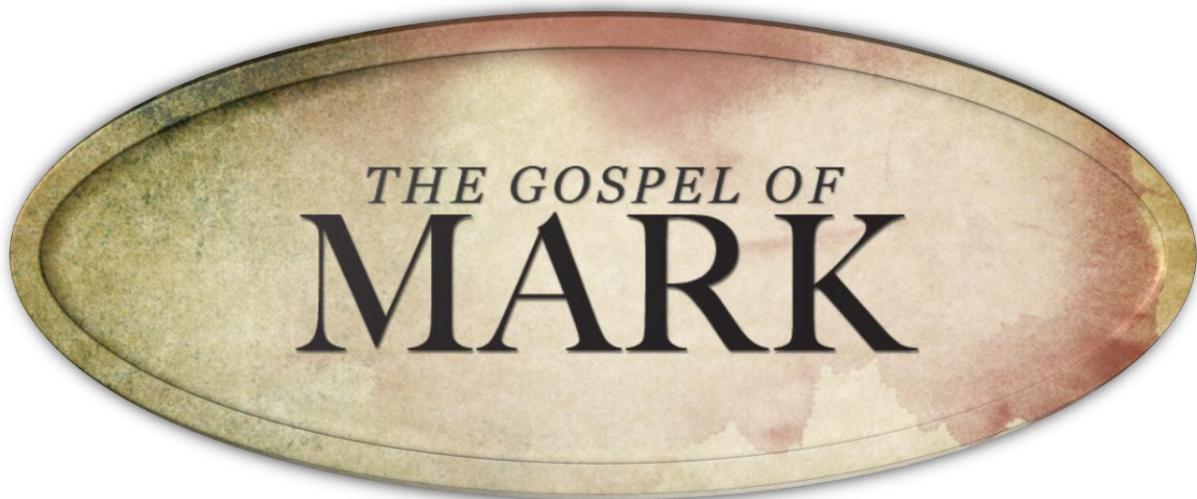


New Hope United Methodist Church

2026



Introduction to the Study:

A few optional words about this study that might help in our learning and understanding.

- i. Translation: the text is provided in the Common English Bible Translation (CEB). The main reason for this is that it coincides with the bibles we distribute to children. They can use their Bibles from the church to follow along if they so choose. The second reason, however, is perhaps more important for adults. The CEB is a modern, easy to read translation. It is not an interpretation, which takes the English text and modernizes the language from the English. Instead, it is an actual translation. This means it holds as closely as possible to the original Greek meaning as we have been able to determine it with over 200 years of scholarship. Older, or earlier, translations do not have the same scholarship available, including the most recently discovered manuscripts and fragments, information learned from secondary sources, many that have been discovered after the older translations were published, and the wisdom of many talented linguists who have been able to painstakingly uncover new understandings of the text based upon extensive study and linguistic skill. For this reason, a more modern translation can be a very essential and effective tool for understanding. Many older translations are translated not from the original languages of authorship, but at least partially from the Latin Vulgate, which dominated the Roman Catholic Church until the use of vernacular became widely accepted following the conference of Vatican II, which concluded in 1965. This means they were translated in part or sometimes in whole from another translation. That is like playing telephone with the text. Many translations were done with a small number of scholars translating based on limited knowledge. For example, Luther was a scholar, but the Luther Bible is not as accurate because it is only Luther's understanding of the text, with no team of scholars to check and scrutinize the work. Many sources, and importantly some of the earliest of the manuscripts and fragments, have been discovered or translated after older translations were already finished. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1947 and 1956, but have been in the process of authentication and translation as recently as 2020, as many have surfaced in an ongoing process that continues even today. In the Cave of Horrors, discovered in 2017, new fragments were just unearthed rare scrolls of the minor prophets written mainly in Greek. Since Biblical Hebrew is difficult to translate as many words have been lost over time, while Koine Greek is a very well researched dialect of a living language, discovering the text in a Greek translation that dates back to a time when Hebrew was more widely known by those still speaking living dialects of it lends a new understanding of elusive texts. Such resources were not available in early translations of the Bible. When it comes to

Biblical translation, early is not always best or most accurate. One thing often missing from early translations, though, is a variety of voices. Translators of the earliest English translations, upon which later translations are often based, losing the cultural perspectives. In other words, a lot of early translations sound very Western in their narrative even though they are Eastern in their original style. They sound very male, even though some in their original language use much more feminine language. Poetry will lose its attributes if not painstakingly translated. The translators need to consider what is most important in Psalms, for example. Is only the meaning of the words essential, or is there also important meaning in the rhyme, meter, and alliterations that are typically lost in translation? With a degree in literature, I will tell you it all matters, but it is impossible to translate all elements at once. Decisions by translators need to be made to try to get these elements as close as possible to the original, but also to retain the meaning of each of these elements so that the reader can have the full range of understanding available to them. This requires a larger group of translators with experience and expertise in a wide range of disciplines, including science, mathematics, linguistics, literature, history, cultural anthropology, and more.

Translators and editors of the CEB include over 120 male and female scholars from 24 faith backgrounds (including scholars from United Methodism, Judaism, reformed Christian traditions, other Protestant denominations, and more) and from many different disciplines and places around the world with a stated focus on accuracy and readability. This compares to the about 50 less experienced translators of the King James Version in the early 17th Century, the 32 ecumenical scholars of the RSV (with revision by the later scholars to create the NRSV), and the 15 evangelical scholars who edited and oversaw the work of approximately 100 translators of the NIV. In other words, the CEB's translation base is broader and more informed by a wider group of scholars without preference based on denomination or theological slant. The emphasis was language and accuracy, not influencing theology or defaulting to tradition (many translations if they are unsure how to translate or if there are seemingly equal translations will revert to a more traditional wording from an older and more familiar translation rather than the less traditional option. While this is not bad, necessarily, it keeps the reader from knowing the possibility and nuance of the second way of translating that particular text. As language evolves, reverting to the traditional translation can also sometimes alter the meaning as language's fluid nature causes meanings to shift over time). The CEB was completed in 2011. This makes it the most diverse in scholarship, the most ecumenical in scholarship, and the most linguistically up-to-date of current scholarly translations from the original languages. For all of these reasons, I have chosen the CEB translation for this study. (for more information

about the scholarship of each translation, read the prefaces, forewords, and introductions located in front of each of your Bibles, which was the source of the scholarship of this section). Please remember, though, that no translation is perfect, and that using another translation is a great way to enhance your understanding of the text. Just because this study has the text printed in the CEB translation does not mean you are not encouraged when you are curious or unsure to compare it to other translations, or to simply read this in whichever translation you are most comfortable studying in. When looking at translations, while some are better than others as far as scholarship, the best Bible translation is the one that actually gets read!

- ii. **Format:** This study is divided into a daily plan. Each day represents only a few minutes of reading and contemplation. There are also Thursday video studies that will be linked on the corresponding days. These will replace our weekly Thursday Thoughts during Lent. This study in many places also focuses on important information that lies outside of the Biblical text. This includes historical, linguistic, cultural, and additional information and insights that help shape the understanding of the text. Citations for these are given in-text wherever possible. If anything has been omitted, it was not an intentional effort. Additional resources and works consulted are listed at the end of this study. Sunday devotions will show the readings and leave space for notes from worship, but do note the readings will be the same as the readings during worship. Going to worship will complete the Sunday and Ash Wednesday devotions! Those unable to attend will note that on Sundays as well as on Ash Wednesday, recorded messages are linked for easy access.
- iii. **Participation:** Of course, the emphasis of this study is to read through an entire Gospel in one Lenten season. Some, including many of our children and youth, have not had the opportunity to do this practice. You are free to participate or skip any parts of the study that you choose. The Kingdom of God does not require your participation. You are, however, encouraged heartily to participate in this study that is designed to bring you closer to God and to the church in this Lenten season so that you might be inspired by the reading of the Gospel. Sometimes, it can feel like we just need a little more reading and study of God's word to really bring us into our calling more deeply. In just a few minutes each day, we hope this gives you the opportunity to be more familiar with the Gospel of Mark and to feel more confident in your faith and calling because of that!
- iv. **What is the fast that God requires?** Fasting is a long-standing Christian tradition during Lent, going back to the very first Christians we have on record. John Wesley said, "The man who never fasts is no more in the way to heaven than the man who never prays." In other words, it is an important standard Christian practice. Lent was the traditional season of receiving new members into the faith. Therefore, it was dedicated

to intensive learning and personal growth in faith, capped off by Baptisms and ordinations on Easter morning. Initiates would often spend the entirety of Lent fasting and set apart in intensive study. Then on Easter morning, they would experience Baptism, or if they were entering the priesthood, ordination. In the early days, they would remove clothing, be anointed head to toe with oil, and (sometimes still unclothed) would be baptized in the rising sun to signify that they had died to the world and been risen in Christ, reborn as a new creation of God and dedicated to service of the Lord. For obvious reasons, we do not require such a commitment to become a member of the church. We do, however, encourage all our participants take a time of Lenten fasting to be able to concentrate more fully on study and commitment to their faith. This study falls within that tradition. It is a way of saying that we are willing to give up a few minutes every day, to fast on our activity in order to focus on God, to the practice of studying the Gospel so that we can then commit ourselves more fully to Christ in the coming season of resurrection! We don't do it every day, but for six short weeks, we commit to doing just a little bit more. That is our Lenten fast. In Isaiah 58, we are challenged to a different kind of fast: "releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated and breaking every yoke." In Hebrew traditions, yoke does not just mean oppression; it is what the people of God used to refer to the law. Breaking the yoke meant understanding and freeing the people from difficult and burdensome laws and instead embracing the law of love that undergirds all others. To do that, we must study the life of Jesus. Reading the Gospel of Mark is a Lenten Fast, one that breaks the yoke of the law and instead insists upon the heart of the law. But if we do not know the stories, how can we take upon ourselves the yoke of Christ? Our fast this year is not one of food or diet, but one of justice and replacing the oppressive burden of the yoke with the joy of love and service, as we learn more about who our Lord is so that we can love better.

- v. Welcome! Welcome to Lent and to this study! May it be for you a gift of God's grace in a season of rededication and learning! Use this study as completely or as basically as it is helpful for you. If you do not use it, I still pray that you are able to read through the Gospel of Mark in this Lenten Season in order to immerse yourself in the oldest of the Gospels and to be able to talk about the gospel with your friends here at New Hope in these next six weeks. Sometimes it is such a holy thing for all of us to "be on the same page," at the same time! My hope for us is to be on the same page all of Lent, and for that page to be the Gospel story!

Day 1: Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026

Today's Reading: From Mark Chapter 1

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, **2** happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

Look, I am sending my messenger before you.

He will prepare your way,

3 *a voice shouting in the wilderness:*

“Prepare the way for the Lord;

make his paths straight.”

4 John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. **5** Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. **6** John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. **7** He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. **8** I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

9 About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. **10** While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. **11** And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

12 At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. **13** He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

14 After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, **15** saying, “Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”

Meditation on the Reading:

This is a unique way to begin the Gospel story! Mark is the only gospel that begins with Jesus as an adult. There is no birth narrative in this book. For the author of Mark, the most important thing about Jesus was not just that he was like us, but that he was special and divine. You will see as we proceed through Mark that we mere humans appear somewhat normal, but Jesus stands out. He may be a person like us, but he chooses to be different than us by having a unique way of seeing and fulfilling the scriptures we thought we knew. This book is short and to the point, and it portrays a Messiah who turns the world upside down, not just by being human,

but by being like God in ways none of us imagined God to be. Mark doesn't present this as unusual, though, but as though upside down is the most normal thing in the world. And it starts this way from the very first chapter.

Questions to ponder:

Consider these things from the reading today as you meditate:

1. This happened just like we knew it would. Of course it happened this way! Consider how the first three verses define the book of Mark as a document which reports events that should be expected. For Mark, of course these things happened; scripture said they would. Do you feel like these things that happen are what the people of Jesus' time would have really expected? Do you always expect Jesus? If not, should you?
2. The description of John in verses 4-8 should make us think of another Biblical character. There was a strange and powerful prophet who used to dress like this and who spent his life around the region of the Jordan, as well. Yes! Isaiah is the prophet who John is looking at and sounding like in this reading! And that would make the people of Jesus' time think of John as a prophet like Isaiah. What might their expectation of a prophet be?
3. Anointing the king was one of the main jobs of Biblical prophets. If John is being seen here as a Biblical prophet, how is Jesus' baptism like the anointing of a new king?
4. Jesus' first act after being baptized is to invite others to follow him. How do you invite others to follow you in your journey of faithfulness?

(Ash Wednesday Evening Worship Reading – Meditation at Church @ 7pm)

¹⁶As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷“Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” ¹⁸Right away, they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee’s sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. ²⁰At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

Please note that worship tonight is at 7pm. The meditation on the reading from Mark 1:16-20 will be shared at that time. Come join us in person or watch online! Notes from worship:

Day 2: Thursday, February 19, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark Chapter 1*

²¹ Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. ²² The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. ²³ Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, ²⁴ “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God.”

²⁵ “Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out.

²⁷ Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, “What’s this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands unclean spirits and they obey him!” ²⁸ Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.

²⁹ After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. ³¹ He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

Meditation on the Reading: (watch the short [Thursday Thoughts Video](#) today)

As shared in the *Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary*, “the very first event of Jesus’ ministry...is one that expresses his authority.” Why does this matter? Others depended on the authority of scribes and pharisees to interpret the law. This early depiction of Jesus is Mark’s way to establish Jesus as one with even more authority than the “experts.” When Jesus commands, even the unclean spirits scream and run! That is far more authority than someone who just makes decisions based upon a book. This is a new kind of authority where Jesus can not only know and interpret the law, but he is able to demand obedience. Later, Jesus goes with his new disciples to one of the friends’ homes. There, his mother was ill. In this time, it was common for people to assume that those who were ill had a demon or had sinned, or that perhaps their parents had sinned. No one could possibly be sick unless evil of some kind was involved. Only God was attributed the ability to forgive. Therefore, being able to cure carried with it the authority of God themselves! Jesus cures her with the authority that is now clearly God’s authority, in case there was any question. Furthermore, in this chapter, we will continue to see Jesus bring healing to many! The first chapter of Mark poses the question that the rest of the book will seek to answer: Who is this rabbi, this man with the authority of God?



[Week 1 Video](#)

Questions to ponder:

Consider these things from the reading today as you meditate:

1. When you first started learning about Jesus, how would you describe him? Has that view changed? How?
2. What does it mean to have the authority of God? What kind of authority do we have?
3. Jesus uses his authority to cast out or to drive away evil. Do we invite evil with ours or do we drive it away? How might those two things look?
4. How do you think this kind of ministry makes the “experts” in the law look?
5. The person with the unclean spirit is in the temple and says that they know who Jesus is: The Holy One. Jesus silences the one who is from the start identifying him as the Messiah. Why do you think this is something Jesus wants silenced? What could it mean in this text that the unclean spirit is in the synagogue?
6. The setting changes here, but does the authority change? No. Jesus is able both in public and in private to bring forth the authority of God. Why might that be important?

Don't forget to watch the [Thursday Thoughts Video!](#)

Day 3: Friday, February 20, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark Chapter 1*

³²That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered near the door. ³⁴He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him.

³⁵Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. ³⁶Simon and those with him tracked him down. ³⁷When they found him, they told him, "Everyone's looking for you!"

³⁸He replied, "Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." ³⁹He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

⁴⁰A man with a skin disease approached Jesus, fell to his knees, and begged, "If you want, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Incensed, Jesus reached out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do want to. Be clean." ⁴²Instantly, the skin disease left him, and he was clean. ⁴³Sternly, Jesus sent him away, ⁴⁴saying, "Don't say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice for your cleansing that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them." ⁴⁵Instead, he went out and started talking freely and spreading the news so that Jesus wasn't able to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, but people came to him from everywhere.

Friday's Creative Reflection:

Jesus had trouble being alone in the reading today. Do you ever feel like you can't get a moment to yourself? How do you balance your demanding life and time for yourself? Take a moment alone for yourself today and do something creative that feeds your soul (art, cooking, woodwork, reading, writing, hiking, etc.) What did you do? (log your creativity below)

Day 4: Saturday, February 21, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 2*

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. ²So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. ³Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. ⁴They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!"

⁶Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, ⁷"Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins." ⁸Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? ⁹Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? ¹⁰But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed, ¹¹"Get up, take your mat, and go home."

¹²Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

¹³Jesus went out beside the lake again. The whole crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴As he continued along, he saw Levi, Alphaeus' son, sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Levi got up and followed him. ¹⁵Jesus sat down to eat at Levi's house. Many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus and his disciples. Indeed, many of them had become his followers. ¹⁶When some of the legal experts from among the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, "Why is he eating with sinners and tax collectors?"

¹⁷When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners."

Biblical Culture Saturday:

Where is Capernaum? It is a village located along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. In Mark, several references are made to events occurring in or around Capernaum, especially the synagogue. This is in the northernmost area of Israel at the time, in a region that was filled with Gentile and especially Samaritan influences. As a part of the Northern Kingdom before the Exile,

this area was overthrown first by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians, leaving this region subject to strong influences from the North and East. Babylonians believed not only in demons that had negative influences on the world, but also in positive demons. As you read about Jesus' interaction with demons in this gospel, think about how the author may be influenced by this cultural belief of the region.

Also remember that unlike the temple in Jerusalem, a synagogue is not divided. People of all kinds can gather at the synagogue. In fact, the word "synagogue" means "meeting" or "bringing together." These stories of unclean people, people with demons, and Gentiles stand in stark contrast to stories of the temple in Jerusalem. What we will see in Mark is that the temple is

seen as a place needing to be cleansed or even destroyed, while the synagogues are places of teaching, healing, and grace. Jesus, a man of authority, has power over the temple and the corruption it represents. At the synagogue, however, Jesus has authority over even the Gentiles. It is interesting to note, though, that Jesus often seems much harsher to Jewish characters than to Gentile characters, scolding them repeatedly for not following their own beliefs. This is not an antisemitic viewpoint; Jesus is not criticizing Judaism here, but rather hypocrisy. It is always important to note this, or there is a temptation to blame Judaism for the bad parts of what is genuinely just human nature. What is clear as we read that the story, though, is that it is set far from the temple practices of Jerusalem.



Questions to ponder:

1. What do the legal experts in this text represent and how does Jesus appear in this text? How does Jesus prove his authority?
2. Jesus in this section is questioned about whether he and his followers are being "good" enough. Why is this so important, and what is Jesus' response?

Day 5: Sunday, February 22, 2026

(Companion to Worship)

Reading from Worship:

¹⁸ John's disciples and the Pharisees had a habit of fasting. Some people asked Jesus, "Why do John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples fast, but yours don't?"

¹⁹ Jesus said, "The wedding guests can't fast while the groom is with them, can they? As long as they have the groom with them, they can't fast. ²⁰ But the days will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

²¹ "No one sews a piece of new, unshrunk cloth on old clothes; otherwise, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and makes a worse tear. ²² No one pours new wine into old leather wineskins; otherwise, the wine would burst the wineskins and the wine would be lost and the wineskins destroyed. But new wine is for new wineskins."

²³ Jesus went through the wheat fields on the Sabbath. As the disciples made their way, they were picking the heads of wheat. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look! Why are they breaking the Sabbath law?"

²⁵ He said to them, "Haven't you ever read what David did when he was in need, when he and those with him were hungry? ²⁶ During the time when Abiathar was high priest, David went into God's house and ate the bread of the presence, which only the priests were allowed to eat. He also gave bread to those who were with him." ²⁷ Then he said, "The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren't created for the Sabbath. ²⁸ This is why the Human One is Lord even over the Sabbath."

Message Today: Challenging the Status Quo

Day 6: Monday, February 23, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 3*

Jesus returned to the synagogue. A man with a withered hand was there. ²Wanting to bring charges against Jesus, they were watching Jesus closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. ³He said to the man with the withered hand, "Step up where people can see you." ⁴Then he said to them, "Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they said nothing. ⁵Looking around at them with anger, deeply grieved at their unyielding hearts, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he did, and his hand was made healthy. ⁶At that, the Pharisees got together with the supporters of Herod to plan how to destroy Jesus.

⁷Jesus left with his disciples and went to the lake. A large crowd followed him because they had heard what he was doing. They were from Galilee, ⁸Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the area surrounding Tyre and Sidon. ⁹Jesus told his disciples to get a small boat ready for him so the crowd wouldn't crush him. ¹⁰He had healed so many people that everyone who was sick pushed forward so that they could touch him. ¹¹Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down at his feet and shouted, "You are God's Son!" ¹²But he strictly ordered them not to reveal who he was.

¹³Jesus went up on a mountain and called those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve and called them apostles. He appointed them to be with him, to be sent out to preach, ¹⁵and to have authority to throw out demons. ¹⁶He appointed twelve: Peter, a name he gave Simon; ¹⁷James and John, Zebedee's sons, whom he nicknamed Boanerges, which means "sons of Thunder"; ¹⁸and Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, Alphaeus' son; Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean; ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

Monday Mission: Try doing one or more of these mission ideas!

Community: Help bring healing to the community by gathering a first aid kit to share at a community food pantry. Items to include: Bandages, thermometer, light blanket/throw, instant ice pack, hot hands, etc.

Family: Give each member of your family (whether there is one of you or way more) a disciple nickname. You each need to choose one thing to do to help someone else that makes sense for your nickname. For example, if you are "Daughter of Joy" you could send a funny (but nice) card to someone who needs cheering up.

On Your Own: In Japan, professional pushers shove people onto the subway to fit more people inside before the doors close. Jesus tries to avoid being crushed by the crowd. Do one thing today to help someone who feels crowded or crushed. Make space for someone in a creative way!

Day 7: Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 3*

²⁰ Jesus entered a house. A crowd gathered again so that it was impossible for him and his followers even to eat. ²¹ When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, "He's out of his mind!"

²² The legal experts came down from Jerusalem. Over and over they charged, "He's possessed by Beelzebul. He throws out demons with the authority of the ruler of demons."

²³ When Jesus called them together he spoke to them in a parable: "How can Satan throw Satan out? ²⁴ A kingdom involved in civil war will collapse. ²⁵ And a house torn apart by divisions will collapse. ²⁶ If Satan rebels against himself and is divided, then he can't endure. He's done for. ²⁷ No one gets into the house of a strong person and steals anything without first tying up the strong person. Only then can the house be burglarized. ²⁸ I assure you that human beings will be forgiven for everything, for all sins and insults of every kind. ²⁹ But whoever insults the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever." ³⁰ He said this because the legal experts were saying, "He's possessed by an evil spirit."

³¹ His mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word to him, calling for him. ³² A crowd was seated around him, and those sent to him said, "Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you."

³³ He replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" ³⁴ Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister, and mother."

Meditation on the Reading:

Beelzebul comes from Ba'al-zebul, which means "lord of the flies." It became known as the king of the demons by about the time Mark was written. Ba'al is the title given by Israel to foreign deities, with the latter part of their name identifying what traits the deity is associated with. Ironically, Ba'al means, "He took ownership of," and is also translated, "marriage." Yes, the word for a false God, foreign God, or demon translates also as "marriage." Hebrew is a very complex language! It is the root of the deity Hebrews called "Bel," which in Babylonian would translate as Marduke (the strongest God of Babylon, who created earth, was responsible for creating the first rainbow, etc.). For more information about the Babylonian system of beliefs, you might consider reading, [*Enuma Elish*](#).

The "demons" here, then, are previously named foreign gods, not Jewish or Christian deities. The idea of demons was beginning to morph into a new understanding, which later (not yet) in the interpretation of the biblical texts would become closer to "fallen angels." Demons in the text of Mark, though, are often seen as neither good nor evil. They are seen as non-created, often unseen foreign entities able to occupy weaker hosts, such as people who are sick or animals. This is influenced less by those who would

identify demons as angels and more by social influences such as the cult of Isis. The depictions of Isis during this time and leading up to this time show Isis as a beautiful woman with wings of light, often accompanied by a sun disc on her head. Sound familiar? That is where the imagery of female angels came from. Before that, angels were always depicted as they were described in the Bible: quite frightening and never female! The female angel with halos and glowing light was an homage to the image of the pagan god, Isis. The author of Mark, like others in his time, was influenced by the predominance of Isis in their culture. In lore, she guided people to the afterlife, accepted people from all walks of life, performed miracles, and was the embodiment of love that could bring significant transformation to the life and afterlife of members of the cult. You can see why many connect her story to that of Jesus.

This is not to say the author of Mark made Jesus look like Isis. These are two different traditions. Many parts of Isis do not match any parts of the story of Jesus. It is important to note, though, that the reason certain attributes of Jesus were emphasized more than others was that there were in several areas traits that corresponded in some way to the familiar pagan deity of Isis. People notice correlation. Many of the correlations that exist shape the way Mark chooses to talk about Jesus and other religious experiences in the Bible so that they could be understood more easily at the time. Did the author of Mark once believe in Isis? Perhaps, but that is highly unlikely. Did he know about the cult and its beliefs? Most definitely! Did that influence which stories and experiences the author of Mark chooses to include in the text? Without a doubt! The reason some of the new ideas that were not a part of the Old Testament belief system are in the book of Mark is not that the author copied the cult of Isis, but that readers had questions whose answers were not in the Old Testament which needed to be explained because of the influence of the Cult of Isis and other cults in Mark's era. What do we believe about angels? What do we believe about demons (remember they started as "foreign gods," and Isis is a foreign god!)? What do we believe about spirits and the afterlife now that there is a cult very much concerned about that topic? These kinds of questions caused the authors of the New Testament to speak answers to things they had not needed to speak to before. Therefore, we will see new answers and new expressions of faith come forward as Jesus confronts these beliefs and Mark records the response of Jesus to the questions of a people with a different culture. They may seem strange to us, but they brought clarity in their day. Christianity does not steal from Isis but rather confronts paganism and helps people connect to God through Christ instead.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) Why might Jesus' family want to attribute Jesus' power to a demon? Does his family know who he is? Is it easy for us to fall for another tradition's answers when ours is silent?
- 2) Why does Jesus say what he does about family, keeping in mind that his family just accused him of being possessed by the king of demons? What is he really saying about his family?
- 3) Imagery of our faith is often borrowed from other places because we do not know how to imagine our own beliefs. How is borrowing the image of Isis similar to Jesus' family trying to call him possessed by Beelzebul? Do we ever borrow ideas from another group because we are having trouble making sense of our own? Can you think of an example?

Day 8: Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Today's Reading: From Mark, Chapter 4

Jesus began to teach beside the lake again. Such a large crowd gathered that he climbed into a boat there on the lake. He sat in the boat while the whole crowd was nearby on the shore. ²He said many things to them in parables. While teaching them, he said, ³“Listen to this! A farmer went out to scatter seed. ⁴As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path; and the birds came and ate it. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn't deep. ⁶When the sun came up, it scorched the plants; and they dried up because they had no roots. ⁷Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked the seeds, and they produced nothing. ⁸Other seed fell into good soil and bore fruit. Upon growing and increasing, the seed produced in one case a yield of thirty to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of one hundred to one.” ⁹He said, “Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!”

¹⁰When they were alone, the people around Jesus, along with the Twelve, asked him about the parables. ¹¹He said to them, “The secret of God's kingdom has been given to you, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables. ¹²This is so that they can look and see but have no insight, and they can hear but not understand. Otherwise, they might turn their lives around and be forgiven.

¹³“Don't you understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴The farmer scatters the word. ¹⁵This is the meaning of the seed that fell on the path: When the word is scattered and people hear it, right away Satan comes and steals the word that was planted in them. ¹⁶Here's the meaning of the seed that fell on rocky ground: When people hear the word, they immediately receive it joyfully. ¹⁷Because they have no roots, they last for only a little while. When they experience distress or abuse because of the word, they immediately fall away. ¹⁸Others are like the seed scattered among the thorny plants. These are the ones who have heard the word; ¹⁹but the worries of this life, the false appeal of wealth, and the desire for more things break in and choke the word, and it bears no fruit. ²⁰The seed scattered on good soil are those who hear the word and embrace it. They bear fruit, in one case a yield of thirty to one, in another case sixty to one, and in another case one hundred to one.”

Wednesday Word Study:

Parable: παραβολή (parabōlā) etymology: para (across, over) ballō (throw, cast)

Related words you might know: ἐκβάλλω (ekbalō): to cast out, as in a demon

The word for parable comes from the Greek prefix para and the Greek verb ballō, meaning to *throw alongside*, or some would say *to cross over*. A parable is a story that takes an idea from one context to illustrate it in another. It is a type of applied metaphor that draws a parallel between two situations. One of the trademarks of a parable is that it is not explained, although this is one of the parables that breaks the mold for teaching purposes.

Question to ponder:

How does this story thrown alongside our human nature help make our faith understandable?

Day 9: Thursday, February 26, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 4*

²¹ Jesus said to them, "Does anyone bring in a lamp in order to put it under a basket or a bed? Shouldn't it be placed on a lampstand? ²² Everything hidden will be revealed, and everything secret will come out into the open. ²³ Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!"

²⁴ He said to them, "Listen carefully! God will evaluate you with the same standard you use to evaluate others. Indeed, you will receive even more. ²⁵ Those who have will receive more, but as for those who don't have, even what they don't have will be taken away from them."

²⁶ Then Jesus said, "This is what God's kingdom is like. It's as though someone scatters seed on the ground, ²⁷ then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn't know how. ²⁸ The earth produces crops all by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain. ²⁹ Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it's harvesttime."

³⁰ He continued, "What's a good image for God's kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? ³¹ Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; ³² but when it's planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade."

³³ With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear. ³⁴ He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them.

³⁵ Later that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." ³⁶ They left the crowd and took him in the boat just as he was. Other boats followed along.

³⁷ Gale-force winds arose, and waves crashed against the boat so that the boat was swamped. ³⁸ But Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow. They woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we're drowning?"

³⁹ He got up and gave orders to the wind, and he said to the lake, "Silence! Be still!" The wind settled down and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Jesus asked them, "Why are you frightened? Don't you have faith yet?"

⁴¹ Overcome with awe, they said to each other, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"



[Week 2 Video](#)

*Please watch today's [Thursday Thoughts Video](#) *

Day 10: Friday, February 27, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 5*

Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the lake, to the region of the Gerasenes. ²As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out of the tombs. ³This man lived among the tombs, and no one was ever strong enough to restrain him, even with a chain. ⁴He had been secured many times with leg irons and chains, but he broke the chains and smashed the leg irons. No one was tough enough to control him. ⁵Night and day in the tombs and the hills, he would howl and cut himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from far away, he ran and knelt before him, ⁷shouting, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!"

⁸He said this because Jesus had already commanded him, "Unclean spirit, come out of the man!" ⁹Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He responded, "Legion is my name, because we are many." ¹⁰They pleaded with Jesus not to send them out of that region.

¹¹A large herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside. ¹²"Send us into the pigs!" they begged. "Let us go into the pigs!" ¹³Jesus gave them permission, so the unclean spirits left the man and went into the pigs. Then the herd of about two thousand pigs rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned.

¹⁴Those who tended the pigs ran away and told the story in the city and in the countryside. People came to see what had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to be demon-possessed. They saw the very man who had been filled with many demons sitting there fully dressed and completely sane, and they were filled with awe. ¹⁶Those who had actually seen what had happened to the demon-possessed man told the others about the pigs. ¹⁷Then they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region.

¹⁸While he was climbing into the boat, the one who had been demon-possessed pleaded with Jesus to let him come along as one of his disciples. ¹⁹But Jesus wouldn't allow it. "Go home to your own people," Jesus said, "and tell them what the Lord has done for you and how he has shown you mercy." ²⁰The man went away and began to proclaim in the Ten Cities all that Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Meditation:

This is an interesting story, even for Mark! It seems to use imagery and spirituality that would be common in this region to frame the story rather than a more Jewish sounding narrative. This is described very much the way Gentiles might have described these events. It reveals two important things: 1) The Gentiles had stories unique to them about the miracles of Jesus that survived in the Bible, and 2) Jesus has power over the deities of the Gentiles, as well as the world of the Jews. This speaks again to one of Mark's favorite subjects: the authority of Jesus.

Creative Reflection: Draw a sketch of what the authority of Jesus looks like in your life.

Day 11: Saturday, February 28, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 5*

²¹ Jesus crossed the lake again, and on the other side a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. ²² Jairus, one of the synagogue leaders, came forward. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded with him, “My daughter is about to die. Please, come and place your hands on her so that she can be healed and live.” ²⁴ So Jesus went with him.

A swarm of people were following Jesus, crowding in on him. ²⁵ A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a lot under the care of many doctors and had spent everything she had without getting any better. In fact, she had gotten worse. ²⁷ Because she had heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. ²⁸ She was thinking, If I can just touch his clothes, I'll be healed. ²⁹ Her bleeding stopped immediately, and she sensed in her body that her illness had been healed.

³⁰ At that very moment, Jesus recognized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹ His disciples said to him, “Don't you see the crowd pressing against you? Yet you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² But Jesus looked around carefully to see who had done it.

³³ The woman, full of fear and trembling, came forward. Knowing what had happened to her, she fell down in front of Jesus and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He responded, “Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace, healed from your disease.”

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking with her, messengers came from the synagogue leader's house, saying to Jairus, “Your daughter has died. Why bother the teacher any longer?”

³⁶ But Jesus overheard their report and said to the synagogue leader, “Don't be afraid; just keep trusting.” ³⁷ He didn't allow anyone to follow him except Peter, James, and John, James' brother. ³⁸ They came to the synagogue leader's house, and he saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, “What's all this commotion and crying about? The child isn't dead. She's only sleeping.” ⁴⁰ They laughed at him, but he threw them all out. Then, taking the child's parents and his disciples with him, he went to the room where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her hand, he said to her, “*Talitha koum*,” which means, “Young woman, get up.” ⁴² Suddenly the young woman got up and began to walk around. She was 12 years old. They were shocked! ⁴³ He gave them strict orders that no one should know what had happened. Then he told them to give her something to eat.

Biblical Culture Saturday:

Talitha koum is an Aramaic phrase: טַלְיָתָא קוּמַי. Maybe today is a good day to learn more about Aramaic, and its cultural implications to the text. Aramaic is a dialect of Hebrew (sort of a cross between Hebrew and Syriac), which developed in the Assyrian portions of what once was Israel. Remember that Israel divided into the Northern Kingdom and Judah, with ten of the twelve Tribes

of Israel in the North and two in the South. Later, the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria about 140 years prior to the fall of Judah to Babylon in the south. This long exposure to the Syriac language in the previously Hebrew area gave birth to the language of Aramaic. Jesus' ministry was primarily centered around the Sea of Galilee, located at the current northern border of Israel in the area whose primary language was Aramaic. It would have been the native language of Jesus and the disciples. The use of an Aramaic phrase in this text dates it early, while also confirming the culture of Northern Israel as the culture native to the author of Mark. When this is paired with the very poor structure and simplicity of the Greek in which this gospel is written, clearly the author is more likely to be a part of the same Aramaic culture as Jesus, as opposed to the Hellenist culture of the author of John or the Hebraic influence of the authors of Luke/Acts and Matthew. Hebraic is Hebrew influenced by the Arabic language, common to southern Israel.

This is important as we read Mark, understanding that the culture represented in Mark is both most authentic to the actual story, but also that it is one step farther from our own culture. In other words, Mark has been written by someone in their second language and then translated through several cultures on its journey to reach us in modern English. For those who have played the telephone game, you might understand the implications. Mark is the gospel whose sources often do not agree as centuries of scholars took some liberties in "fixing" the text, in addition to later scholars changing the ending.

In other words, we will see some things in Mark that remind us of the importance of textual criticism in understanding the meaning of this gospel, while also recognizing the gift of a gospel that pulls us much closer to the culture of Jesus than the other gospel texts will.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) Why is understanding the culture and context of a text important to understanding its meaning?
- 2) How could the fact that this is written by someone who is not a native Greek speaker be important? How would a story look like if you tried to write it in another language without having Google?
- 3) Aramaic is read right to left. Do you think seeing the world right to left instead of left to right could be a factor in understanding? Use your own imagination and think of ways that reading left to right instead of right to left might influence other parts of your life.

Day 12: Sunday, March 1, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 6*

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown. His disciples followed him. ²On the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were surprised. "Where did this man get all this? What's this wisdom he's been given? What about the powerful acts accomplished through him? ³Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't he Mary's son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" They were repulsed by him and fell into sin.

⁴Jesus said to them, "Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns, among their relatives, and in their own households." ⁵He was unable to do any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶He was appalled by their disbelief.

Today's Message: You Think You Know Me, But You Don't

Sermon Notes:

Day 13: Monday, March 2, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 6*

Then Jesus traveled through the surrounding villages teaching.

⁷He called for the Twelve and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. ⁸He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a walking stick—no bread, no bags, and no money in their belts. ⁹He told them to wear sandals but not to put on two shirts. ¹⁰He said, “Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. ¹¹If a place doesn’t welcome you or listen to you, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them.” ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives. ¹³They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.

¹⁴Herod the king heard about these things, because the name of Jesus had become well-known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and this is why miraculous powers are at work through him.” ¹⁵Others were saying, “He is Elijah.” Still others were saying, “He is a prophet like one of the ancient prophets.” ¹⁶But when Herod heard these rumors, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised to life.”

¹⁷He said this because Herod himself had arranged to have John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother Philip. Herod had married her, ¹⁸but John told Herod, “It’s against the law for you to marry your brother’s wife!” ¹⁹So Herodias had it in for John. She wanted to kill him, but she couldn’t. ²⁰This was because Herod respected John. He regarded him as a righteous and holy person, so he protected him. John’s words greatly confused Herod, yet he enjoyed listening to him.

²¹Finally, the time was right. It was on one of Herod’s birthdays, when he had prepared a feast for his high-ranking officials and military officers and Galilee’s leading residents. ²²Herod’s daughter Herodias^[a] came in and danced, thrilling Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the young woman, “Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” ²³Then he swore to her, “Whatever you ask I will give to you, even as much as half of my kingdom.”

²⁴She left the banquet hall and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?”

“John the Baptist’s head,” Herodias replied.

²⁵Hurrying back to the ruler, she made her request: “I want you to give me John the Baptist’s head on a plate, right this minute.” ²⁶Although the king was upset, because of his solemn pledge and his guests, he didn’t want to refuse her. ²⁷So he ordered a guard to bring John’s head. The guard went to the prison, cut off John’s head, ²⁸brought his head on a plate, and gave it to the young woman, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹When John’s disciples heard what had happened, they came and took his dead body and laid it in a tomb.

Monday Mission:

Community: When John the Baptist died, his followers were very upset. It is hard to lose someone you know to death. New Hope has a ministry of sending booklets to help those who have lost beloved spouses or children. Share a small donation to the church to help purchase healing books for those who lost loved ones this year.

Family: Sometimes we ask for the wrong things from the people in our family. Think of a time you have asked for or even demanded the wrong thing. Write a card to apologize to the person in your family that you hurt.

On Your Own: Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs to do good works and spread the message of the faith. Invite a friend to church this week so that you can have someone to do good things with!

Day 13: Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 6*

³⁰The apostles returned to Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. ³¹Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. He said to the apostles, "Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while." ³²They departed in a boat by themselves for a deserted place.

³³Many people saw them leaving and recognized them, so they ran ahead from all the cities and arrived before them. ³⁴When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things.

³⁵Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, "This is an isolated place, and it's already late in the day. ³⁶Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves."

³⁷He replied, "You give them something to eat."

But they said to him, "Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months' pay^[a] and give it to them to eat?"

³⁸He said to them, "How much bread do you have? Take a look."

After checking, they said, "Five loaves of bread and two fish."

³⁹He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. ⁴⁰They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to sit before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²Everyone ate until they were full. ⁴³They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴About five thousand had eaten.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) There were a lot more people who came to Jesus. This follows the death of John the Baptist, and Jesus calls these people, "Sheep without a shepherd." Explain how this is the first recorded funeral lunch.
- 2) Why is it important for us to do ministry to families following funerals?
- 3) What might Jesus had shared with this group who needed a teacher after John's death?
- 4) Some people speculate that there were some with food who shared as the baskets came by while others received, and that the miracle was the sharing not in a miraculous appearance of new food. Others believe in a miraculous transformation like the story of water being turned into wine at the wedding at Cana. Still others believe that Jesus made food appear as it was needed. How do you think this miracle happened, and what influence does this miracle have on your faith?

Day 14: Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Today's Reading: From Mark, Chapter 6

⁴⁵ Right then, Jesus made his disciples get into a boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake, toward Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After saying good-bye to them, Jesus went up onto a mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ Evening came and the boat was in the middle of the lake, but he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ He saw his disciples struggling. They were trying to row forward, but the wind was blowing against them. Very early in the morning, he came to them, walking on the lake. He intended to pass by them. ⁴⁹ When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost and they screamed. ⁵⁰ Seeing him was terrifying to all of them. Just then he spoke to them, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ He got into the boat, and the wind settled down. His disciples were so baffled they were beside themselves. ⁵² That's because they hadn't understood about the loaves. Their minds had been closed so that they resisted God's ways.

⁵³ When Jesus and his disciples had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret, anchored the boat, ⁵⁴ and came ashore. People immediately recognized Jesus ⁵⁵ and ran around that whole region bringing sick people on their mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ Wherever he went—villages, cities, or farming communities—they would place the sick in the marketplaces and beg him to allow them to touch even the hem of his clothing. Everyone who touched him was healed.

Wednesday Word Study:

καὶ: (kī) etymology: kai (and, also, too)

Kai is an interesting word that is used over 9000 times in the New Testament, and over 500 times in the book of Mark alone. In this short section of text, the word appears 19 times! In Koine Greek, kai cannot just be properly translated as *and* although that is the most common translation. In reality, it is a conjunction that implies a joining together of statements or ideas that moves them along. The CEB translates it less than some other translations because of this understanding of its silent meaning. That is why you might see fewer "ands" in the CEB text than in some of the earlier translations. It is a grammatical structure that gives movement to a story rather than an actual word to translate in most contexts. Think of it like this: a regular paragraph is divided into sentences that have hard stops at the end. This slows the cadence of the paragraph so that when said aloud it has a certain timing. In Greek, often instead of ending sentences, they are joined together with the word "kai" which speeds the motion from one sentence to the next. It provides fluidity and connection to a section of text. It sometimes is more emphatic and should be translated with "and" or "also," but often, it does not need translated at all. If you feel like the New Testament has a lot of occurrences of the word, "and," it is probably because some translations felt the need to translate every instance of *kai* when it is often unnecessary. Instead, when you see a lot of "ands" in a biblical text, remember to be a little more excited, a little more fluid, and a bit faster when you read that part. Why might a non-native speaker frequently use a word that is used to make a text more fluid?

Day 15: Thursday, March 5, 2026

Today's Reading: From Mark, Chapter 7

The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. ²They saw some of his disciples eating food with unclean hands. (They were eating without first ritually purifying their hands through washing. ³The Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat without first washing their hands carefully. This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. ⁴Upon returning from the marketplace, they don't eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.) ⁵So the Pharisees and legal experts asked Jesus, "Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?"

⁶He replied, "Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He wrote,

*This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far away from me.*

⁷*Their worship of me is empty
since they teach instructions that are human words.*

⁸You ignore God's commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you." ⁹Jesus continued, "Clearly, you are experts at rejecting God's commandment in order to establish these rules. ¹⁰Moses said, *Honor your father and your mother*, and *The person who speaks against father or mother will certainly be put to death*. ¹¹But you say, 'If you tell your father or mother, "Everything I'm expected to contribute to you is *corban*(that is, a gift I'm giving to God)," ¹²then you are no longer required to care for your father or mother.' ¹³In this way you do away with God's word in favor of the rules handed down to you, which you pass on to others. And you do a lot of other things just like that."

¹⁴Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."

¹⁷After leaving the crowd, he entered a house where his disciples asked him about that riddle. ¹⁸He said to them, "Don't you understand either? Don't you know that nothing from the outside that enters a person has the power to contaminate? ¹⁹That's because it doesn't enter into the heart but into the stomach, and it goes out into the sewer." By saying this, Jesus declared that no food could contaminate a person in God's sight. ²⁰"It's what comes out of a person that contaminates someone in God's sight," he said. ²¹"It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, ²²adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight."

*Please watch today's Thursday Thoughts Video

Day 16: Friday, March 6, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 7*

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. ²⁵ In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁸ But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

²⁹ "Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." ³⁰ When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

³¹ After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. ³² Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. ³³ Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, "*Ephphatha*," which means, "Open up." ³⁵ At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly.

³⁶ Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. ³⁷ People were overcome with wonder, saying, "He does everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can't speak."

Friday's Creative Reflection:

Of course we are creating something yummy today! And it is easy enough for ANYONE, even kids and scary bad cooks! Watch this video for the instructions for this quick, easy, and inexpensive crumb dump cake. While you are eating it, remember this story from scripture!

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1C3eXotgRn/> (video link for this recipe)

Ingredients: 2 cans of fruit pie filling of your choice (I choose blueberry!); one cake mix of your choice (if you are not sure what to choose, pick yellow. Yellow is always okay!); 2/3 c. melted butter

Spread pie filling in the bottom of a greased Texas sheet cake pan or a greased 9"x12" cake pan. Mix cake mix with melted butter to make course crumbs. Evenly spread over the top of the pie filling. Clean up your mess! It's easier to do it while the cake is cooking so that when it is done, you can enjoy not having as much to clean up! As you clean up, imagine the "dogs" from this story eating the crumbs.

Baking: Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes or until golden brown like on the video! Enjoy on its own or with ice cream! In this story, Jesus shares a heaping helping of healing with the woman. Maybe you should share your creation with someone and tell them the story, too!

Day 17: Saturday, March 7, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 8*

In those days there was another large crowd with nothing to eat. Jesus called his disciples and told them, ²“I feel sorry for the crowd because they have been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. ³If I send them away hungry to their homes, they won't have enough strength to travel, for some have come a long distance.”

⁴His disciples responded, “How can anyone get enough food in this wilderness to satisfy these people?”

⁵Jesus asked, “How much bread do you have?”

They said, “Seven loaves.”

⁶He told the crowd to sit on the ground. He took the seven loaves, gave thanks, broke them apart, and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they gave the bread to the crowd. ⁷They also had a few fish. He said a blessing over them, then gave them to the disciples to hand out also. ⁸They ate until they were full. They collected seven baskets full of leftovers. ⁹This was a crowd of about four thousand people! Jesus sent them away, ¹⁰then got into a boat with his disciples and went over to the region of Dalmanutha.

¹¹The Pharisees showed up and began to argue with Jesus. To test him, they asked for a sign from heaven. ¹²With an impatient sigh, Jesus said, “Why does this generation look for a sign? I assure you that no sign will be given to it.” ¹³Leaving them, he got back in the boat and crossed to the other side of the lake.

¹⁴Jesus' disciples had forgotten to bring any bread, so they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵He gave them strict orders: “Watch out and be on your guard for the yeast of the Pharisees as well as the yeast of Herod.”

¹⁶The disciples discussed this among themselves, “He said this because we have no bread.”

¹⁷Jesus knew what they were discussing and said, “Why are you talking about the fact that you don't have any bread? Don't you grasp what has happened? Don't you understand? Are your hearts so resistant to what God is doing? ¹⁸Don't you have eyes? Why can't you see? Don't you have ears? Why can't you hear? Don't you remember? ¹⁹When I broke five loaves of bread for those five thousand people, how many baskets full of leftovers did you gather?”

They answered, “Twelve.”

²⁰“And when I broke seven loaves of bread for those four thousand people, how many baskets full of leftovers did you gather?”

They answered, “Seven.”

²¹Jesus said to them, “And you still don't understand?”

Biblical Culture Saturday:

In turn of the Common Era, four distinct Jewish sects dominated the Jewish landscape (along with a more widespread Common Judaism): Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes. Pharisees believed in preserving the purity of Jewish culture in the face of Greek and Roman influences. They believed in strict and literal interpretations of the law. In fact, they were so legalistic that they believed that oral law passed down into the culture of Judaism was equally as important as written law. The law codes, therefore, contained categories that literally included “unwritten rules” which held the same weight as those which were written. Not only that, but in a society that was predominantly illiterate and marginally literate, most people did not know which rules were written and which were not. Pharisees were trusted to carry the knowledge for each community.

In contrast Sadducees were guardians of the written language. They carried the responsibility of knowing the recorded language. They did not believe in authority beyond the written word and believed it in a very literal sense. Meaning beyond the literal fell, lost to time, during this period due to the emphasis on a literal interpretation of the written words. This was exacerbated by decrease in use of Hebrew in everyday affairs. As the Roman influence increased, Koine Greek, which was commonly spoken in the area due to the hellenistic influence upon the Jews in the northern reaches of what was once Israel (remember that the Sea of Galilee where most of the Gospel of Mark takes place is located at the very northern border of Israel’s influence, firmly in the Greek speaking parts of Israel), dominated. This was reinforced in the southern reaches of Jewish territories as the Roman Empire spread to the South, primarily because Koine Greek replaced Aramaic as the lingua franca of the region. As such, Hebrew became less prevalent. Aramaic continued in pockets, but its influence gave way to Koine Greek in heavily Roman areas and in rural areas, especially in the South, Arabic. When the common shared language of the area changed, new languages brought with them the loss of meaning of many words and idioms from the older written texts, specifically as practical Aramaic waned.

This was a turning point in the development of culture and linguistics in the region. Western historicity and spiritualism gripped the culture of the Mediterranean, changing the world forever. Humanity would never be able to think the same way again because of these massive changes in language. Sadducees tried to hold on to the written language in the midst of this. Pharisees tried to force the oral tradition to hold power over a world with a new way of speaking, though the world had already changed. From this point on, we would become a more “literal” world, depending upon written language, abandoning much of our old culture with every shift of language we would endure, and canonizing texts as a way to preserve language in order to petrify a culture that had already changed. It was not effective, and this method of pickling the church would not be long-sustained. Pharisees were later rendered functionally obsolete.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) Do we, like the Pharisees, try to control the volatility of change through our language in the church?
- 2) What can we do to more effectively hold on to the faith we love in the midst of change?

Day 18: Sunday, March 8, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 8*

²² Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch and heal him. ²³ Taking the blind man's hand, Jesus led him out of the village. After spitting on his eyes and laying his hands on the man, he asked him, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴ The man looked up and said, "I see people. They look like trees, only they are walking around."

²⁵ Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again. He looked with his eyes wide open, his sight was restored, and he could see everything clearly. ²⁶ Then Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village!"

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

²⁸ They told him, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets."

²⁹ He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Human One^[a] must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead." ³² He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. ³³ Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: "Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

Message: Not Today, Satan!

Sermon Notes:

Day 19: Monday, March 9, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 8 & 9*

³⁴After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. ³⁵All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. ³⁶Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? ³⁷What will people give in exchange for their lives? ³⁸Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One^[b] will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

¹Jesus continued, “I assure you that some standing here won’t die before they see God’s kingdom arrive in power.”

²Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain where they were alone. He was transformed in front of them, ³and his clothes were amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white. ⁴Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus. ⁵Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Rabbi, it’s good that we’re here. Let’s make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He said this because he didn’t know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified.

⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, “This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Human One had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept it to themselves, wondering, “What’s this ‘rising from the dead’?” ¹¹They asked Jesus, “Why do the legal experts say that Elijah must come first?”

¹²He answered, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. Why was it written that the Human One would suffer many things and be rejected? ¹³In fact, I tell you that Elijah has come, but they did to him whatever they wanted, just as it was written about him.”

Monday Mission:

Community: In this text, Jesus calls his followers to say *no* to themselves, take up their crosses, and follow. In our community, there are many who suffer because we say *no* to God and *yes* to ourselves. Today, say a prayer for those who are struggling because you said *no* to God. Who are they? Today, challenge yourself to say *yes* in one way. Did you stay home when you could visit a lonely neighbor? Maybe today, say *yes*. Did you buy food for yourself and neglect to buy for someone who needs it even though you know you had enough money to share? Maybe today say *yes*. Did you walk past a mess and leave it for someone else when you knew you could have cleaned it up? Maybe today say *yes*. Choose one thing to say *yes* to today, and think about the difference it made not just to others, but in your own heart.

Family: In the text today, Jesus was transformed! The disciples, though, were scared by the change. We can do that to one another, too. When people in our family change, whether good or bad, we can be scared and not know what to do. Today, think of someone in your family who has changed their lives or situation in a way that you might not have reacted well to. Send that person a special hand-written note that explains how the change they made confused you, but that you love them just the same as always.

On Your Own: The part of a Roman cross that was traditionally carried by those who were to be crucified weighed 75-125lbs! Find something heavy and carry it a short distance. If you are able, try carrying something with you all day. Perhaps you have an ankle weight, a backpack, or another bag that you could carry today. How does it feel to add even just a small amount of weight to your day. When you take that off, how does it feel to be free from it? That is the feeling Christ gives us through forgiveness. Sometimes, we can put our cross on someone else, a friend or coworker, and let them carry it for us without asking or even noticing. Is there one thing you can unburden someone in your life with, something you have let them carry on your behalf, that you can take from them? It could be a chore, blame, or duty. Reflect on how you can take back a part of something that you have laid on another person as a cross in order to free them in Christ's name today. If this is too much for you today, perhaps your mission is to start the habit of praying for strength to be able to do it one day soon.

Day 20: Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 9*

¹⁴When Jesus, Peter, James, and John approached the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them and legal experts arguing with them. ¹⁵Suddenly the whole crowd caught sight of Jesus. They ran to greet him, overcome with excitement. ¹⁶Jesus asked them, "What are you arguing about?"

¹⁷Someone from the crowd responded, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, since he has a spirit that doesn't allow him to speak. ¹⁸Wherever it overpowers him, it throws him into a fit. He foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and stiffens up. So I spoke to your disciples to see if they could throw it out, but they couldn't."

¹⁹Jesus answered them, "You faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you? Bring him to me."

²⁰They brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a fit. He fell on the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been going on?"

He said, "Since he was a child. ²²It has often thrown him into a fire or into water trying to kill him. If you can do anything, help us! Show us compassion!"

²³Jesus said to him, "'If you can do anything'? All things are possible for the one who has faith."

²⁴At that the boy's father cried out, "I have faith; help my lack of faith!"

²⁵Noticing that the crowd had surged together, Jesus spoke harshly to the unclean spirit, "Mute and deaf spirit, I command you to come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶After screaming and shaking the boy horribly, the spirit came out. The boy seemed to be dead; in fact, several people said that he had died. ²⁷But Jesus took his hand, lifted him up, and he arose.

²⁸After Jesus went into a house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we throw this spirit out?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "Throwing this kind of spirit out requires prayer."

Questions to ponder:

- 1) In this text, the Greek word for what is described is that a demon "seizes" the man's son. Even in the Bible, this is called a seizure. Clearly the medical understanding of the situation is different in our culture than in that of this text. How do we make sense spiritually out of the Biblical stories that seem to be based upon incorrect understandings of health?
- 2) In Markan culture, *demon* means a foreign deity, either good or bad, who takes control over the free will of a person. Do we still blame confusing and unfortunate situations on foreign powers? What prayers are still required today?

Day 21: Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 9*

³⁰ From there Jesus and his followers went through Galilee, but he didn't want anyone to know it. ³¹ This was because he was teaching his disciples, "The Human One will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him. Three days after he is killed he will rise up." ³² But they didn't understand this kind of talk, and they were afraid to ask him.

³³ They entered Capernaum. When they had come into a house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about during the journey?" ³⁴ They didn't respond, since on the way they had been debating with each other about who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all." ³⁶ Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him. Then he said, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me."

³⁸ John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us."

³⁹ Jesus replied, "Don't stop him. No one who does powerful acts in my name can quickly turn around and curse me. ⁴⁰ Whoever isn't against us is for us. ⁴¹ I assure you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will certainly be rewarded.

⁴² "As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and to be thrown into the lake. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It's better for you to enter into life crippled than to go away with two hands into the fire of hell, which can't be put out. ⁴⁴ If your foot causes you to fall into sin, chop it off. It's better for you to enter life lame than to be thrown into hell with two feet. ⁴⁵ If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out. It's better for you to enter God's kingdom with one eye than to be thrown into hell with two. ⁴⁶ That's a place *where worms don't die and the fire never goes out.* ⁴⁷ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁴⁸ Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? Maintain salt among yourselves and keep peace with each other."

Wednesday Word Study:

σκανδαλίση: (scandalizā) etymology: skandalidzō (cause to stumble)

This is an interesting word here. It is clearly the root of our English word, *scandalize*. In this text, it is the word translated "fall into sin." Typically, we only think of the later part of this passage referring here to actual children. In verse 36, we see the word for child as the example Jesus is using. Children were not considered with the same value as we given them today, and we cannot simply think of this passage the same way we would in our own culture that highly values children. Using a child as an example in this time paired with the phrase *the least* would not just imply children, but it would mean the least influential and valuable person in the area. In the later verses, the text does not simply refer to children, but to

mikron, or *the least* in contrast to the word used in verse 34, *μείζων*, which means greatest. In verse 42, we see the shift away from talking about children and moving toward all who are considered least as the language changes in the text. This word appears in Matthew 25, for example, used to describe not only children, but rather describing those who are often considered lesser in value by society: the poor, the immigrants, those in prison, those with disabilities, widows, etc. In this text, the latter story beginning in verse 42 is often translated to mean children, not because that is written in the text, but of tradition and because children appear in the story before this. But remember, this gospel is chronologically first. Using a later writing to “fix” an earlier source does not necessarily reflect accuracy as much as assumption. We must read this gospel without the interpretation of the later writings. It also is a gospel that moves quickly from one idea to the next. It must also be read accordingly. Doing that means that this passage would translate more like this: “As for whoever causes those who are the least who believe in me to be scandalized, it would be better for that one if a heavy millstone were put around their neck and they were cast into the sea.” That changes the idea of what scandalize might mean here. It reminds us that if we create the conditions that cause others beneath our station in life to be scandalized, if we make their misfortune a sign of their moral failure, then we are in serious trouble. I am not sure many consider this verse with the millstone-sized weight it deserves. Are we doing things to scandalize poverty? To scandalize immigration? To scandalize the lonely? To scandalize those who are differently abled, differently aged, or those who have been imprisoned? Because clearly in this passage, that is not going to end well for us! This is a nuance found in Mark that could really matter for us and how we treat one another. It is more comfortable for us to translate this in a way that does not convict our tendencies to think less of people who do not succeed. But comfort is not faithfulness. When we read the actual words here, we must acknowledge that Jesus is scolding those disciples in verse 34 who think they are better than others, while warning all who are listening not to make a scandal from those God has created, just because the world has not assigned influence to them. This week, pray on how you scandalize the lives of others, and how you might be called to be a bit more careful to love the least in our own society.

Day 22: Thursday, March 12, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 10*

Jesus left that place and went beyond the Jordan and into the region of Judea. Crowds gathered around him again and, as usual, he taught them. ²Some Pharisees came and, trying to test him, they asked, “Does the Law allow a man to divorce his wife?”

³Jesus answered, “What did Moses command you?”

⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a divorce certificate and to divorce his wife.”

⁵Jesus said to them, “He wrote this commandment for you because of your unyielding hearts. ⁶At the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female.* ⁷*Because of this, a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife,* ⁸*and the two will be one flesh.* ^[b] So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together.”

¹⁰Inside the house, the disciples asked him again about this. ¹¹He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if a wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, “Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. ¹⁵I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it.” ¹⁶Then he hugged the children and blessed them.

¹⁷As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?”

¹⁸Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. ¹⁹You know the commandments: *Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't cheat. Honor your father and mother.*”^[c]

²⁰“Teacher,” he responded, “I've kept all of these things since I was a boy.”

²¹Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him. He said, “You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.” ²²But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.



[Week 3 Video](#)

*Please watch today's [Thursday Thoughts Video](#) *

Day 23: Friday, March 13, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 10*

²³ Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, "It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom!" ²⁴ His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, "Children, it's difficult to enter God's kingdom! ²⁵ It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

²⁶ They were shocked even more and said to each other, "Then who can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God."

²⁸ Peter said to him, "Look, we've left everything and followed you."

²⁹ Jesus said, "I assure you that anyone who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms because of me and because of the good news ³⁰ will receive one hundred times as much now in this life—houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and farms (with harassment)—and in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last. And many who are last will be first."

³² Jesus and his disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, with Jesus in the lead. The disciples were amazed while the others following behind were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he told them what was about to happen to him. ³³ "Look!" he said. "We're going up to Jerusalem. The Human One will be handed over to the chief priests and the legal experts. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ They will ridicule him, spit on him, torture him, and kill him. After three days, he will rise up."

³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷ They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory."

³⁸ Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?" ³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. ⁴³ But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. ⁴⁴ Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, ⁴⁵ for the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Friday's Creative Reflection:

Leaving everything to follow someone is a hard thing. Wanting to be first but being farther back in line is, too. Today's creative reflection is a gardening reflection! Gather together a pot for each person (at least 6" around, but larger is better for this one), some good soil, pea gravel (these are succulents that enjoy well-draining soil), and some friends! We are going to plant hens and chicks!

From a gardening center, buy a mother plant for each person. A mother plant is one that is mature. You want to start with a good healthy starter that is ready to plant. The garden center staff can help you pick the right ones for this!

Once you have everything you need and a good space that can get plenty dirty (a garage, patio, or garden space will work just fine!), mix the soil and the pea gravel in a 2:1 ratio, and fill everyone's pots with the mixture. Be sure you have at least half as much pea gravel as soil and that it is well mixed. This will create good drainage for your soil. Also, be sure your pot is ready for drainage! If there are not holes in your pot, you will need to put a few in before adding the soil. Just carefully drill into the bottom of your plastic pot using a small drill bit. If you have a metal pot, try using a metal punch. Glass and terra cotta pots should already contain holes.

Once the pot is filled with soil, place the hen on top of the soil and water lightly. The first four weeks it is planted, add one cup of water every other day directly on top of the hen. This will encourage the roots to sprout. After four weeks, the plant will only need water once every 1-2 weeks. It is important not to overwater once the plant is established. The hen will sprout chicks regularly. You may use the chicks to start new plants and share them with more friends!

Remember to tell the story to your friends: the first will be last and the last will be first. The chick that is small now will end up being the hen later!

Enjoy your garden!

Day 24: Saturday, March 14, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 10*

⁴⁶ Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus' son, was sitting beside the road. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!" ⁴⁸Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him forward."

They called the blind man, "Be encouraged! Get up! He's calling you."

⁵⁰ Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man said, "Teacher, I want to see."

⁵² Jesus said, "Go, your faith has healed you." At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

Saturday Cultural Reflection:

In Biblical times, illness was thought to be a curse caused by sin. Either this man or his parents or ancestors sinned, and he is bearing the guilt. We see that language is used a lot in the Old Testament, as well, especially in Isaiah and the prophets. Those who are suffering in any circumstance seen as unfortunate by society were deemed sinners. Isaiah 53 is the perfect example of this theology.

This idea still lingers in our society today. There is a sense of people not deserving health care, for example, because they must have caused their own health problems. While certainly there are some health conditions that are a result of our choices, for example conditions caused by sedentary lifestyles, alcohol or drug abuse, or other "choices" we make, there are often more considerations than just choice when it comes to our health. Most of our health struggles are the result of external factors, genetic factors, economic factors, availability of preventative care, or cultural influence, which cannot be blamed on the person who is sick. In fact, often it is the sin of the community that leads to many illnesses, such as cancers caused by pollution or conditions caused by poor access to nutrition. But still, even today, the onus falls too often upon the person who is sick or their family. Parents ask themselves, "Which of us is to blame for our child's birth defect?" when in reality, no one knows why some illness happens.

The problem with that theology is that sickness and health crises are less of a plague and more of a side effect of living. The truth of the matter is simply this: people get sick. While we should do our best to keep one another healthy, as people of faith, it is essential to not fall into the trap of believing that medical conditions, including mental health, are the problem and responsibility of the person who bears

them on their chart. Our blessings come with responsibility, and that includes our health blessings. If we are healthy, we are able to provide health care to those who are not. Unfortunately, many Christians still misunderstand illness as equivalent to sin, sometimes even citing Biblical texts to defend that position. There is a tendency to use isolated examples of those who in our minds do not deserve help to defend our lack of compassion for those who need more. Instead of seeing the unhealthy as precious children of God, we can see them as drains to society. Some are fortunate to have support that can pay for care. Many, though, are not. Many silently go without necessary care, which leads to even worse health. According to government statistics, when cost of health care is combined with missing workdays due to care, lost employment, medical mileage and travel, and uncovered expenses, families who have a child with a disability require 28% more income than other families to maintain the same level of financial stability. I know that seems like it couldn't possibly be true, so I will share our own personal statistics. Between deductibles, travel expenses, over the counter expenses, unpaid time off, etc., our family has averaged just over \$10,000 in out-of-pocket medical expenses annually for our child with Spina Bifida, and we are fully insured. By the grace of God we have been able to pay these expenses, many in those early years thanks to community, church, family, and friends we did not even have to ask. But many people simply cannot. Many do not have a church, a community, or family and friends who can help carry them through. The sad truth is that our theology of illness as a society has not changed nearly enough since the time of Mark, and we are allowing people to be blamed, to suffer, and to die. These healing stories from scripture need to matter more to us as a society. Do not be deceived. This is not about money; it is about theology. We need to stop blaming people who are sick for their illnesses and start accepting our role in no longer silencing their cries. We must rather encourage their healing and best possible health. Jesus hears the cry.

When this man boldly asks for the help he needs, trusting that Jesus is faithful to give it, the "faithful" people around him scold him and try to quiet him. Their sentiment echoes in our ears: "How dare you ask for help! Jesus should be helping me, not you! You clearly are not as good because your sin caused you to be blind. You don't deserve Jesus. You don't deserve grace." The crowd did not want Jesus to waste his time on this sinner. Jesus, though, twists the narrative by noting that Bartemaeus' faith healed him, though the crowd believes his unfaithfulness made him blind. In this story, Jesus lifts up the one who is blamed for his own illness due to unfaithfulness as the one who is most faithful. It turned the cultural ideas of sin causing all illness upside down. Faithfulness is not wrapped up in good fortune; faithfulness comes in refusing to be silent in our need, and in proclaiming the story of our faith with boldness and courage. Faith comes in not stifling the cry of those who need help. This is an example of Jesus speaking directly to the culture of the time, resisting. Perhaps two millennia later we are ready to finally listen?

Day 25: Sunday, March 15, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 11*

When Jesus and his followers approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. Jesus gave two disciples a task, ²saying to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘Its master needs it, and he will send it back right away.’”

⁴They went and found a colt tied to a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. ⁵Some people standing around said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶They told them just what Jesus said, and they left them alone. ⁷They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes upon it, and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. ⁹Those in front of him and those following were shouting, “*Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*” ¹⁰Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹¹Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. After he looked around at everything, because it was already late in the evening, he returned to Bethany with the Twelve.

¹²The next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³From far away, he noticed a fig tree in leaf, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing except leaves, since it wasn't the season for figs. ¹⁴So he said to it, “No one will ever again eat your fruit!” His disciples heard this.

¹⁵They came into Jerusalem. After entering the temple, he threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. ¹⁶He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He taught them, “Hasn't it been written, *My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?* But you've turned it into a *hideout for crooks.*” ¹⁸The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching. ¹⁹When it was evening, Jesus and his disciples went outside the city.

Today's Message: You Only Think You Are Ready

Day 26: Monday, March 16, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 11*

²⁰ Early in the morning, as Jesus and his disciples were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered from the root up. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look how the fig tree you cursed has dried up.”

²² Jesus responded to them, “Have faith in God! ²³ I assure you that whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea’—and doesn’t waver but believes that what is said will really happen—it will happen. ²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive it, and it will be so for you. ²⁵ And whenever you stand up to pray, if you have something against anyone, forgive so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your wrongdoings.”^[d]

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples entered Jerusalem again. As Jesus was walking around the temple, the chief priests, legal experts, and elders came to him. ²⁸ They asked, “What kind of authority do you have for doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?”

²⁹ Jesus said to them, “I have a question for you. Give me an answer, then I’ll tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things. ³⁰ Was John’s baptism of heavenly or of human origin? Answer me.”

³¹ They argued among themselves, “If we say, ‘It’s of heavenly origin,’ he’ll say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ³² But we can’t say, ‘It’s of earthly origin.’” They said this because they were afraid of the crowd, because they all thought John was a prophet. ³³ They answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus replied, “Neither will I tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things.”

Monday Mission:

Community: Sometimes, like the disciples today, we are surprised when prayers are answered, even though we know all things are within God’s power, and that God cares for each of us to the uttermost. Do something today to let others know that God has answered prayer. Tell someone in the community your story, make yourself a new shirt or mug that say, “God answers prayer. Ask me how,” or post on social media a story or meme that shows how much you appreciate those who have been answers to your prayers.

Family: John Wesley was a firm believer in prayer, and he believed that it was a thing not only of words, but of action. Pray for your family today by 1) asking God to love them and care for them, 2) doing one thing to help love and care for them, 3) reminding them that God loves them! Try this heart-warming Taste of Home recipe as a way to care for your family, whether they are related to you, are close friends, or are church family! Recipe: [Steak Strips with Dumplings Recipe: How to Make It](#)

On Your Own: Send a secret sign of caring! Doing something without seeking credit is a great way to show love. Get some tiny bottles with cork stoppers at Dollar Tree. Put a note inside that says, “I don’t know where this will end up, but I do know that God loves you.” Put them in some random or not-so-random places, and pray that whoever finds them is blessed. (remember that if you want to leave them on private property, like at a business, to ask permission)

Day 27: Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 12*

Jesus spoke to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower. Then he rented it to tenant farmers and took a trip. ²When it was time, he sent a servant to collect from the tenants his share of the fruit of the vineyard. ³But they grabbed the servant, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴Again the landowner sent another servant to them, but they struck him on the head and treated him disgracefully. ⁵He sent another one; that one they killed. The landlord sent many other servants, but the tenants beat some and killed others. ⁶Now the landowner had one son whom he loved dearly. He sent him last, thinking, They will respect my son. ⁷But those tenant farmers said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸They grabbed him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

⁹“So what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Haven’t you read this scripture, *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.* ¹¹*The Lord has done this, and it’s amazing in our eyes?*” ¹²They wanted to arrest Jesus because they knew that he had told the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away.

¹³They sent some of the Pharisees and supporters of Herod to trap him in his words. ¹⁴They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you’re genuine and you don’t worry about what people think. You don’t show favoritism but teach God’s way as it really is. Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay taxes or not?”

¹⁵Since Jesus recognized their deceit, he said to them, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a coin. Show it to me.” ¹⁶And they brought one. He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

¹⁷Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” His reply left them overcome with wonder. ¹⁸Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked, ¹⁹“Teacher, Moses wrote for us that *if a man’s brother dies, leaving a widow but no children, the brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.* ²⁰Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman; when he died, he left no children. ²¹The second married her and died without leaving any children. The third did the same. ²²None of the seven left any children. Finally, the woman died. ²³At the resurrection, when they all rise up, whose wife will she be? All seven were married to her.”

²⁴Jesus said to them, “Isn’t this the reason you are wrong, because you don’t know either the scriptures or God’s power? ²⁵When people rise from the dead, they won’t marry nor will they be given in marriage. Instead, they will be like God’s angels. ²⁶As for the resurrection from the dead, haven’t you read in the scroll from Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God said to Moses, *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?* ²⁷He isn’t the God of the dead but of the living. You are seriously mistaken.”

Questions to ponder:

- 1) Have you ever seen people try to use “what if” logic to win an argument? They believe if they can catch a person wrong about one thing, they will be wrong about everything. How does Jesus show he is superior to that kind of “logic?”

- 2) How do people today still try to use obscure incidents to dictate everyday rules? Is that effective?

- 3) How do you “test God” in your life? What have you learned?

Day 28: Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 12*

²⁸ One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

²⁹ Jesus replied, “The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord,* ³⁰ *and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*

³¹ The second is this, *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* No other commandment is greater than these.”

³² The legal expert said to him, “Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love God with all the heart, a full understanding, and all of one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, “You aren't far from God's kingdom.” After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, “Why do the legal experts say that the Christ is David's son? ³⁶ David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, *The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right side until I turn your enemies into your footstool.'* ³⁷ David himself calls him 'Lord,' so how can he be David's son?” The large crowd listened to him with delight.

³⁸ As he was teaching, he said, “Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They want to be greeted with honor in the markets. ³⁹ They long for places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. ⁴⁰ They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly.”

⁴¹ Jesus sat across from the collection box for the temple treasury and observed how the crowd gave their money. Many rich people were throwing in lots of money. ⁴² One poor widow came forward and put in two small copper coins worth a penny. ⁴³ Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who's been putting money in the treasury. ⁴⁴ All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on.”

Wednesday Word Study:

πλούσιοι: (ploosēoy) etymology: play-thoo'-no (multiply, fill)

πτωχή: (ptōchā) etymology: piptō (fall, beat down)

The words chosen here for *rich* and *poor*, respectively, are interesting choices. While they are common words, there are other common words with different connotations that could have been chosen here. In Greek, these connotations have more meaning than just plain words.

For example, the word used later in this text which is translated in our translation above as *hopeless poverty* has a connotation of *want*. The above word for poor from the word study, however, holds a connotation not only of financial poverty, but of physical stature. It means *brought to her knees, beaten down, and fallen*. It does not just call to our vision someone without means, someone who wants, but rather it forces us to imagine the humility and humiliation of her poverty. She has been beaten down to a posture of lowness, of being unworthy and unable to lift her crumpled body. This poverty does not just have a word; it has a full posture. It is a similar posture as the tax collector praying in the synagogue who refuses to even lift his eyes. (Yes! I know you are now putting together that the scene from Luke 18:10 is a scene showing the disparity between his richness as a tax collector and his insistence upon assuming a physical posture of poverty due to his poverty of spirit! Isn't language fun!)

That stands here in contrast to the word for rich. The word for rich is one of multiplication and fullness. The image we might imagine for this word as we look at its connotation would be that of a cup overflowing. In Psalm 23, the Septuagint is best translated as saying *my cup is better than drunk*. It overflows! It is rich. Rich is not just a word or a financial state of being; rich has a posture! Rich stands tall but is trickling down because it flows over in its fullness, and yet it still has all of its value right there in our sticky hands. Poor is falling down empty with no chance of rising because all value is now lost.

I think we lose a lot of the meaning of many Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic words in the scriptures because their visual aspects are lost to us in English. The purpose of today's word study is not to redefine words, but to simply remember that the language of scripture is much more visual and in-your-face than the English we use to translate it. Our equivalent words are often flat in comparison. When you read scripture, try to imagine the imagery and what the visual scene is doing to lend meaning to the text beyond just the actual words. Greek has a knack for taking a story with words and creating animation through the text. Our job as a reader is to allow ourselves to see it.

Day 29: Thursday, March 19, 2026)

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 13*

As Jesus left the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, look! What awesome stones and buildings!"

² Jesus responded, "Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished."

³ Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things happen? What sign will show that all these things are about to come to an end?"

⁵ Jesus said, "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many people will come in my name, saying, 'I'm the one!' They will deceive many people. ⁷ When you hear of wars and reports of wars, don't be alarmed. These things must happen, but this isn't the end yet. ⁸ Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other, and there will be earthquakes and famines in all sorts of places. These things are just the beginning of the sufferings associated with the end.

⁹ "Watch out for yourselves. People will hand you over to the councils. You will be beaten in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me so that you can testify before them. ¹⁰ First, the good news must be proclaimed to all the nations. ¹¹ When they haul you in and hand you over, don't worry ahead of time about what to answer or say. Instead, say whatever is given to you at that moment, for you aren't doing the speaking but the Holy Spirit is. ¹² Brothers and sisters will hand each other over to death. A father will turn in his children. Children will rise up against their parents and have them executed. ¹³ Everyone will hate you because of my name. But whoever stands firm until the end will be saved.



[Week 4 Video](#)

*Please watch today's [Thursday Thoughts Video](#) *

Day 30: Friday, March 20, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 13*

¹⁴“When you see the disgusting and destructive thing standing where it shouldn't be (the reader should understand this), then those in Judea must escape to the mountains. ¹⁵Those on the roof shouldn't come down or enter their houses to grab anything. ¹⁶Those in the field shouldn't come back to grab their clothes. ¹⁷How terrible it will be at that time for women who are pregnant and for women who are nursing their children. ¹⁸Pray that it doesn't happen in winter. ¹⁹In those days there will be great suffering such as the world has never before seen and will never again see. ²⁰If the Lord hadn't shortened that time, no one would be rescued. But for the sake of the chosen ones, the ones whom God chose, he has cut short the time.

²¹“Then if someone says to you, ‘Look, here's the Christ,’ or ‘There he is,’ don't believe it. ²²False christs and false prophets will appear, and they will offer signs and wonders in order to deceive, if possible, those whom God has chosen. ²³But you, watch out! I've told you everything ahead of time.

²⁴“In those days, after the suffering of that time, the sun will become dark, and the moon won't give its light. ²⁵The stars will fall from the sky, and the planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁶Then they will see the Human One coming in the clouds with great power and splendor. ²⁷Then he will send the angels and gather together his chosen people from the four corners of the earth, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven.

²⁸“Learn this parable from the fig tree. After its branch becomes tender and it sprouts new leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that he's near, at the door. ³⁰I assure you that this generation won't pass away until all these things happen. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.

³²“But nobody knows when that day or hour will come, not the angels in heaven and not the Son. Only the Father knows. ³³Watch out! Stay alert! You don't know when the time is coming. ³⁴It is as if someone took a trip, left the household behind, and put the servants in charge, giving each one a job to do, and told the doorkeeper to stay alert. ³⁵Therefore, stay alert! You don't know when the head of the household will come, whether in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows in the early morning or at daybreak. ³⁶Don't let him show up when you weren't expecting and find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to all: Stay alert!”

Friday's Creative Reflection:

You won't know the day or hour, but maybe it is because you need to make this!

<https://youtu.be/ZPcCmzU433M?si=ziBgxZFXtqWzjdT>

Watch this video for more information about sundials and how to make your own! Or try a larger version for your yard or garden! When you show others, you can tell them the story from scripture today!

Day 31: Saturday, March 21, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 14*

It was two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and legal experts through cunning tricks were searching for a way to arrest Jesus and kill him. ² But they agreed that it shouldn't happen during the festival; otherwise, there would be an uproar among the people.

³ Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on his head. ⁴ Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? ⁵ This perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay^[a] and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

⁶ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. ⁷ You always have the poor with you; and whenever you want, you can do something good for them. But you won't always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could. She has anointed my body ahead of time for burial. ⁹ I tell you the truth that, wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."

¹⁰ Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to give Jesus up to them. ¹¹ When they heard it, they were delighted and promised to give him money. So he started looking for an opportunity to turn him in.

¹² On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, the disciples said to Jesus, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?"

¹³ He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city. A man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks, "Where is my guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?'" ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs already furnished. Prepare for us there." ¹⁶ The disciples left, came into the city, found everything just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

Saturday Cultural Reflection:

"So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to 'offer' something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service...Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either." -Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*

The disciples here are confused about the ministry of receiving. Their theology has been born from a sense of those who are religious being bound to be the ones who *offer*. This is not new for us. In Judaism, this was also the tradition. Those who were in the church were the ones who were blessed. In fact, in temple life, those were the only ones allowed in the temple. People who needed help were usually considered unclean or not as holy. They were women, often widows or women divorced by their

husbands; they were orphans, left with no one to care for their needs; they were sick or differently abled; they were mentally ill in a time when there was little or no treatment for such illnesses; they were poor because they were not as capable of work as others; they were immigrants, forced from war-torn places; they were slaves who owed something to someone, at least in the eyes of the owners; they were prisoners, due to political changes or debts; or they were someone marginalized for a reason people culturally attributed to God's judgment. It is very important to understand that this is not due to a failing of those who had means, but rather as a cultural reality beyond the control or even the understanding of many within the culture. We all are born into a world that creates a culture around us beyond the influence of a single person. As we are acculturated, we learn to accept the worldview in which we are raised. This does not excuse our corporate sins, but rather explains them and allows grace to understand their origins.

It is in this culture the disciples were born and raised, a culture and faith that required them to give because that was their role in society, not because they believed in the true value of those receiving from them. There were givers and there were receivers. The givers were more holy, not because of their giving but because of their fortune. Giving in a small degree to those who were less was the price of keeping society in its place. This is not judgment upon those in any particular place of society at the time, but merely an observation of the system creating the culture and the culture driving the system.

In this text, the disciples, a part of this system, clearly healthy enough to work and fortunate enough to be in places of authority and respect, are not accustomed to receiving. How dare this woman, a person of low stature, offer to a person of such high stature an expensive gift? And there was more going on here. There was something overlooked by some who are not of this culture. Women were not allowed to have assets they earn themselves. Women had no things of value such as this expensive perfume unless it was given to them by a man. Either this woman had a husband of means from whom she received this gift and now squanders it, or she was given this gift by a man who is not her husband. The immediate reaction from the disciples would be to naturally assume that this woman obtained the gift she shares from a means fraught with sin, and that she has the nerve to put such a thing on the head of this holy man, Jesus! It was disgraceful and wasteful!

But Jesus understands that to listen to God, he must listen to this woman. She does not have the courage or the authority to speak in this text, but she has the courage to give when her place is to receive. In so doing, she prepares Jesus for what is coming not simply by anointing him for burial but by expressing to the world what Jesus represents: grace! This is another cultural table-turning in Mark.

Day 32: Sunday, March 22, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 14*

¹⁷That evening, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸During the meal, Jesus said, "I assure you that one of you will betray me—someone eating with me."

¹⁹Deeply saddened, they asked him, one by one, "It's not me, is it?"

²⁰Jesus answered, "It's one of the Twelve, one who is dipping bread with me into this bowl. ²¹The Human One^[b] goes to his death just as it is written about him. But how terrible it is for that person who betrays the Human One! It would have been better for him if he had never been born."

²²While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵I assure you that I won't drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way in God's kingdom." ²⁶After singing songs of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Today's Message: Do You Have to Ask?

Sermon Notes:

Day 33: Monday, March 23, 2026

Today's Reading: From Mark, Chapter 14

²⁷ Jesus said to them, "You will all falter in your faithfulness to me. It is written, *I will hit the shepherd, and the sheep will go off in all directions.* ²⁸ But after I'm raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

²⁹ Peter said to him, "Even if everyone else stumbles, I won't."

³⁰ But Jesus said to him, "I assure you that on this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

³¹ But Peter insisted, "If I must die alongside you, I won't deny you." And they all said the same thing.

³² Jesus and his disciples came to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James, and John along with him. He began to feel despair and was anxious. ³⁴ He said to them, "I'm very sad. It's as if I'm dying. Stay here and keep alert." ³⁵ Then he went a short distance farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, he might be spared the time of suffering. ³⁶ He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want."

Monday Mission:

Community: Not what we want, but what God wants: that is what we should pray for and work for. What might God want in our community? Think of one thing, and do it, advocate for it, or work toward it.

Family: Take this cup from me! Let's trade a cup of struggle for a cup of help! Gather healthy drinks such as juices, water, V8, and healthy drink mixes and drop them off at the little food pantry. Whether you can bring one or a whole case, take someone's cup of suffering today and replace it with a cup of joy!

On Your Own: Peter thought he was willing to do anything for Jesus, but later we learn that he was not willing to hold on to his faith when he was scared. That is the hardest time to hold tight to our faith. Who is scared in your life? Have you asked them if they need a prayer? Praying with people is sometimes a little scary for us, too. If the person in your life can face their fear, can you face yours and offer to pray with them? Give it a try!

Day 34: Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 14*

³⁷ He came and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Couldn't you stay alert for one hour?" ³⁸ Stay alert and pray so that you won't give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak."

³⁹ Again, he left them and prayed, repeating the same words. ⁴⁰ And, again, when he came back, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open, and they didn't know how to respond to him. ⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, "Will you sleep and rest all night? That's enough! The time has come for the Human One^[e] to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up! Let's go! Look, here comes my betrayer."

⁴³ Suddenly, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came with a mob carrying swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests, legal experts, and elders. ⁴⁴ His betrayer had given them a sign: "Arrest the man I kiss, and take him away under guard."

⁴⁵ As soon as he got there, Judas said to Jesus, "Rabbi!" Then he kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they came and grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

⁴⁷ One of the bystanders drew a sword and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ Jesus responded, "Have you come with swords and clubs to arrest me, like an outlaw?" ⁴⁹ Day after day, I was with you, teaching in the temple, but you didn't arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ And all his disciples left him and ran away. ⁵¹ One young man, a disciple, was wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They grabbed him, ⁵² but he left the linen cloth behind and ran away naked.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) The disciples kept falling asleep. Do you think they understood the importance of this night?
- 2) How is this story different than what you remember? Which things are not in the text that you thought you would hear? Which things are included that you did not expect?
- 3) This is the only gospel in which the man flees, naked. Some scholars have suggested that this strange story points to the identity of the author of Mark, who gives himself a cameo. Do you think this man could have been the author of this book? Why/why not?
- 4) How would it feel to be betrayed by a kiss from a friend?

Day 35: Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Today's Reading: From Mark, Chapter 14

⁵³They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders, and legal experts gathered. ⁵⁴Peter followed him from a distance, right into the high priest's courtyard. He was sitting with the guards, warming himself by the fire. ⁵⁵The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they couldn't find any. ⁵⁶Many brought false testimony against him, but they contradicted each other. ⁵⁷Some stood to offer false witness against him, saying, ⁵⁸"We heard him saying, 'I will destroy this temple, constructed by humans, and within three days I will build another, one not made by humans.'" ⁵⁹But their testimonies didn't agree even on this point. ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up in the middle of the gathering and examined Jesus. "Aren't you going to respond to the testimony these people have brought against you?" ⁶¹But Jesus was silent and didn't answer. Again, the high priest asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed one?"

⁶²Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty and coming on the heavenly clouds."

⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we need any more witnesses? ⁶⁴You've heard his insult against God. What do you think?"

They all condemned him. "He deserves to die!" ⁶⁵Some began to spit on him. Some covered his face and hit him, saying, "Prophecy!" Then the guards took him and beat him.

Wednesday Word Study:

Προφήτευσον: (profātoosan) etymology: profātoo-oh (*prophecy, speak under inspiration*)

This word is fabulous for those who heard it in the first Century! For us, it has lost a bit of that luster it had at first when we all used to have the famous stories of the Old Testament committed to memory. Since we have Bibles now, and maybe even more so since we have Google, we don't depend as much upon our memories when it comes to the words of scripture. In the culture of Jesus' day, though, and in the years following until it was more common for people to be literate, memorizing scripture was a common spiritual practice. The famous lines of scripture that remind us of our favorite stories would be on the hearts and lips of the faithful. We know that even in the days of Jesus (we know because of the quotation of the scripture used in the Gospels being from the Septuagint, not simply the Hebrew text of the Old Testament), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, also known as the Septuagint, was commonly used and known by Jews. A Jew of this time, then, would immediately recognize this powerful word from the Old Testament story it is famously found in the story of the Valley of Dry Bones from Ezekiel 37. In the valley of dry bones, the Lord commanded Ezekiel, "Prophecy to these bones." And when Ezekiel did, the bones lived! In this text, the soldiers are taunting Jesus, telling him, "Prophecy!" It is the same word, in the same form, and while it seems like taunting to outsiders, insiders in the faith would hear this in their ears and know. "Prophecy!" This man will die, but God will indeed speak life into these bones, and they will live again. This is not a new story, but rather it is one we already know. "Prophecy!" This is the sound of dry bones about to rattle. Can you hear it?

Day 36: Thursday, March 26, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 14*

⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. A woman, one of the high priest's servants, approached ⁶⁷ and saw Peter warming himself by the fire. She stared at him and said, "You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus."

⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand what you're saying." And he went outside into the outer courtyard. A rooster crowed.

⁶⁹ The female servant saw him and began a second time to say to those standing around, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰ But he denied it again.

A short time later, those standing around again said to Peter, "You must be one of them, because you are also a Galilean."

⁷¹ But he cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷² At that very moment, a rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered what Jesus told him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down, sobbing.



[Week 5 Video](#)

*Please watch [Thursday Thoughts Video](#) Today *

Day 37: Friday, March 27, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 15*

At daybreak, the chief priests—with the elders, legal experts, and the whole Sanhedrin—formed a plan. They bound Jesus, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate. ²Pilate questioned him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “That’s what you say.” ³The chief priests were accusing him of many things.

⁴Pilate asked him again, “Aren’t you going to answer? What about all these accusations?” ⁵But Jesus gave no more answers, so that Pilate marveled.

⁶During the festival, Pilate released one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. ⁷A man named Barabbas was locked up with the rebels who had committed murder during an uprising. ⁸The crowd pushed forward and asked Pilate to release someone, as he regularly did. ⁹Pilate answered them, “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” ¹⁰He knew that the chief priests had handed him over because of jealousy. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas to them instead. ¹²Pilate replied, “Then what do you want me to do with the one you call king of the Jews?”

¹³They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

¹⁴Pilate said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done?”

They shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, so he released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus whipped, then handed him over to be crucified.

Friday's Creative Reflection:

A crowd experiment: This is one we like to do when we are in a big crowd. When you are in a crowded area, without making a big scene, start looking at a spot on the ceiling as if it were the most amazing thing in the world. Tilt your head and really look at it. Make that quizzical look on your face like you are trying to figure out something really important. Maybe even point! Do it for a few minutes and then look around. How many people can you find who are also trying to look at that spot? There are always a lot. Sometimes it spreads right through the stadium or event center we are in, and we can watch it move from one side of the room to the other! It is not just people in the Bible who join in when they see or hear something that seem exciting or interesting. It is human nature! Whether you go to Walmart or a stadium, try this experiment to see if you can get others to start joining in! Then think about the story: Do you think all of the people in the crowd even knew what they were cheering about when the crowd shouted? We need to learn to be more selective about what we follow!

Day 38: Saturday, March 28, 2026

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 15*

¹⁶The soldiers led Jesus away into the courtyard of the palace known as the governor's headquarters,^[a] and they called together the whole company of soldiers.^[b] ¹⁷They dressed him up in a purple robe and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him. ¹⁸They saluted him, "Hey! King of the Jews!" ¹⁹Again and again, they struck his head with a stick. They spit on him and knelt before him to honor him. ²⁰When they finished mocking him, they stripped him of the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹Simon, a man from Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus' father, was coming in from the countryside. They forced him to carry his cross.

²²They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place. ²³They tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh, but he didn't take it. ²⁴They crucified him. They divided up his clothes, drawing lots for them to determine who would take what. ²⁵It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The notice of the formal charge against him was written, "The king of the Jews." ²⁷They crucified two outlaws with him, one on his right and one on his left.^[c]

²⁹People walking by insulted him, shaking their heads and saying, "Ha! So you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? ³⁰Save yourself and come down from that cross!" ³¹In the same way, the chief priests were making fun of him among themselves, together with the legal experts. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself. ³²Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross. Then we'll see and believe." Even those who had been crucified with Jesus insulted him.

Saturday Cultural Reflection:

The seat of authority in the Jewish ruling body during Jesus' time was called the Sanhedrin. Along with the Council, the Sanhedrin had the authority over the Jewish people in Jerusalem and beyond. It did not, however, have power to issue a death sentence. It consisted of elders, mostly from the ruling families who claimed to be descended from priests dating back to the reign of King Solomon. This was the claim, but not always the case. It was a claim that kept certain families in political authority over the people. Romans beginning at near the time of the birth of Jesus found themselves in a time period later known as the *Pax Romana*, characterized by rapid growth and acculturation by Rome in every direction. While there was not always peace, the name describes the method of Roman takeover. Rome would partner with local political authorities, allowing Roman dominance with some local control. Rome discovered that by doing this, they could reach farther faster and that others would concede rather than fight. To keep the peace while still retaining the authority, Rome granted the Sanhedrin the authority to manage most day-to-day Jewish affairs without much interference while Rome handled legal affairs. Jews had a temple tax while Rome had government taxes, for example. A reader of Mark in the early days of the Christian church would understand that the reason no one wanted to be the ones to condemn Jesus was because Rome wanted peace and the Sanhedrin wanted the death penalty. Remember, though, that the Sanhedrin represented corrupt leadership, not the heart of the Jewish people. To the people, he was hope. Hope is always a threat to corrupt leaders. How do you see that in our world?

Day 39: Sunday, March 29, 2026 (Passion Sunday)

Today's Reading: From *Mark, Chapter 15*

³³ From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. ³⁴ At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani,*” which means, “My God, my God, why have you left me?”

³⁵ After hearing him, some standing there said, “Look! He’s calling Elijah!” ³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, “Let’s see if Elijah will come to take him down.” ³⁷ But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

³⁸ The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “This man was certainly God’s Son.”

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (the younger one) and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When Jesus was in Galilee, these women had followed and supported him, along with many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him.

Message: Torn

Sermon Notes:

Day 40: Monday, March 30, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 15*

⁴² Since it was late in the afternoon on Preparation Day, just before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph from Arimathea dared to approach Pilate and ask for Jesus' body. (Joseph was a prominent council member who also eagerly anticipated the coming of God's kingdom.) ⁴⁴ Pilate wondered if Jesus was already dead. He called the centurion and asked him whether Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that Jesus was dead, Pilate gave the dead body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ He bought a linen cloth, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the cloth, and laid him in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. He rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was buried.

Monday Mission:

Community: Today's reading is about the burial of Jesus. Today, talk to someone in the church about how you can help with the church's funeral ministry. Offer what you can: Moving tables and chairs for a funeral dinner, running the sound system during the service or visitation, straightening the pews following the service, vacuuming the sanctuary and narthex the day before a funeral, sweeping or mopping the fellowship hall or cleaning the kitchen after the service, donating food or money to provide food for a funeral dinner, donating time to serve during the meal, cleaning plates or refilling drinks at the funeral dinner, volunteering to help be on the funeral committee for UWF, or volunteering to be a part of the care team's ministry to families who lose loved ones.

Family: Help those in your family remember others in the family by creating a family tree, genealogy, or other remembrance. Consider creating an online memorial site for your family! Or maybe this week, minister to someone who is on hospice or who has a long term illness. Make someone with dementia a picture book of family memories and favorite locations, make or buy a recipe book for someone in the family whose dietary needs have changed with a word of encouragement written in the cover, or give a caregiver in your family an afternoon to themselves while you take a turn.

On Your Own: Are you mourning a loss? It can really feel like we are broken some days. But maybe you are exactly who someone else needs today, broken and all. God doesn't need us to be perfect to serve in mission. Consider a way you can share your experience and presence with someone else who feels broken due to loss, and don't be afraid to use your brokenness for God's healing.

Day 41: Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 16*

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. ³They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) ⁵Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. ⁶But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.^[a] He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. ⁷Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." ⁸Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.^[b]

Questions to ponder:

- 1) Why would Mark choose to end the Gospel in this way? What is unusual about this particular version of the Easter narrative?
- 2) How do we know this is the third day in this text that does not explicitly say so?
- 3) Mark does not have anyone guarding the tomb like the other gospels do. Why do you think Mark did not include this detail?
- 4) This narrative does not tell whether or not the disciples believed, but rather only tells that they are terrified. Do you think the disciples believed the young man in the white robe?
- 5) Who is the man in the white robe? What clues in the text lead you to that conclusion?

Day 42: Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 16*

Alternate Ending #1:

[⁹They promptly reported all of the young man's instructions to those who were with Peter. Afterward, through the work of his disciples, Jesus sent out, from the east to the west, the sacred and undying message of eternal salvation. Amen.]

Wednesday Word Study:

σωτηρία: (sōtārēas) etymology: sohtayrayah (deliverance from impending death, salvation, preservation) sohzoh (keep safe) toyay (strengthen, swell)

Salvation is the last word of this short second ending of Mark, thought to be the earlier of the two alternate endings for Mark. While the version of Mark believed to be the earliest is the one ending in verse 8, redactions (later editorial changes to the original text prior to publication) are important for us because they help us understand the heart of the people at the time it was first recorded. This gives a window into the early church. The fact that the scribes chose to include the sending of the disciples and the last word of salvation after living with the discomfort of the earlier ending of Mark helps us see the heart of those early disciples. In Mark, they are hiding and afraid. That is the end of the story. But later, we see that the church has learned a bit more about the ending. They have learned that they are embodying the ending still by embracing the last word: Salvation.

This word has an important element we don't always think of in a modern context. Its roots lie in the Greek verb σώζω, which means to keep safe. Salvation is more than an act of geography, of a going to heaven. It means to keep safe. Early Christians would have needed the rally cry of this ending to Mark in a world where martyrdom was common. Becoming Christian meant being willing to die for what one believes. The last word in this gospel is: God will keep you safe with this new concept of Salvation, or eternal safety. Whether you end up in an area being killed by wild animals, if you are being crucified by Romans, or if you are imprisoned and exiled from your family and friends forever, it no longer has any power over anyone. Christians are safe for eternity because of the gospel.

Certainly, adding an ending that inspired the generations of the day to be brave and bold in light of persecution tells us more about the early church than it does the actual gospel. Some look at these redactions and dismiss them as irrelevant since they were additions to the text. I would argue that this redaction was added still in the time of other New Testament writings and should be considered in the same light we consider the words of Paul, Luke, and John. They might not have been original to the gospel story, but they are original to the early church who continued to use them along with the gospel to change the history of Christianity forever.

Day 43: Thursday, April 2, 2026

Today's Reading: *From Mark, Chapter 16*

Alternate Ending #2:

⁹After Jesus rose up early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and reported to the ones who had been with him, who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹But even after they heard the news, they didn't believe that Jesus was alive and that Mary had seen him.

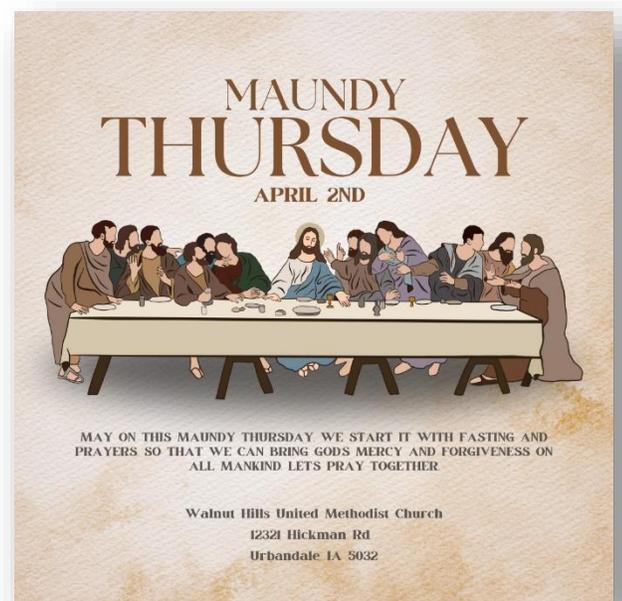
¹²After that he appeared in a different form to two of them who were walking along in the countryside. ¹³When they returned, they reported it to the others, but they didn't believe them. ¹⁴Finally he appeared to the eleven while they were eating. Jesus criticized their unbelief and stubbornness because they didn't believe those who saw him after he was raised up. ¹⁵He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to every creature. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever doesn't believe will be condemned. ¹⁷These signs will be associated with those who believe: they will throw out demons in my name. They will speak in new languages. ¹⁸They will pick up snakes with their hands. If they drink anything poisonous, it will not hurt them. They will place their hands on the sick, and they will get well."

¹⁹After the Lord Jesus spoke to them, he was lifted up into heaven and sat down on the right side of God. ²⁰But they went out and proclaimed the message everywhere. The Lord worked with them, confirming the word by the signs associated with them.

*Please watch [Thursday Thoughts Video](#) Today and consider attending our circuit's Maundy Thursday Worship and Holy Week Service Night at Walnut Hills United Methodist Church tonight! We will be doing a mission project to benefit Joppa's ministry to the unhoused in our community. *



[Week 6 Video](#)



Day 44: Friday, April 3, 2026

- Good Friday Worship Service @ noon at New Hope UMC
- Cantata 7pm

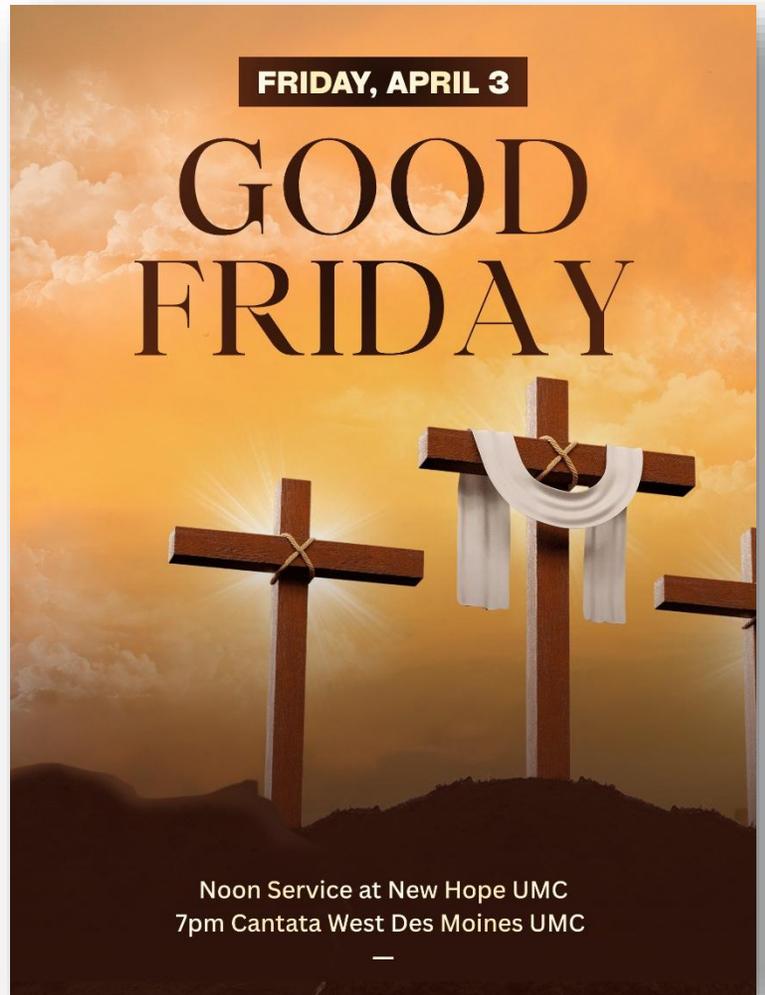
Today's Reading: *From Mark 15:33-39*

Message: Son of God

Friday's Creative Reflection:

When Jesus died, the temple curtain was torn. Try these experiments to tear apart loops. What happened? Did it go the way you expected? It turns out that by tearing the temple curtain in two, God united the temple instead of dividing it, as one might expect a tear to do. God's results can be quite unexpected, but they are always good! Enjoy this fun and creative activity of anticipating what will happen with just a little twist of the story!

<https://youtu.be/KBFqA4bTmB0?si=Hr5JxXqfLkQ9v35l>



Reminder: Good Friday Traditional Worship is today at 12:00pm (noon) at NHUMC; Tonight is the Good Friday Cantata Service for all the area United Methodist Churches. It will be at 7pm at West Des Moines UMC.

Day 45: Saturday, April 4, 2026 (our last day!)

Until sundown, this is a traditional day of rest in the church calendar. Why? This honors the rest of the disciples as they mourn in the upper room. It is a day to sit in tombs of our own for a day, to truly spend time pondering how we got in this tomb and if there is any way out for us on our own. What we always will discover is that the only way out of our own tombs is with the power of Christ's resurrection. Our stone will never roll away on its own. We may try to sneak out, squeezing through some crack that is not really big enough to slip through without leaving much of us still trapped inside. There is no good way out, no permanent way out, aside from Christ.

Try this for an activity today as you meditate today on the tombs we find ourselves in and how without Christ we are helpless to make it out:

<https://www.food.com/recipe/empty-tomb-cookies-220621>

Or if this activity is not your favorite, try meditating on the tomb the church is in post-Covid with this article:

[The Future of the United Methodist Church: An In-depth Interview with Doug Powe and Lovett Weems - Lewis Center for Church Leadership](#)

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