

Prayer of Thanks for the Bible

In bible month I give thanks for Mark's Gospel and my freedom to read it. Thank you for Mark's gift as a writer, for those who have translated and expounded his text, enabling me to explore it today.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving Father, I hold your world before you. It is the work of your hands so carefully crafted, the rhythm of nature makes me pause in wonder before you my maker. Be with scientists and world leaders at this time of pandemic. May we set aside greed to allow all to share in the bounty of food, water and vaccines at this time.

Spirit, show me the faces at the margins of my community who you call me to love. Give me courage to break the social norms of this age, to speak to the homeless, the ill, the excluded and the lonely by whatever means I can even during these restrictions.

Jesus, as I contemplate the mystery of your identity as God and man, soften my hard heart and draw me deep into the Gospel to find the hidden meaning which you still speak to me today. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer **Our Father, who art in heaven**

Closing Hymn: StF 654 **The love of God comes close where stands an open door**

Blessing

Calm the storms in us today, that we may we go in peace to love and serve those you place before us this week. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Acknowledgements:

Inspiration for this service was taken from the Bible Month study guide

<https://www.preachweb.org/biblemonth>

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Worship at Home Darlington District

Bible Month week 2 – Mission & Boundaries



Call to Worship

But I will sing of your strength,
in the morning I will sing of your love;
for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.
You are my strength, I sing praise to you;
you, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely.

Psalm 59: 16-17

Hymn: StF 2 **Come let us sing to the One, to the Father of life**

We join together in prayer

Almighty God I praise you.
You are beyond all I can imagine.
You care for the tiniest creature and the whole universe.

In the light of your majesty I confess my own smallness.
Times when I have not lived to your glory:
the things done or not done, said or not said.
I am sorry, forgive me.

Jesus said "your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2: 5)
We too can take up our mats and walk in the light of that forgiveness.

Alleluia! Thanks be to God. **Amen**

Reading: [Mark 4:1 – 8: 21](#)

These chapters include story, teaching, mystery, healings, inclusion, tragedy, miracles and challenge. Mark packs his text with meaning. What do you notice as you read these chapters?

Reflection

Hardness of heart:

Jesus' parables often have surprise endings. There is a dramatic twist, something to make his hearers (and us) think. Jesus' explanation of the purpose of the parables in [Mark 4: 11-12](#) seems bleak at first sight. Are the parables meant to obscure who Jesus is? Digging a little deeper we discover the words in verse 12 are a quotation from [Isaiah 6: 9-10](#). The disciples would know the passage and how, in Isaiah chapters 1 to 5, Israel had repeatedly refused to turn back to God. Hardness of heart is the tragic consequence of not heeding Christ's mission, not turning back.

Pause for thought:

In what ways might we refuse God's invitation?

Two more parables about seeds growing invite us to consider how we are maturing as disciples of Jesus. Mark writes not as biography or history. This is Gospel – good news for us to learn from and live by. We don't always understand, we don't always get it right when seeking to follow Jesus, but neither did the disciples ([Mark 6: 52](#) and [8: 17](#)) Mark's 'warts and all' telling of the Gospel inspires us to pick ourselves up and keep trying.

Pause for thought:

How are we contributing to the coming of the Kingdom of God?

The Miracles of Identity:

In this section of the Gospel Mark offers several hints at the true identity of Jesus.

Jesus calms the storm. This startling act is a reminder of God's power over creation which is celebrated in scripture ([Exodus 14: 21-31](#); [Psalm 65: 7](#); [Psalm 107: 28-29](#)). Here Jesus exhibits the same authority – this is shocking authority.

The people are described as like sheep without a shepherd ([Mark 6: 34](#)). This is further Old Testament imagery, picking up particularly [Ezekiel 34](#) where God the true shepherd is compared to the

ineffective shepherding of human leaders. Here Jesus steps in to teach and guide the shepherdless flock.

Hymn: StF 480/481; H&P 70 **The Lord's my shepherd**

Next ([Mark 6: 35-44](#)) Jesus feeds the crowd from one meagre portion. He demonstrates God's grace, generosity and compassion for the hungry and leaderless. We notice also that Jesus involves the disciples in organising the crowd and distributing the food. Even Jesus does not choose to exercise ministry alone.

The miracles of identity end with Jesus walking on the water ([Mark 6: 45-52](#)). Again the terrified disciples fail to understand. Jesus calms the wind - and the disciples who are once again astounded.

Pause for thought:

When do we miss the full significance of Jesus?

When should we find ourselves amazed or astounded?

Impurity and Contagious Holiness:

When we stand back and look at bigger sections of this book, one of the notable features of Mark's narrative is the crossing of the lake, it is a signal that Jesus takes his ministry to those outside established Jewish society. Mark compares and contrasts: the feeding of 5000 'insiders' is echoed in the feeding of 4000 'outsiders'. In the ritually 'impure' Gentile area the spirits in Legion call out in recognition of who Jesus is ([Mark 5: 1-9](#)) and Jesus brings liberation. By contrast when Jesus preaches in his home town responses include offence and unbelief. ([Mark 6: 1-6](#))

In the wonderfully entwined stories which follow Jesus ignores the conventional boundaries and brings restitution in the face of more ritual impurity – gender, death, bleeding. The holiness of the Son of God is not compromised by his encounters with the excluded, his mission is fulfilled, not undermined, by reaching out beyond the social norms of the day. Could the same be true for us today?

Pause for thought:

What might contagious holiness in impure contexts mean for us today?