossible for them to extend God's grace to others. Are there any places where a false view of God's grace hinders you from inviting others into friendship with Jesus?

# Tuesday

4.04

## † Read

Mark 3:1-6: *A Man with a Withered Hand*

## ✧ Reflection - by Meredith Copley

Take a minute to engage mentally and emotionally with this passage. Imagine the people as they gather for worship in the synagogue. Consider how Jesus noticed the man with the withered hand. Feel the tension in the air as the crowd watched to see if Jesus would heal the man on the Sabbath day. I am struck by the fact that Mark doesn't tell us exactly how Jesus felt toward this man with a disability. He leaves that to our imagination. However, he does give us insight into how Jesus felt toward the Pharisees. He felt anger and sadness over their hardness of heart.

It seems, these men prefer to observe a legal code than to be moved by compassion for a fellow human being. Over time, their love for God was replaced with love for their religion, and their traditions and interpretations had become the objects of their affection. But Jesus did heal the man of his weakness. The word Mark used was restored. Jesus restored the man's withered hand. He brought it to health, back to what it was supposed to be in the first place.

I see the faces of those for whom the safety of the Law is more important than caring for the needy. Law gives them power and security, and their hearts have become hardened to what is human. The great commandment is the law of love. Would people who know me be able to say that I follow the 'law of love'? I watch Jesus in this scene. What would I have done had I been there with the man with the withered hand? Is my heart hardened? Am I rightly angry when people are despised? Do I channel my anger towards healing?

Prayer: *Lord, make me a person who is moved by compassion, who loves my neighbor as I love myself, and may your law of love rule in my heart. Amen.*

## 🎧 Listen

Listen to the song *Little Things with Great Love* by The Porter's Gate.

# Wednesday

4.05

Holy Week

## ✚ Read

Mark 3:13-21: *The Twelve Apostles*

## ✧ Reflection - by *Dave McCune*

As Jesus calls the twelve disciples to follow Him for the first time, I'm reminded of the very human and relational side of Jesus' journey. First, I can't help but smile at the idea of Jesus handing out nicknames: "Simon? You look like a Peter. I'm calling you Peter. John and James, brothers right? I see the energy between you two - y'all are the sons of thunder." Yes, it's a fun scene to imagine, but there is substance to it. Peter means "rock" - Jesus was speaking words of life to this man about whose confession He would later say, "On this rock I build my church." James and John would be close confidants, each with powerful ministries and powerful stories about their lives and deaths. Jesus calls forth something in us we didn't know we had. These men needed this calling to face the challenging road of being a disciple. This is great comfort to me on the wilderness journey.

If one side of the relational coin is speaking words of life, the other is experiencing betrayal. Jesus also called Judas, who would later betray not just Him but the group of friends. In His hometown those closest to Jesus thought He was crazy, even possessed by a demon! How many of us can relate to being misunderstood, wounded, or outright betrayed by those closest to us? It's an acutely gutting feeling. To know that Jesus experienced the same is a tender and mysterious comfort. Accounts like these always remind me that following Jesus isn't about avoiding pain, but rather it is about following the bravest person who ever lived, the one who teaches us by His life that betrayal and pain and death do not have the final word. Thanks be to God!

What words of life do you sense or desire Jesus to speak over you where you feel stuck? Can you identify with Jesus's experience of betrayal? Do you find any comfort on the journey in this?

## 👁 Look

As you go throughout your day, notice those around you who may feel misunderstood, wounded or betrayed. How might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to engage with those whom you notice?

# Thursday

4.06

## † Read

John 13:1-20: *Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet*

## ✧ Reflection - by Jill Yoder, 11th Grade (North Atlanta High School)

One thing that I find comforting is that we will always have an unconditional, open invitation into a relationship with Jesus. We will always have a teacher and a father to guide us through life.

In this passage, Jesus sets an example for His disciples by washing their feet, despite being their teacher, and asks that they do the same for others. In our day to day lives, God's hope for us is that we live by the example Jesus has set. He hopes that we treat people with kindness, grace, and mercy. Something I always find myself struggling with is allowing myself to get caught up in trying to fit the mold of how the world says I should live and who the world says I should be. But by trusting God fully, we are able to let go of that stress and know that we are loved fully because God has made us. We are able to follow the perfect example Jesus has set for us and trust Him as we continuously learn and grow into people of Christ.

## → Go

After having spent time reflecting on this passage and Jesus' humility, kindness, grace and mercy. Are there people in your life to whom you have not shown the attitude that Jesus showed when he washed his disciples' feet? Invite the Holy Spirit to help you notice when you might have fallen short. Then, take time to ask forgiveness from God. If you are able, go to that person and ask forgiveness of the person as well.

# Good Friday

4.07

## † Read

Luke 23:26-49: *The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus*

## ✧ Reflection - *by Nate Smith*

**Imagine** 🌀 yourself in that moment as Simon of Cyrene. Jerusalem is not your home; you've only just arrived. Suddenly you are thrust into this violent and chaotic scene, forced to carry an instrument of torture behind a stranger on his way to death. As they put the cross on your shoulders, you feel its weight, its roughness. You hear the cries of the women, mourning and lamenting, and the voice of Jesus telling them to weep for themselves and their children. You feel powerless and confused. This is not how you thought your day would go. You have no idea how it will end. Near you, just ahead of you, though, is the stranger, who is neither powerless nor confused. The soldiers have seized you and forced you to follow, but he is a willing participant in his own execution.

As you arrive at the place that is called The Skull, the soldiers force you to lay down your load and release you. Do you run away, escape the city, flee to the wilderness? Or do you remain with this strange stranger who is doing more than dying? Or, do you stand at a distance with the weeping women and watch?

The wilderness is a place of solitude and testing but also a reprieve from the hustle and bustle of city life. As you seek to engage God in the wilderness today, your day may take unexpected turns. If you find yourself thrust into the chaos of the city, the chaos of the cross, stay near to Jesus. He is your peace. He is your Savior.

*Dawn in the Desert*  
Aleksey Savrasov, 1852



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