

# **Journey to Jerusalem**

**Lenten Devotional  
Bidwell Presbyterian Church  
2018**

The 2018 Lenten Devotional is a compilation of inspirational writings contributed by members of our congregation, staff, and pastors. "Journey to Jerusalem" takes you through the 40 days of Lent based on the final chapters of Mark's gospel. We hope you find this a helpful tool for your spiritual growth during this Lenten season.

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Saturday  
(February 14, - March 31, 2018).

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King's Cross is a famous railway station in London that is a final stop on one of the major rail routes between London and the North. This name also carries weight as a way to think upon the direction of Jesus's life in conjunction with his identity as Lord of all.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus made a turn from Galilee toward Jerusalem where he would ultimately be crucified. He made the swift turn after his encounter with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi when he asked them what they made of his identity. There Peter confessed, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:30). Jesus then proceeded to describe the nature of his ministry "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." Jesus referenced the voluntary nature of his death and that he was a unique kind of King. As he made his turn toward Jerusalem, one can imagine the turning point this was not only for him but for his disciples.

Turning points in our lives are opportunities for positive life change and greater depth in our relationship with God. This season of Lent that lasts 40 days is an opportunity for us to enter into an intentional period of allowing Christ to help us turn around (a literal translation for the word "repent") and surrender our lives more fully to him. As Jesus turned and "set his face ("like flint" Isa. 50:7) toward Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), he invites us to follow him. He does so in order that we might know the fullness of his love for us and so that we may experience the joy of his resurrection and its implications for our lives.

We begin this Lenten Season turning from the first half of Mark's Gospel to the latter. The initial chapters (1-8) pointed to the Crown of Jesus which is the identity he bears as God's Son. This gave us the chance to consider his might, power, and ability to draw people into awestruck wonder and praise. But, the best is

Saturday, March 31st  
Mark 15:42-47 (NIV)

### BURIAL OF JESUS

I don't know about you, but I tend to speed from the cross through the burial and right to the resurrection. The miracle of the resurrection is without parallel and it draws me in! However, I can appreciate the details in the gospels about Jesus' burial because they show the fulfillment of prophecy. They show how God was at work in every detail of history.

We may be familiar with the verses in Isaiah talking about the crucifixion, "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain... Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering." (Isa. 53:3,4). Then Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, goes on to talk about Jesus' burial. "He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." (Isa. 53:9).

In Mark 15:42 we are told of Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a wealthy man, who asked Pilate for Jesus' body. Had Joseph not asked Pilate for Jesus' body, Jesus would have shared a common grave with other criminals, the grave assigned him with the wicked talked about by Isaiah. However, Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in a clean shroud and placed him in Joseph's own new tomb. So, Jesus had a grave with the rich. The prophecy foretold in Isaiah had been fulfilled. God is at work fulfilling prophecy about the Messiah.

*Thank you, Lord, for taking on our pain, for bearing our suffering, for being pierced for our transgression. Thank you that even in burial, you were affirmed as the one who fulfilled the prophecy. We thank you for the gift of salvation that you bought through your death on the cross.*

Lisa Stone

<sup>1</sup>Tim Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of The Son of God*, xviii.

## Day 39

Good Friday, March 30th  
Mark 15:33-41 (NIV)

### THE DEATH OF JESUS

Darkness came over the whole land for three hours. As Jesus was dying the sky grew dark. What an ominous scene! Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (vs 34). Oh what pain! Not only excruciating suffering on the cross, now he cries out with the pain of alienation from his own heavenly Father with whom he had enjoyed perfect fellowship. Why? He took on our sins! The Father turned his face away.

"With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last" (v 37). What suffering he had endured! And yet he had a burst of energy to let out a loud cry at his last breath!

"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (v 38). I remember reading about when this scene was to be filmed for "The Passion" someone asked, "Is this a big deal"? The answer came, "Oh yeah! It's a big deal!" Why? Because God himself has accepted the sacrifice of his Son, and torn the curtain dividing the people from the Holy of Holies! We can now draw near to God! "Access to God, which was limited to the high priest once a year as he entered into the Holy of Holies to present a sacrifice for the peoples' sin, is now opened to all who believe in Jesus Christ."

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your own Son to die for us. Thank you for allowing us to draw near to you through the blood of your Son. Thank you that we are forgiven! Help us to live in your presence, grateful for the fellowship that you invite us into together with you. Thank you for the new family that you give us in Christ; brothers and sisters united together on the level ground at the foot of the cross.*

Bill Hammond

yet to come. As Jesus makes his turn from the region of Galilee to Jerusalem, we are invited to look deeper into the heart of God and the selfless nature of his Son.

The burning question is: will we allow ourselves to heed the warning of Jesus' blinker that flashes bright "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34).

I invite you this Lenten Season to make the turn with Jesus and for us as a church to look for what God will do in our life together. May these daily devotionals written by select members of our church be a gift to you as you enter into a deeper faith with the one who carries the King's cross and is Lord of all.

With much joy and expectation this Lenten Season!

Pastor Henry

## Day 1

Ash Wednesday, February 14th  
Mark 8:27-30 (LISB)

### PETER'S FAITH AND OURS

In this passage, the disciples are in pagan Caesarea Philippi. It's fitting that in this godless city Simon Peter tells Jesus, "You are the Christ." Messiah and Christ both mean "Anointed One."

What would we say about Jesus? Would we declare him our Messiah, as Peter does? What if we were threatened with death? In Mark 8:27, Jesus asks the disciples who the crowds say he is. The crowds think Jesus is some sort of prophet. But Jesus wants the disciples to form their own opinions. So, he says, "Who do you say I am?" Jesus knows how soon their faith will be tested! He tells them several times that He will soon suffer and die. Jesus tries to prepare the apostles for the trials to come.

In Matthew 16:13-20, the same scene is described, in which Peter also says Jesus is, "the Son of the living God." In Luke's gospel, Peter answers Jesus, "The Christ of God." (9:18-20). In all three gospels, Peter is recognizing Jesus as divine.

At first, the apostles and the crowds may have thought of Jesus as some sort of magician. When they joined Jesus, they left behind the lives they led before. They moved beyond curiosity or casual awe. Sitting at his feet, they learned and committed their lives to his teachings.

Later, under threat of imprisonment, Peter denies Jesus three times. Peter is human. His faith ebbs and flows, like ours. Jesus knows that Peter will deny him, yet he tells Peter in Matt. 16:18, "On this rock I will build my church." He chooses Peter, even though Peter is weak.

Thank you, Messiah, Son of God, Anointed One, Jesus for your faith in Peter, and in us.

Penny Oster

## Day 38

Thursday, March 29th  
Mark 15:21-32 (ESV)

### A DRINK FOR THE ONE WHO IS PERISHING

Among all the mockery, taunting and shaming, there is a flash of mercy toward Jesus. Someone, perhaps a group of religious women, raises toward Christ's lips a cocktail of wine and myrrh, which may have helped numb the excruciating pain of crucifixion. I want him to sip that cup so badly; injustice and horror abound, and he *so* deserves this relief, however minor it might be.

But Jesus, our astounding savior, does not indulge. He opts for full, unsparring agony compounded by the venom of hateful onlookers.

In the ebb and flow of our lives, we encounter pain, sadness and desperation. Often our impulse as humans is to find something to dull the suffering, even for a moment. Sure, that might mean a glass of Cab, but it's just as easily an escape into television, a hobby gone overboard, or an Amazon purchase just because.

Yet we know, in our souls, that all of our fixes fall short. And moments before his death, woozy from torture, Jesus makes sure to drive home that we, sons and daughters of God, we are worth *everything*. A few gulps of wine and myrrh, sips we're inclined to take, would cheapen his sacrifice to mankind. How assuring to have a savior, then and now, who dodges nothing, absorbing everything that separates us from God.

When distress looms, and maybe that's right now, think of Christ brushing away that cup. He is the only lasting relief, the source of true joy and life.

Ryan Arnold

## Day 37

Wednesday, March 28th  
Mark 15:16-20 (ESV)

MOCKED. BEATEN. REJECTED.

Virtually no one emerges from childhood without having experienced bullying in some form. We are familiar with the pain of feeling hurt, rejected, helpless. As he journeys toward the physical brutality of the cross, Jesus is not “helpless.” He tells his disciples to put away their weapons: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). He *chooses* to drink the cup of physical agony.

Oh, but the *heart pain*. This he does not “choose,” it is the inevitable outcome of his deep love for each person he has come to save. “The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light” (John 3:19). Having given his chosen people free will to choose him back, he is indeed vulnerable to the rejection of the people he loves.

Today’s passage is brutal. We witness false accusations and betrayal. The Creator-King is taunted, blindfolded, stripped before the jeering crowd, “crowned” with cruel thorns, beaten and spat upon. He is sent to a criminal’s death with shouts of derision.

I have to wonder... where am I in that crowd of onlookers? Might I be drawn to the excitement by prurient curiosity? Could I succumb to the cultural pressure to edge away from his often “uncomfortable” message? Or perhaps I would choose apathy, going about my busy schedule, oblivious to the world-changing events unfolding around me. Let’s stop, witness, *experience* this terrible scene. Let’s let it hurt. Because it hurt the One who “*came to his own, and his own people did not receive him*” (John 1:11).

And yet... and still... “...To all who *did* receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become *children of God.*” (John 1:11-12).

Jo Anne Cripe

## Day 2

Thursday, February 15th  
Mark 8:31-33 (NRSV)

THE WAY TO LIFE

As the disciples walked with Jesus, he allowed them front row seats to watch the extraordinary power of the Kingdom of God. Healings, teachings with authority, demons cast into a herd of pigs, food multiplied to feed thousands – TWICE! Jesus ate with sinners and Gentiles, honored women, touched the unclean. So of course when asked who Jesus is, they proudly proclaim, “Messiah.”

And in that moment, their world is turned upside down.

*He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed (vs 31).* What did they understand of the Messiah? Messiah’s don’t suffer. Hadn’t he Jews suffered enough throughout generations? Here was Jesus who had the power to overcome it all. *Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. But Jesus rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me Satan!” (vs 32).*

Peter spoke what I imagine every one was thinking, and Jesus minced no words. Suffering is part of the Messiah’s journey – and for Peter to try and deny that suffering would come was evil. Jesus knew his time on earth went through the cross. Jesus would suffer physically; endure pain unto death for the sake of the world.

I don’t like to suffer; I find it hard to choose suffering. Yet that is exactly what Jesus did. There is no way to save our life without losing it. We have a choice. We can choose the cross, knowing that we are being invited to die to ourselves so we might gain life. Or we can, in our thoughts or actions rebuke Jesus.

What I am certain of is that Jesus stays with us in our hardest moments. His life brings hope that we can find life in suffering’s midst. Jesus rose, defeating death. That was his Journey and it can be ours as well.

Kimberley Wun

## Day 3

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Friday, February 16th  
Mark 8:34-9:1 (NRSV)

### THE CROWN AND THE CROSS IN MY OWN LIFE

In these verses, Jesus implies that his bearing a cross necessitates our bearing a cross. The King will endure a cross of his own and so will we, for in verse 35 we read “whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Comprehending Jesus’ gift of salvation involves self-denial.

This goes against the grain of our culture that champions self-fulfillment and actualization over personal sacrifice. How often have we been told to “fulfill our own potential”? We’ve even been instructed by our parents or other influences that what they want most for us is to “be happy.” Our happiness and success is something we naturally aim for. Yet Jesus’ message seems to strike at the heart of this, to blow it to smithereens.

The Greek word for “life” used by Jesus is “psyche,” which underscores a person’s identity or distinctiveness. What Jesus does is cause us to think about where we find our identity. He’s highlighting that the world is not enough. You can have the finest of cars, homes, personal features of beauty or charisma, money, success or power, but they will neither fulfill nor bring you salvation. Jesus wants you to form an identity that is not performance based but is shaped by his love.

Ask yourself this Lent, on what is my identity founded? What most significantly roots my affections? If there’s something I were to lose right now that would shake me to my core because it is so self-defining, what is it? And further, will I take up my own cross or only demand that Jesus takes up his? Reread the passage to see what God would ask of you.

Henry Hansen

## Day 36

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Tuesday, March 27th  
Mark 15:1-15 (LASB)

### JESUS BEFORE PILATE

When the leading priests bound Jesus and brought him to Pilate, the Roman governor asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “You have said it” is one biblical translation while another is, “if you say so” (vs2).

Pilate knew deep down that Jesus was not guilty, and even gave him opportunities to answer the accusations against him. Jesus said nothing. Really? No defense?

It’s easy to judge Pilate here for caving into the crowd, going along with the “group think,” the momentum of the crowd shouting, “Crucify him!” (vs 13). However, can’t we all see a bit of ourselves in Pilate, who went along with the pack in order to keep his political position? Haven’t we all at some time gone along with something even when we know the better path is to stand up for what’s right? Laughed at a joke at the expense of another? Greyed the lines? Heard that little voice in our hearts say “do this” and we don’t, or “don’t do that” and we do?

Contrast this to Jesus whose determination here is astounding. Accused of crimes he did not commit. Mocked, betrayed and compared to another prisoner who WAS guilty, and released instead. Yet Jesus’ determination to remain focused on God’s purpose and plan was solid. And ultimately he was crucified, deserving none of it.

Jesus’ humility, focus and ability to see a MUCH bigger picture here is astonishing. “You have said it” is all he says and then remains quiet, even praying for those who beat and persecuted him and ultimately put him to death.

*Jesus, thank you for your ultimate sacrifice. Help us to have unwavering confidence and trust in you regardless of the world’s expectations, knowing your plan is so much larger than we can imagine.*

Janine Rodgers Reale

## Day 35

Monday, March 26th  
Mark 14:66-72 (NRSV)

### WHERE IS HOPE?

Jesus, betrayed by Judas, had been taken away to the high priest. In the courtyard below, Peter followed, though he kept his distance. Things had gone terribly wrong. The shepherd was taken, and the little flock of disciples scattered. Any dream of God's kingdom being ushered in, by force if necessary, vanished.

What was going through Peter's mind when he denied to the servant-girl, several times, that he had been with Jesus? I imagine Peter had lost hope. In the daylight his confidence had soared. He was with his Master, surrounded by followers of like mind. What couldn't they accomplish together?

But now, alone, confidence disintegrated. Hope gave way to fear, perhaps, or even disgust at the whole matter. The rooster crowed, and Peter seemed oblivious. He cursed and denied knowing Jesus. Three denials, and then the rooster crowed a second time.

Something broke inside Peter at that point. He came to his senses. He remembered what Jesus had said, how Jesus had predicted this very moment, and the tears flowed. Peter wept.

That, of course, is not the end of the story, but we must pause this day and reflect on our own story. If we've entered a dark time, betraying what we know to be true, tempted to wonder if God really does love us, may we come to our senses. Bitter tears open the soul to that transcendent love.

There is hope, when all hope seems gone.

*O Lord, if tears have come allow them to be an offering to you. I have betrayed you in big and small things, but help me not to despair. You came into the world to make us new creatures. Grant, O Lord, the hope of the resurrection.*

Dan Barnett

## Day 4

Saturday, February 17th  
Mark 9:2-12 (ESV)

### A TASTE OF GLORY

What do you think of when you hear the word "Glory"? Gazing at a sunset? Listening to Handel's Messiah? Being in that "thin place" where Heaven and earth seem to meet?

Journeying the dusty roads of Palestine together, Peter, James and John have listened to Jesus speak often of His Father in Glory. One day, on a high mountain, He takes them with him to the ultimate "thin place" where "he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant ... And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus... and a voice came out of the cloud, *"This is my beloved Son; listen to him"* (vs 2-8).

These three friends were granted a foretaste of Heaven's glory. John made it a central theme of his gospel: *"We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son, from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). While we are tempted to relegate this event to a unique moment in the past, here is God's promise to each of us today: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

What difference does the Glory of the Most High God make in my daily life? C.S. Lewis reflects in [The Weight of Glory](#), that "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak... we are like ignorant children, who want to go on making mud pies in a slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea."

Someday we will "see face to face." For today, let's ask God for a glimpse of His Glory.

Jo Anne Cripe

## Day 5

Monday, February 19th  
Mark 9:14-29 (MSG)

### JESUS HEALS

Jesus' disciples have just tried, unsuccessfully, to heal a seriously unwell boy. At this, he says to them, "What an unbelieving generation! No sense of God! How many times do I have to go over these things?" (vs 19).

It's a hard tone, but this is serious. It's a tone we use with our own children when we urgently need their attention. He has much to impart. The time is now. There is not much time left on his journey to the cross.

The boy's father says to Jesus, "...if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus replies, "If? There are no 'ifs' among believers. *Anything can happen*" (vs 22-23). Immediately the father cries, "Then I believe. Help me with my doubts!" (vs 24).

How many of us have asked Jesus for a miracle but doubted simultaneously? Desperation takes over. The situation feels so vast, so impossible. For a moment, we forget the truth about Jesus: *Anything can happen!*

The father declares his belief anyway, and asks for help with his doubt. That's our model. We set our intentions and ask Jesus for help. Healing our doubts is as much a miracle as healing our sicknesses. Both father *and* son are healed.

Why couldn't the disciples heal the boy? Jesus explained that "this kind" can only come out by PRAYER. What had the disciples tried?

Believe. Ask Jesus for help. Pray. So basic, but we still forget. That's okay; Jesus helps us. He may not heal every person, every time, just how we want. This is such a painful reality. But we can always trust that he is Good. Going-to-the-cross Good. Hold onto this, friends, as you ask for your miracles.

Bonnie Johnston

## Day 34

Saturday, March 24th  
Mark 14:53-65 (ESV)

### STILL

At age 8, I was falsely accused of firing expletives at my mom's friend, who was babysitting me and a friend. The "friend" had, in fact, been the one to let her verbal-freak fly. I was shocked by what I heard but said nothing to my mom when she picked me up. The girl, however, decided to cover herself and fabricated a story to her mother that marked me as the culprit. Her mother called my mother to tell what I had "done." Let's just say, the remaining day did not go well and despite my protests of innocence, I tasted Dial soapsuds. As I continued to cry, my mom informed me I would call her friend and apologize. She dialed, stated the call's purpose, and suddenly the room fell silent as she listened to the account of what had really transpired.

Have you ever been falsely accused? Have you ever instigated something, spread a story, or jumped on a bandwagon? "...seeking testimony against Jesus...found none" (vs 55); "False witness and testimony that did not agree" (vs 56). Perhaps this crowd surrounding Jesus thought they were taking part in an event that offered them feelings of inclusion, importance, or validation in their thinking. Perhaps they were covering themselves.

The people who studied about the coming Messiah, ensconced in their own myopic worldview, didn't recognize him, believe in him, nor come to his defense. More importantly though, is the demeanor of Jesus, who remained still to *false* accusations; he did, however, answer honestly and clearly, when asked the direct question of who he was, speaking truth.

God, you know my heart. Search me and reveal your truth. In stillness, may I find peace.

Leslie Amani

## Day 33

Friday, March 23rd  
Mark 14:43-52

### JESUS ARRESTED

There's a lot going on here. There's betrayal, arrest, apocalyptic allusions, prophecies fulfilled and laid out, someone gets their ear lopped off, someone else runs away naked, and all of it happens with the immediacy that typifies Mark's telling. In the midst of it all Jesus speaks. He will speak less and less from this point on, and His words are chosen carefully.

Jesus is still while chaos churns around him. He simply speaks, rebuking those whose choices created this chaos.

He knows that this is where the pain truly begins. He knows what we are capable of when we are at our best. He knows what we are prone to at our worst. He faces the armed crowd, aware that they have had plenty of opportunities to approach him, without the intimate betrayal, without the public display, and without weaponry.

Jesus knows the personal sacrifice and the gift he's preparing as he faces this mob. They are stuck in one idea of danger, one idea of challenge, one idea of confrontation. Jesus takes this confrontation, points out its faults, and assures both his attackers and followers that he is ready, that this must come. The end is beginning, and the new beginning awaits.

As I read this passage, I imagine myself in the crowd. I watch the armed mob, I listen to the calm man in the middle of the chaos, I see the followers flee. I am in awe of that powerful peace. How can I cultivate such a calm, faithful peace in my life? How do I live in the promise that Jesus' silence makes in that moment?

Kate Ory

## Day 6

Tuesday, February 20th  
Mark 9:30-37 (MSG)

### ON THE WAY TO THE CROSS

Jesus has a way of turning our thoughts up-side-down. When the disciples became full of their own popularity and prominence in the community, Jesus brought them back to the reality of his mission, and his coming death, once again.

They didn't know what to do because the last time he described his death and resurrection, Peter balked. Jesus put Peter in his place. Their Jewish minds could not engage the concept of death for Jesus much less resurrection. Fear and confusion kept them from asking Jesus for clarification. How often do we let fear and confusion keep us from seeking wisdom from Jesus about a matter?

Jesus had another focus. His concern was for the character of his followers. They were beginning to take their star status a little too seriously, building kingdoms in their own minds and establishing a new pecking order. So, the text says, "He sat down and summoned the twelve." In Jewish culture disciples know something is serious when their rabbi sits down to teach. Jesus leveled the playing field immediately and gently, waiting until they were in private to help them understand the reverse order by which he would conquer sin and death. His kingdom would be established not with the power the culture embraced but with simple servanthood.

Jesus took a child in his arms and told his disciples that doing this simple gesture put them in line with him and God.

On the way to the cross, Jesus takes time to teach us, his disciples, the reverse order of his kingdom. The way to the cross, he reminds his disciples, is that of servanthood.

Nancy Calkins

## Day 7

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Wednesday, February 21st  
Mark 9:38 - 41 (MSG)

### A CUP OF WATER

As Jesus begins his final journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, he uses this time with his disciples to teach them truths that they will need in the future. He knows what lies ahead, not just in the next few weeks but for the rest of their lives. He uses teachable moments to provide lessons that will enable them to do the work he will call them to do.

Along this journey John points out to Jesus that others are using his name to perform miracles. John believes that miracles should be reserved for those who are the “chosen” disciples, those who sacrificed everything to follow Christ. He expects Jesus to agree. To the contrary, Jesus makes this statement, “Why, anyone by just giving you a cup of water in my name is on our side” (vs 41). He wants the disciples to recognize that the gospel is not theirs exclusively. This is a lesson they need to learn. If the gospel of Christ is to spread throughout the world it will take all believers to do their part.

This lesson speaks to us today. There is a huge hurting world in need of Christ’s message of love and grace. This can’t be accomplished by ordained ministers, biblical scholars, or trained lay ministers alone. It can only be done when everyone who names Jesus as Lord and Savior reaches out to those around them. You have been placed in your world to give the message of Christ. No one is better equipped than you to spread the gospel to those in your life.

Will you extend a cup of refreshing water in Christ’s name to **your** thirsty world?

Debra Henley

## Day 32

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Thursday, March 22st  
Mark 14:32-42 (NRSV)

### GETHSEMANE

I once had a horrible nightmare that I was working in an office in a skyscraper and a tornado was tearing through the city, about to hit our building. Those of us on the high floor of the skyscraper were preparing for our building to be ripped in half and we were sure death was imminent as a result. I remember thinking to myself in the dream, “I will now know what death feels like. I really hope it is not agonizing.” I woke up from my sleep before the dream went much further. What was so harrowing about the nightmare was the feeling it imparted in me: death was about to happen.

In the Gethsemane vignette in Mark, we experience one of the most poignant examples of Jesus’s humanity. While Jesus knew the purpose he was to fulfill through the sacrifice of his life, it didn’t make the fact any easier, he was about to experience the unknown: death. Unlike a sudden natural disaster hitting, a series of things were about to occur before his death would actually happen. And, it would not be a “quick death,” but in fact one of the worst ways to die. Jesus did what a human being would do, he asked God to reconsider, to spare his life. And yet, he surrendered in his soul to the will of his Father. Jesus’ entire life was a series of choices he made to obey his Father. And now, in the final act of obedience, Jesus succeeds. While fully human, he is also fully God.

Is there something going on in your life right now that you could take to God in prayer and sincerely ask for His will to be done?

Shannon Christopher

## Day 31

Wednesday, March 21st  
Mark 14:27-31 (NRSV)

### DO YOU KNOW YOURSELF?

Perhaps the disciples were to take comfort in Jesus' words that though they would desert him, he would draw them together again after his resurrection. But they did not understand. Standing with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, desertion seemed the farthest thing from Peter's mind. He was ready to fight if need be to defend his Teacher, even to die for this one who was ushering in the kingdom of God. In a way, Peter got it exactly backwards. Jesus was on his way to die for Peter.

Peter proclaims that he will never deny Jesus, and John Calvin notes in his commentary on this passage that "Peter uses no hypocrisy, but speaks with sincere affection." Deny Jesus three times this very night? Impossible! And yet, Calvin continues, "Peter promised more for himself than he was able to accomplish." He had "a false confidence in his virtue."

It's easy for us to believe that we know ourselves, especially our motives, better than anyone else could know us. Our resolve to be faithful in prayer, to worship God as we have been created to do, to be ambassadors for Christ in our daily lives, can seem unshakeable in the moment. But those closest to us may know otherwise.

Our "false confidence," Calvin says, is like a drunken soldier who runs fearlessly into the field of battle, only to "think nothing else than flight" when it wears off. May our confidence be in our Lord, who knows us more truly than we know ourselves.

*Good Shepard, please forgive me for my presumption. I seek to follow you, but can do so only as I depend on your grace. With humility I say: My confidence is in you.*

Dan Barnett

## Day 8

Thursday, February 22nd  
Mark 9:42-50 (MSG)

### ON THE WAY TO THE CROSS

I have to admit verses 48-50 have been some of the most difficult words for me personally to take in. I asked myself why would Jesus be so stern about the effects of sin, if he has paid for our sins by his redemptive work? He loves us!

The sins of selfishness, pride, greed, and envy all eat away at our souls depriving us of peace. They deprive us of relationship with Jesus himself because they take our focus away from him and his direction for our life. As a result, it is better to cut off the leprous parts of our body that lead us to sin. Think of it in terms of addiction. Any addiction takes away our self-respect and robs us of the mental time to engage with Jesus. Because it is an addiction we feel hopeless and lost versus feeling blessed and peaceful.

Jesus has opened the way to eternity with his perfect sacrifice, but he wants us as his disciples here to be free from those things (sin) that corrupt our souls and cause us to suffer. Anyone of us who practices a personal discipline, athletic, academic, or spiritual, knows they must lay aside distractions that would deter them from reaching the goal. If you, as a disciple, want to reach the goal of being like Jesus you must "cut off" those things that would keep you from being his.

The way to the cross cost Jesus everything. He "cut off" sin at every turn because being in God's presence is worth everything!

*Lord, help me to recognize those things that would hinder my growth in you. Then help me release any distraction that would keep me from being fully yours.*

Nancy Calkins

## Day 9

Friday, February 23rd  
Mark 10:1-12 (ESV)

### DIVORCE

Separate. Disconnect. Divide. Detach. Isolate. Alienate.

As one who has experienced divorce, this is a difficult passage to read. Malachi 2:26 states “God hates divorce.” Divorce is painful and creates an emotional chasm; a living-death from a spouse and the family and friends associated with the union. Read, again, the list of words at the beginning. For a God who has created us to be in relationship, these words epitomize what God is against: Rejection and separation from being fully loved just as we are.

What strikes me in this passage from Mark most poignantly is Jesus’ response to the Pharisees: “Because of your hardness of heart.” Sit with and reflect on what hardness of heart looks like: Crustiness. Hard-edges. An emotional and spiritual fortress of inflexible stone erected over time and circumstances, stone by stone. Hardness of heart is the antithesis of being malleable, flexible, open, and vulnerable.

How to combat this “hardness of heart”? One way, for me, is to lay my concerns at the feet of the Savior; to lay down the stones I’m holding on to; stones like anger, betrayal, hurt and disappointment. If you are carrying stones, don’t build a wall; lay them down and use the stones to build a bridge between you and the Savior and those you are in relationship with.

*God, I lay before you the thoughts, ideas and feelings that I am using to build a wall between myself and others. I pray you soften my heart and gently heal my woundedness so that I may not sin against you nor toward others. Increase, within my heart, mind and soul, love, compassion, kindness, gentleness and faithfulness. Lead me.*

Leslie Amani

## Day 30

Tuesday, March 20th  
Mark 14:12-26 (MSG)

### BETRAYAL

When I think of the Last Supper, I prefer to remember Jesus with his friends, with the bread, and the wine, and the cup, and the “Remember Me.” But not this painful moment.

Jesus has news. “Important and hard,” he calls it. Just as he predicted exactly how they would find the room for this special Passover meal, he predicted that one of his twelve closest friends would “hand him over to the conspirators” (vs 17-18).

While Jesus can predict the future, his disciples cannot. They ask, “It isn’t me, is it?” (vs 19). Each man truly doesn’t even know what he will do next, or what he is capable of. Much like each of us, unfortunately.

This moment is rich with the fullness of Jesus. He has prepared a place at his holiday table for the most painful kind of enemy, a close friend. He is delivering bad news to loved ones and attempting to be present with them. He is letting go of a friend and allowing an enemy to destroy him. He is obediently fulfilling a scripture (Psalm 41:9) which will cause him great pain and suffering but also save the world. He predicts, too, his friend-turned-enemy’s suffering (v 21). He knows that once Judas goes, they will soon come for him. He knows what each of them must do.

Consider Jesus’ strength and courage in this passage and your own capacity for loyalty and betrayal.

Consider Jesus’ ability to predict the future and his hold on it. In John’s account of this story (John 13), Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9, written 1000 years earlier by King David at the end of his own life. Read Psalm 41 to see how Jesus may have felt in this step toward the cross.

Bonnie Johnston

## Day 29

Monday, March 19th  
Mark 14:1-11

### PERSPECTIVE

Isn't it astounding how several people can view the same event, yet see it differently? This is a daily dynamic in all our lives, and one aspect found in this very rich passage. In his version of this event, Mark retains anonymity of a few characters, referring to them as simply "a woman" and "some others." With these generic terms, it's much easier to insert ourselves into either role.

Presumably, all these persons have spent time with Jesus, watched him live and listened to him speak. Yet with the same information, they are reaching drastically different conclusions. One has accepted Jesus' words of his impending death and appropriately responds with a passionate and extravagant action; others feel strongly rooted in the daily meeting of practical needs. No doubt the woman has often met the practical needs of people. No doubt the others have had times of worship. But at this moment, they are polarized, and one side becomes accusatory, derogatory, and even threatening.

At this moment of tension, Jesus steps in as mediator to protect, to explain, to correct misunderstandings. He exposes hard-heartedness, and chides the misuse of the poor. He brings blessing where there has been cursing.

Sometimes we are "a woman," responding passionately and extravagantly to the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And sometimes we are "the others," bewildered or even condescending of other's beliefs or actions. Whatever our perspective, we are to be Christ, the peace maker.

"Make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring your love..... Oh Master grant that I may never seek, as such to be understood, as to understand..." (Anon.)

*Daily, Lord, I yield my perspective to Yours.*

Tina Hoover

## Day 10

Saturday, February 24th  
Mark 10:13-16 (NIV)

### THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND JESUS

I like the way that people would bring little children to Jesus "for him to place his hands on them" (vs 13). Were they laughing? Playing? "But the disciples rebuked them" (vs 13). What were they thinking? Was Jesus too important to touch and play with children? He had more important things to do with the adults?

This made Jesus indignant. He was strongly displeased. He says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (vs 14). What? Little kids? With all their interruptions and silly questions? Children don't know what to do or what to say. Children haven't worked out all the right answers to any questions. What is it about children that make them special? Jesus even centers whether or not we enter the kingdom of God on this issue: "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (vs 15). Wow.

I used to be part of a ministry with children singing songs and sharing testimonies in the streets. I would witness grown men weeping in the crowds and moms tearing up. What is it about children that the Holy Spirit would be so strong through them? I have a hunch it has something to do with how Jesus feels about children. Is it their innocence? They are not always so innocent, are they? But they are so teachable and trusting. They believe a promise (so please keep your promises to children) and their hearts are so precious.

Let us come to Jesus like a little child; trusting, honest and unpretentious. If you see a child today give them a special hug.

Bill Hammond

## Day 11

Monday, February 26th  
Mark 10:17-27 (ESV)

### THE RICH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

This passage is amongst the most widely known interactions that Jesus has with another person during his public ministry. I believe what makes these verses so well known is the tension it creates for people for two reasons: the focus on money/wealth and on entering God's Kingdom.

I am struck most, not by the exchange that Jesus has with the rich man, but by the reaction of the disciples. Their reaction was to ask, "then who can be saved?" (vs 26). I know most of the attention goes to earlier elements, yet I wonder if Mark actually wants us to focus on the back-n-forth that Jesus and his disciples end up having.

The tension arises right smack in the middle of the astonished reaction and questions that come from the disciples. Their context told them that wealth was a sign of God's pleasure and blessing with a person, a family, or a nation. In some cases, we in our day, still ascribe to a similar notion.

Thankfully, Jesus, not only suggests that this notion is faulty, he makes it clear by his typical use of overstatement, "eye of the needle," (vs 25) that wealth is not a clear sign of God's pleasure. In fact, it may actually be the aspect in our lives that keep us from entering into God's Kingdom. Wealth just might be the god we idolize, worship, and make sacrifices for.

*Lord Jesus, we are struck by your words and instructions. We see that you have initiated a radical and new way of living and thinking. Search us, and help us remove the idols that keep us from your invitation to live in your Father's Kingdom. Amen.*

Matt Plotkin

## Day 28

Saturday, March 17th  
Mark 13:32-37

### THE DAY AND THE HOUR UNKNOWN

There are so many unknowns in this life...we don't know REALLY what today will bring. In a split second our world can change due to great fortune or great disaster. *It's all so unknown.* When I first read this passage, my natural inclination was to think that there's just one reason why we should stay alert, so that we'll be ready when Jesus returns. It's like we are working toward one goal.

As I have pondered this further I think this passage offers even more. Certainly we want to be ready when Jesus returns. But in my own life I have found that God also cares about our journey before Jesus returns. Being ready means a day to day walk growing deeper in relationship with him. That walk is where he guides, speaks into and disciplines our lives, and how He wants to use us in others' lives.

What I have grown to know to my core is that God's discipline, boundaries and direction are guardrails not to prohibit us from freedom, rather when we are fully in line with who He has created us to be, pursuing Him, and His purpose, we are most fully alive and alert. Now THAT is freedom. In "thin space" times such as these there is freedom, and joy. Let us stay alert to God's unique plans for each of us. Only the Father knows the day of Jesus return but let's not miss the freedom, joy and deep purpose he has to offer beforehand.

Janine Rodgers Reale

## Day 27

Friday, March 16th  
Mark 13:1-31 (NRSV)

### THE VERSE THAT ALMOST COST ME MY RELIGION

*“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” (vs 30)*

When Jesus talks about the sun being darkened, the light of the moon failing, and stars falling from heaven, it sounds like he’s talking about the end of the world. When he talks about “the Son of Man coming in the clouds,” one would think that he’s referring to his “Second Coming.”

There’s a problem here. Jesus said this would all happen before his own generation would pass away. Obviously, the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ did not happen in the next 40 years. Was Jesus horribly mistaken about all of this? This question troubled me for many years.

Finally, Biblical scholarship began to provide answers. As it turned out, language about darkening of the sun, failing moon light, and falling stars had nothing to do with the end of the world. This was the kind of language that great prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel freely used to describe the catastrophic fall of a great city and its earth-shaking consequences. Jesus was borrowing this picturesque prophetic language to predict the fall of Jerusalem.

Likewise, the vision of “the Son of Man coming in the clouds” had nothing to do with the “Second Coming of Christ to Earth.” Jesus was quoting Daniel 7:13, where the “Son of Man” comes before the Ancient of Days to be vindicated.

Tragically, in 70 A.D., Jesus’ reluctant predictions came true. Jerusalem revolted and the Roman Army completely destroyed the city. Jesus was not crazy. Jesus was not mistaken. He and those who put their trust in him were finally vindicated.

Allen McCallum

## Day 12

Tuesday, February 27th  
Mark 10:28-31 (NIV)

### WHAT HAVE YOU LEFT TO FOLLOW JESUS?

Peter declared, “We have left everything to follow you”! (vs 28). He left his nets, his boats, his business and his familiar life of fishing.

Jesus said, “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age; homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life” (vs. 29-30).

That’s a big promise with a big caveat. Jesus wanted his followers to know that there are big sacrifices in following him, as well as rewards multiplied a hundred times over, AND persecutions, and also... eternal life.

I didn’t have to give up so much to follow Jesus. I live like many of you, where the cost of following Jesus is not as intense as in other places. But many throughout the world must give up their family, their property and their livelihood to follow Jesus and the gospel. In over 50 countries in the world today it is illegal to be a Christ follower. In many places, to follow Jesus means loss, hardship and turmoil. Following Jesus in the Muslim world, North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, or parts of Asia is extremely difficult. Each time I’ve heard a personal story of persecution I’ve also heard that God has been faithful in rewarding the person with a larger family of God through Christ.

Where does that leave us? What have you left to follow Jesus? What rewards have you experienced in following Jesus? Any persecutions?

*Please pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world.*

Bill Hammond

## Day 13

Wednesday, February 28th  
Mark 10: 32-34 (NIV)

### JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A THIRD TIME

WOW! Even though Jesus knew what was going to happen, he still kept walking into Jerusalem. Jesus was not caught off guard, naive, or a victim. “The Son of Man” (vs 33) anticipated suffering as any man would when betrayed by his own people, mocked, spit on, flogged, and experiencing death itself. Jesus also knew he would be victorious in the end. “Three days later he will rise” (vs 34).

Amazing, although this is the third time that the disciples are told what would happen, there is no evidence that they recall Jesus’ words as his prediction takes place. It’s as if they don’t really hear him. Is it that it didn’t make any sense to them? What do we disregard because we don’t want to believe it or don’t understand?

*Thank you, Jesus, for going to Jerusalem knowing that suffering awaited. Thank you for dying for our sin. Thank you, God, for raising Jesus three days later. Increase our desire to know You, believe You and trust You. Amen*

Rene Connell

## Day 26

Thursday, March 15th  
Mark 12:41-44 (NKJV)

### THE WIDOW’S TWO MITES

The treasury was located in the temple and known as the Court of Women. Jesus is an observer, probably not noticed as he sat there. Along comes a woman, who by appearance is very poor. Scripture tells us she is a poor *widow*. Could she be one of the widows in v.40 who has lost her home to the greedy Scribes?

This is not a story fit to be used for sermons on giving of your time, talent or treasure. Notice Jesus is not in any way denigrating the wealthy who give generously out of their abundance. Rather, Jesus emphasizes the faith of the one who worships God and by faith depends on His provision.

So what is he trying to teach his disciples as he moves toward the cross? Are the last lessons the most important ones? Is giving our ALL in faith to the glory of God the most important lesson for them *and* for us?

May it be so.

*God, we struggle to release all you have given us. Help us to remember how good you are to provide all we need. Amen*

Clyde Powers

## Day 25

Wednesday, March 14th  
Mark 12:38-40

### WARNING AGAINST TEACHERS OF THE LAW

This vignette in Mark takes place when Jesus is teaching in the temple. He makes observations about those around him. He first observes the scribes.

Scribes were teachers of Torah, moralists and civil lawyers. They held great prestige, surpassing that of the high priests. The best seats in the synagogues were reserved for them and they wore prayer shawls, which Jesus refers to as "long robes," distinguishing them as men of wealth and importance. And yet, Jesus warns his disciples about them. He sees their outward appearance as a pretense.

As always, Jesus is more interested in the inward condition of people than their outward appearance. Jesus warns his disciples not to be fooled by the pomp and ostentation of those in religious power. He can do this, because he knows the condition of their souls. They used religious practice to advance themselves in power, wealth, and prestige. Jesus knows their hearts.

Jesus knows our hearts too. But sometimes we don't know our own hearts unless we intentionally take the time to examine ourselves before God. Here is an indispensable practice you could incorporate into your daily routine:

1. Give thanks to God for all the things you are grateful for over the last 24 hours.
2. Call on the Holy Spirit to help you see the moments of the last 24 hours when you did not act so well and to be honest about mistakes you've made.
3. If you have sinned, ask God for forgiveness (and receive his forgiveness!) and for the strength to apologize if necessary.
4. Pray about how you can amend your ways and ask God to change your heart where necessary.

Shannon Christopher

## Day 14

Thursday, March 1st  
Mark 10: 35-45 (NIV)

### CAN YOU DRINK HIS CUP?

I'm Salome and the truth is, I was in on this. What mother wouldn't want special honor for her sons? Imagine if James and John could sit in glory with Jesus in the high places. Yes, we were foolish. Ambitious to a fault. One day people will say that Jesus mentioned blind men who regain their vision at either end of this incident to serve as bookends around stories of disciples who cannot see. And they would be right; we were blind, slow to learn that being great requires service, not advancement, to learn that becoming great requires service, not advancement.

My zealous sons said *yes, yes, yes*, when Jesus asked, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (vs 38). Ah, but I had to shake my head. How could they know what he truly asked? I had my suspicions: Jews knew that to share another's cup meant sharing fate. The indignant brethren, frustrated with my boys for trying to grab honor that excluded them. They were like willful goats vying for position, my two included. Jesus had nicknamed my boys "Boanerges", Sons of Thunder, and surely the sky rumbled whenever they took action. They were fervent for his sake!

Yet Jesus knew what was in a man, knew what they needed to know. "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (vs 43-44). My beautiful sons. James would be the first apostle killed and John, the last. They would drink the cup of suffering and this would be honor. They would leave the world and in this way, enter glory.

Ask your Lord for ways to serve him, to make him great among the people...

Lauren Mesa

## Day 15

Friday, March 2nd  
Mark 10:46-52 (NIV)

### BLIND BARTIMAEUS

Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, calls out to Jesus saying “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (vs 47). By calling Jesus “Son of David,” Bartimaeus affirms his belief in Jesus as the Messiah. When people try to silence Bartimaeus, he calls to Jesus more loudly! He didn’t care what those around him wanted him to do. He was desperate to get Jesus’ attention.

At that time, religious leaders believed that people who were poor, blind, or who suffered from other bad circumstances were afflicted as a result of God’s judgement. Psalm 9:18 affirms that God has not forgotten the needy and the poor. By calling out to Jesus, Bartimaeus shows his belief that Jesus, unlike the religious leaders, would heal him. Jesus stopped and asked that Bartimaeus be called to him. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see” (vs 51). He could have asked for money, food or other things that he had begged for over the years. Bartimaeus asked for something that only God, the Healer, could give him. “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you” (vs 52). Immediately Bartimaeus received his sight.

What strikes me about this story is how the blind man saw Jesus more clearly than those who could see with their eyes. The guy who, as a beggar, got everybody’s leftovers gets the front row seat in a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, that I may see you as clearly as Bartimaeus. Heal me in the ways that I am still blind in my understanding of you. When I want to look at my feet and the path a foot ahead of me, lift my head to see you.*

Lisa Stone

## Day 24

Tuesday, March 13th  
Mark 12:35-37 (NRSV)

### YOUR HOLY OF HOLIES

Jesus is on a winning streak. He marvels the crowds by confronting the teachings of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes. He’s demonstrating his pedagogical prowess. Even more, he’s directing them to the true nature of his identity.

It’s unique that Jesus raises questions regarding the relationship between the Messiah and King David inside the Temple. The Holy of holies is the greatest identity marker of Jewish life, signifying the power and presence of God. Jesus is now located within the temple taking issue with the teachings of the Scribes. Jesus argues that a difference exists in the nature of David’s kingship as an earthly lord, and his own Kingship over all the earth.

Jesus is King over this earth and he is from the line of David, but what differentiates Jesus is that he is actually God’s Son. He’s fully God. He will not rule like an earthly king but rather one that seeks to embody the kingdom of heaven on earth. Jesus as God’s Son offers more than the world can; he offers salvation.

As you draw near to Christ during your times of worship seek to do two things during Lent. First, engage your mind in the truths of hymns, songs of praise, Scripture, prayers and message. Allow yourself to engage in mystery and wonder. And second, consider the relevance of Jesus’ identity for your life. We struggle with language around kingship because it’s foreign to us. Jesus desires ultimate dominion and influence over every area of your life, because he is the living God.

Henry Hansen

## Day 23

Monday, March 12th  
Mark 12:28-34 (MEV)

### ROAD TRIP

A road trip is a way to think of living our Christian lives, particularly during the Lenten season when we turn our reflections on Christ's journey to Jerusalem and the cross. The first Easter may have been the end of Christ's earthly journey, but it was also a new beginning of a new life for all humankind. He, of course, didn't stop at the cross but rose to conquer death. "Christ Has Risen, Indeed." There is new life, a new world, a new journey toward the Kingdom of God on earth. If life is a road trip, this is the "where" of our journey.

Any journey needs a map. Christian journey maps contain theologies, sermons, rituals, prayers, churches, music, buildings, sacraments, and charities. All such things that have come forward from the first Easter. Our map includes the beauty of nature itself. We see our map whenever love steps in as the core of human relationships.

Every map needs a legend. The legend, or key, to a map pulls together all that's on the map. We find the legend for our Christian journey map in a little corner of the Gospel where Christ is teaching. In Mark 12: 28-31 one of the scribes gathered around Jesus asked: "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered: "The first . . . is, . . . the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord with all your heart, . . . all your soul, . . . all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." After that was understood no one dared to ask him any questions.

What more does our religious map need to be on the road toward the Kingdom of God?

Lou Nevins

## Day 16

Saturday, March 3rd  
Mark 11:1-11 (NIV)

### LIVING IN THE ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

When I read this account of Jesus I often feel the situation is hopeless; Jesus is riding into a dead end that will lead to his death. But, the situation is not what it seems. We know his death is not the final chapter.

Jesus rode a donkey, and his followers thought that a donkey meant He was going to triumph over all their enemies, as promised in Zechariah 9. When he was captured and cruelly murdered, they were understandably devastated. However, horses are for war, but donkeys are for ceremonies such as a peace treaty. Jesus is like a military leader driving a jeep rather than a tank.

He came to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven, to triumph over death, and to initiate the church as his body on earth. He did not come in a robe dipped in blood, with a sword coming out of his mouth, as He will at the final battle prophesied in Revelation 19. That will come later.

Some of us have a lot in common with the crowd that cheered Jesus. We are vulnerable to expecting Jesus to ride into our lives on a war-horse and deal with every situation that causes us pain. We cheer "Hosanna," or "save now," when we assume God will always produce Hollywood-style happy endings in our lives. It's hard to accept Jesus on a donkey as leader of an army that is salt and light in the world, but won't claim final victory until He comes again.

*Lord, help us live in the already, but not yet, of your Kingdom.*

Steve Koch

## Day 17

Monday, March 5th  
Mark 11:15-18 (NAS)

### JESUS' ACCOMPLISHMENT

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. His entrance into the city and first acts there were deliberate provocations of the Roman authorities and religious leaders.

We are all familiar with the phrase "Hit 'em where it hurts." And the wallet is generally what we mean when we say that. Jesus had been challenging the Scribes and Pharisees with words and miracles, doing provocative things like forgiving sins and healing in the temple on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-15). But this – it's shocking. We tend to think of Jesus the "meek and mild," but here he's on the attack, hitting them directly where it hurts. The religious leaders were engaging in commerce in the temple courts, making a profit from changing money and selling livestock for temple sacrifices.

The Matthew 12 passage ends with Jesus withdrawing from Jerusalem after that healing on the Sabbath because he knew the Pharisees were plotting to kill him. His time had not come. But when the time was right, he headed straight back to Jerusalem and the temple and deliberately provoked them in a way he knew they wouldn't let go. It would be difficult to convict Jesus for healing someone, but now he was messing with their income – from which you can be sure the Roman's were also profiting.

Jesus accomplished what he set out to do, the Pharisees went right out and renewed their plot to kill him. This time he didn't leave Jerusalem. This time he stayed to face the death that was planned from the beginning of the world.

*Lord Jesus, your majesty increases in our sight and the depth of your love for us is magnified as we contemplate the determined, deliberate way you sought to accomplish our salvation.*

Janis Barnett

## Day 22

Saturday, March 10th  
Mark 12:18-27 (NIV)

### OUR FUTURE LIFE

Sadducees, Pharisees, you name it, they're trouble. So, forgive me if I ignore the ridiculous question the Sadducees pose in this passage, the one that Jesus immediately recognized for what it was: pure ignorance. They didn't care about his answer; they simply wanted him to stumble. And neither did they believe in the resurrection - but they sure as heck wanted to pose a tangled question about it. Perhaps you know people like that; I do, and it makes me weary.

Today, we can leave such things behind. Instead, we can take Jesus' words about the resurrection to heart, because - and this is big - they will determine the way we presently live. If we are assured of our own resurrection, we will fear neither man nor death. If we are certain of a future life in God's kingdom, we will look at this life very differently. The resurrection is no small matter, and this is what the Sadducees missed. It was then, and continues to be, one of the fundamental and foundational truths of the Bible. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, if there is no resurrection "we are to be pitied more than all men" (15:19). How foolish, we easily think, for the Sadducees to reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, when it is so clearly taught in the Scriptures.

But what of us? What does this greatest, gladdest news of all from the Book of Revelation (21:1-4), that one day we will all love and be loved perfectly, mean to us? Oh, my friends, the wonder of it.

*How does the certainty of our resurrection, and of the kingdom of God to come, impact our present lives?*

Lauren Mesa

## Day 21

Friday, March 9th  
Mark 12:13-17 (NIV)

### WHEN YOUR ENEMIES TEAM UP, LOOK OUT!

The Pharisees and Herodians did not like each other, yet they came together to ask Jesus a question. And, they begin their question with flattery. These are red flags, and Jesus calls it what it is: a trap.

By this point in the life of Jesus, the specter of the cross was looming larger. Virtually anything he said would be used against him. If he sides with “God,” as the leaders portrayed him, he offends Caesar. If he goes with Caesar, he insults the religious authorities. Even Jesus’ reply, by amazing the crowd, infuriates these challengers.

According to his questioners, the denarius coin violated two of the Ten Commandments: it acknowledged Caesar as a god, and it contained a graven image.

I think the message here is largely contained in the phrase “Jesus knew their hypocrisy” (vs 15). They were deceitful because none of Jesus’ questioners was asking the question in good faith. They were pretending to love and respect God while disregarding the clear commands of God. When you or I pretend to believe something, but our actions say otherwise, we are also being hypocrites.

Once, I was tempted to purchase a new chair for our home, and claim it for my office, thus avoiding (or evading) taxes I did not like paying. I could have probably gotten away with it. I realized that if I truly *did* believe that God would take care of my material needs, it would be senseless to stoop to this level. I was grateful to learn that, at least on that day, my heart and actions were aligned.

*Lord, help us to know our hearts and render to you our love and trust.*

Steve Koch

## Day 18

Tuesday, March 6th  
Mark 11:12-25 (NAS & NIV)

### THE FIG TREE

Why did Jesus, who was all about healing and restoration, curse a fig tree? This incident can’t be divorced from Jesus’ cleansing of the temple that follows. Though Jesus’ actions were deliberately provocative, his zeal for his Father’s house was real.

The fig tree was loaded with leaves, attracting Jesus attention; he was hungry and looked for fruit. But that tree was all show, full of leaves, bereft of fruit. Jesus curses the tree on his way to the temple where he wreaks havoc, scattering money, tables, and livestock all over the place. What does this have to do with the fig tree? Fruit. Jesus says, “Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’? . . . but you have made it a robbers den” (11:17). The essence of prayer is communion with God, and reliance upon him for meeting all our needs. Are we hungry? God is our supply. The temple in Jerusalem was no longer a house of prayer. The bustle and activity, aimed at “aiding” temple worship, was all show, no fruit.

The disciples were shocked that the fig tree completely withered. Jesus responded to their surprise with an astounding claim, “If you have faith . . . you can say to this mountain ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done” (Matt. 21:21). The fig tree and the temple are entwined in this story. Jesus reference to “this mountain” may be read as a reference to the temple mount, and the withered fig tree seen as a fore-shadow of the temple’s destruction.

Bearing fruit, the heart of this story, is Jesus’ desire for us as his followers. May our prayers be faith filled, that we may bear much fruit.

Janis Barnett

## Day 19

Wednesday, March 7th  
Mark 11:27-33 (ESV)

### PUZZLING THE AUTHORITY POLICE

As a senior in high school, my brother played varsity basketball. Sadly, he and some of his teammates weren't fans of the head coach. When the distinguished "senior night" arrived - the game when, traditionally, all seniors start together - the coach benched some of them. With wide eyes, we watched from the stands as several of those graduating athletes walked off the court. They were defiant, and they were *done*.

Challenging authority can be shocking and brimming with emotion, and sometimes it's misguided while other times it's valid. In Mark 11, we see the righteousness of religious leaders collapse before Jesus.

Once the chief priests had lifted their jaws after watching Jesus overturn their temple, they fumed and conspired until his return. Like bullies in the schoolyard, they bee lined it to Jesus, fingers in his face, their last meal apparent on their breath. "By what authority are you doing these things...?" (vs 28). Really, they thought they were laying a trap; if Jesus claimed God, they could go after him for blasphemy. But Jesus confounds them with a counter question about the authority of John the Baptist. The chief priests' reaction is almost comical: huddling up to weigh the pros and cons of answers while Jesus waits just feet away. "So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know'..." (vs 33).

The chief priests aren't so sure of themselves. What's the source of *their* authority? They want to please Roman leaders, but they don't want to incite revolt among the common people.

Do you ever find yourself wavering between submission to Jesus and the authority of someone else, *something* else? This Lenten season, may you experience the definitive authority of Jesus—our remarkable Creator, merciful Savior, and rightful Judge of the world.

Ryan Arnold

## Day 20

Thursday, March 8th  
Mark 12:1-12 (NIV)

### SUBTLETY AND SURPRISE

Jesus' audience would have been familiar with parables as a common form of teaching, particularly from rabbis. They would have known that God was the owner of the vineyard Jesus was describing and that Israel was the vineyard. His audience would discern that the servants were the prophets and teachers that God sent over the centuries to guide and lead Israel, usually ignored and often killed. Also familiar, would be the practice of absentee landlords who sent servants to collect the negotiated payment from the tenants. These servants would sometimes be treated harshly.

Jesus' point comes in subtlety and surprise.

Subtle details about the vineyard point to the nature of the owner. Consider what he did. He put up a wall to protect the vineyard from wild animals, installed an in ground press so his tenants could make wine, not just grow grapes, and built a watchtower to defend against thieves. He spared no expense or effort to create an optimal place for them to thrive. When he left he didn't leave a task master who might treat them harshly but allowed them great freedom to work on their own. With all that, they rejected the owner.

Surprisingly, Jesus speaks boldly of himself as the Son and of his approaching death at their hands. He elevates himself above the prophets and others who had come before him. There will be no more opportunity to make things right. Jesus predicts their removal from the vineyard of God, their privileges revoked and given to others.

Like Israel, we are a people of great privilege and freedom. What will we do with these gifts and with the ultimate gift of the Son, Jesus?

Tammie Veach