

JOURNEYING THROUGH HOLY WEEK TO EASTER WITH MARK'S GOSPEL

The important thing about Holy Week is that it is holy. In it, time and life are set apart for the exclusive use of God, and become charged with God's love and grace. To set them apart we have to ask the vital questions "Where is God in the mess of life all around us?" and "What does God want for us and want of us in it all?". Those questions are particularly strong as we face the chaos, pain and uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. They were also the questions facing Jesus and his followers in the week of the cross and the empty tomb.

So this Holy Week we are invited to journey as best we can with Jesus and his disciples. We shall follow the story as Mark's Gospel tells it. Each day there is a bible reading or readings, some brief reflections and some prayers. These are for you to fill out or ignore as you find most helpful. They are simply meant to prompt your own thinking, feeling, imagining and praying as the Spirit leads.

INTRODUCTION (to be used on or before Palm Sunday 28 March 2021)

If you are physically on your own, use your imagination and remember that you are not spiritually alone. Think of all the people who are worshipping and praying throughout the world. If you have been a churchgoer in the past (when congregations could gather for worship or online), imagine the faces of people you know or remember from church. Picture all those of previous generations who are worshipping in heaven alongside the choirs of saints and angels. All you have to do is slip in and join them.

Above all, remember that you cannot be completely alone. God is with you. You might find it helpful to take something that focusses your attention on God and put it where you can see it easily. It might be a Bible, or hymnbook, or cross, or candle. If your attention wanders whilst you reflect and pray, looking at it may bring you back to God.

Read this passage, paying attention to it as you do. What catches your imagination? What puzzles you? How does it make you feel?

Mark 10:46-52 (NRSV)

⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' ⁵²Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Reflection

This happens just before Jesus enters Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday. But it also comes at the end of a series of events. In chapter 8:22-26 of Mark's Gospel Jesus heals a blind man

in two stages. At first, the blind person starts to see but misinterprets and does not understand what he sees. Then Jesus touches him a second time and he starts to see clearly.

Immediately afterwards, in 8:27-9:1, Jesus asks his disciples what people are saying about him. They answer with a range of possibilities. He asks them what they are making of their experience of him, as for some time they have been watching him, listening to him, and being trained by him to do what he is doing. Peter says "You are God's anointed agent" (which is what "Christ" in Greek and "Messiah" in Hebrew mean). Peter has started to see, but he quickly shows that he misinterprets and does not understand what he sees. In 8:31 Jesus says that someone in his position has to be handed over to death and then rise again. Peter immediately rebukes him and is quickly rebuked himself for embodying Satan. He is tempting Jesus to be God's son but not in God's way.

Then in 9:2-9 Peter is taken with James and John up a mountain and experiences what we know as the Transfiguration. In effect, Peter is touched a second time, and starts to see clearly. He sees Jesus as God sees him. There then follows a series of events and conversations which show what it means for Jesus to be God's son in this way, and what the implications of it are for Jesus's followers and disciples. The statement about what it means for Jesus to be Messiah in 8:31 is repeated twice more at 9:31 and 10:33-34, each time with more explicit detail. But each statement about messiahship is quickly followed by a statement about what the consequences are for what it means to be a disciple. Disciples must take up their cross (8:34); be the least important of all and servant of all (9:33-37); and drink the cup (of suffering) that Jesus drinks, and be baptised (ie plunged into the mission and experience of serving God) as Jesus was baptised (10:38). In other words, they must, as far as they are able, mirror Jesus himself, who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for others (10:45).

These are tough lessons. It might be that Covid sufferers, health care staff, key workers and all sorts of carers understand them more instinctively during the current pandemic. Nevertheless, it takes time to take the lessons in and work out their implications. Hence the repetitions. But they culminate in our passage for today (10:46-52). Jesus heals another blind man. This time it only takes one touch. The man immediately sees clearly, and immediately starts to follow Jesus (the verb is the same one that is used for discipleship). Where does he follow him? Chapter 11 shows that it is into Jerusalem on what we know as Palm Sunday. What is he following Jesus to? The next days will show us.

Prayer

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy
but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Methodist Worship Book (MWB) p. 535

The Lord's Prayer