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March 18, 2018 *Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*

“A Suffering Gospel”

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion; for we are many.’ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, ‘Send us into the swine; let us enter them.’ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake. *Mark 5:1-2, 9-13 (NRSV)*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

The glory of serving

MONDAY 3.19.18 **Mark 10:32-45**

“Jesus and his disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem.” Jesus had been speaking plainly (cf. [Mark 8:32](#)) about why he was going to Jerusalem for some time. But James, John and all of them still thought he must be going there to declare himself king, raise an army, drive out the Romans and set up God’s eternal kingdom on earth. The brothers thought they’d make their bid for power before the other disciples. “You don’t know what you’re asking!” Jesus said. In Heaven’s kingdom, there is no status seeking. In my kingdom, we serve.

- We know (as James and John did) what earthly importance, power and privilege look like. Down deep, most of us would like to have at least some of those things. Jesus’ teaching about his kingdom was clear: “that’s not the way it will be with you.” Jesus said he didn’t come to be served, but to serve, even to the extent of giving his life. In what specific ways does choosing to follow Jesus change your approach to life?
- Jesus said: “The ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around.” That kind of power can be a “high.” But Jesus went on, “Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant.” Where do you have power (parent, boss, teacher, pastor, public office, etc.)? Do you most often use your power to serve others, or are you tempted to use it on your own behalf? How can you become more of a “servant leader”?

Prayer: Loving Lord, I’m human. Sometimes I have ambitious dreams and wishes. Keep reshaping me, making those ambitions into ambitions to serve you and others. Amen.

The prince of peace infuriated by an unholy rip-off

TUESDAY 3.20.18 Mark 11:1-25

The deliberate journey south from Galilee that began in Mark 9:30 reached Jerusalem.

Jesus purposely entered in a way that echoed history (cf. [1 Kings 1:32-39](#)) and prophecy ([Zechariah 9:9-10](#)), a clear claim to peaceful kingship. Lending Jesus a donkey's colt may not sound like a big deal. But in his day, that colt was as important to all but wealthiest families as a car is to us. Sometimes several families pooled resources to buy one animal they could all share.

- The prophet Zechariah wrote that a righteous king would ride on a donkey's colt, and bring Jerusalem salvation and peace. Mark 11:2 indicated that Jesus pre-arranged his ride into Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy. Who found Jesus' entrance into the holy city offensive (verse 18)? Would you more likely have been with "the establishment" who didn't want the orderly status quo disrupted, or with the upstart rabbi from Galilee?
- Verse 23-24 showed how Jesus used "hyperbole" (overstatement to make a point) in his teaching. Jesus used that image often—[Matthew 17:20](#) and [Luke 17:6](#) quoted versions of it in different contexts. Throwing mountains into the sea would not actually advance God's Kingdom. Changing our inner anger and hurt into forgiveness (verse 25) can be a mountainous challenge. In what ways have you sensed God's grace changing you into a more gracious person?

Prayer: Jesus, in this passage I see your holy anger against a trade that exploited pilgrims at Passover time. And I see your assurance that your power can move the "mountain" of my unholy anger against people who offend me. Amen.

The fearful tenants abusing God's vineyard

WEDNESDAY 3.21.18 Mark 11:27-12:12

Jesus' vineyard story drew on a beloved Scripture ([Isaiah 5:1-7](#)), which called Israel God's vineyard. Jesus told it in sadness, answering people who assumed that their positions and titles gave them the authority to rebuke and refuse him. Jesus loved the people of Jerusalem (cf. [Luke 19:41-42](#)), but their heedless leaders did not love him. As they plotted his death, Jesus told a story that pointedly exposed the murder in their hearts.

- [Mark 11:18, 28 and 12:12](#) graphically showed the atmosphere charged with hatred that surrounded Jesus during his last week. We're tempted to look down on the Jerusalem leaders, but like them we're subject to blind spots. Is there anything God's spirit is nudging you to face honestly in your life? Do you have the courage to face it, to grant Jesus the authority to guide you in tending the vineyard of your life?
- The temple priests and legal experts held all the visible, human power at the Temple. Why didn't they just arrest Jesus on the spot? "They were afraid of the crowd." Jesus didn't blindly follow "the crowd" (cf. [John 2:23-25](#)), but in this case they saw more clearly than the religious leaders. What blocked the leaders' vision? How can you keep your spiritual eyes and ears clear to recognize God's work in either expected or unexpected places?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you've entrusted the gift of life to me, and you ask me to lead that life in a way that bears fruit for your kingdom. Make me a faithful tenant farmer, one who respects and values your lordship. Amen.

Malicious hypotheticals and great commandments

THURSDAY 3.22.18 Mark 12:13-34

Jesus' enemies tried hard to ask him "no win" questions, for which either answer would get him in trouble. Taxes were as much or more a hot button then as now. But Jesus said it wasn't as simple as a "yes" or "no" answer. There was a valid realm for "Caesar" (human authority), and a citizen's duty to pay taxes fit into that. Yet God's kingdom was larger and higher than human authority, and Jesus clearly indicated that God's kingdom held his (and our) ultimate loyalty.

- The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, and they tried their best to make the idea sound ridiculous. Jesus replied by challenging their earthbound assumptions. What made absolute conviction that death was not the end, that "the worst thing is never the last thing," crucial to Jesus in that week before the cross? Do you share his confidence? If so, in what ways does that assurance shape your day-to-day life for the better?
- Scholar William Barclay noted that there were two schools of thought among rabbis. Some believed "there were lighter and weightier matters of the law...great principles which were all-important to grasp." Others "held that every smallest principle was equally binding." * When asked, Jesus was clear about that—he saw some principles as far more vital than others, central to understanding God's will. What are the implications of Jesus' answer for how you read your Bible, and how you let it guide your life?

Prayer: O God, you spoke to the human family in many times and many ways. But supremely you spoke to us through a Son (cf. [Hebrews 1:1-2](#)). Help me to root all my service to you in the great commandments Jesus identified. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Mark (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 294.

Praising a poor widow, not greedy legal experts

FRIDAY 3.23.18 Mark 12:35-44

Jesus turned the elaborate, often technical way the rabbis and legal experts used the Bible to his own ends. "The Christ" was the title for the promised Messiah. Jesus used Psalm 110 to teach that the Messiah was not "just" David's descendant, but also his eternal Lord. In the Temple Jesus noticed and prized a widow's devout generosity, such a welcome contrast to the hostile authorities who kept pursuing him.

- We use the phrase "all in" about a person fully committed to a belief or course of action. How was the widow Jesus saw in the Temple "all in" for God's kingdom? (As with the young ruler—cf. [Mark 10:17-27](#)—Jesus did not mean it was wrong to be able to pay bills or buy food. He was honoring a heart that worships and serves God before material goods.) In what ways are you "all in" with Jesus? In what ways, if any, are you holding back?
- N. T. Wright said of the "legal experts," "They give themselves airs, and have a great reputation for piety, but are only interested in lining their pockets. The world has not changed, it seems. Not only lawyers, but also politicians and other leaders in the civic world, are again and again discovered to be putting on a show to gain favour while underneath they are after money." * What helps you to monitor your motives, to avoid "putting on a show" that doesn't match your inner reality?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to be honest with myself so that I can be honest with other people and with you. I desire to be "all in" for you as the eternal Lord of my life. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 175.

A shocking glimpse of what fighting Rome would bring

SATURDAY 3.24.18 Mark 13:1-20

Herod the Great built the Temple complex in a futile attempt to win the Jewish people's acceptance. It was the largest, most striking building for miles in any direction. Yet Jesus said none of it would last. That seemed impossible to the disciples. The only set of events they could imagine that would lead to the ruin of the great Temple would be the convulsive events when God made the earth new and purged all that was evil. With clearer insight, Jesus knew that if Israel's leaders insisted on seeking political, military deliverance, they'd face a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Roman armies.

- In 70 A.D., Roman soldiers smashed Jerusalem and the Temple. It was awful—but not the end of the world. Many of Jesus' words applied locally to Jerusalem's fall. Others did reach to the end of the age. Note which parts of Jesus' teaching were more local, and which more cosmic. People often find fearful "signs" in verses 5-8—false messiahs, famines, wars, earthquakes. Some voices say, "The world is about to end." Jesus said, "Don't be alarmed" (verse 7) by such things—they're part of life in a broken world. How can Jesus' words help you avoid needless fear? The disciples "knew" the Temple was permanent. What "permanent" realities in your world have changed or "shaken" just since the year 2000? How can trusting God always give you peace about whatever the future holds?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you taught your disciples what the apostle Paul learned: "The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Help me to build my life on the solid foundation of your eternal kingdom. Amen.

Family Activity: Many people were cruel to Jesus during the last week of His life on earth. He consistently responded with love and forgiveness towards the people who were hurting Him. As a family, share some of your favorite stories about Jesus. What words would you use to describe Jesus in those stories? Review the events of the Final Week together and explore Jesus' responses in them. How would you describe Jesus in those times? What qualities does Jesus faithfully display throughout His life? Choose one or two characteristics of Jesus your family can develop. What steps will your family take to grow more Christ-like? Pray and ask God to help you become more like Jesus.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer Prayers for Peace & Comfort:

- Cheryl Reece and family on the death of her husband Adelbert "Thomen" Reece, 3/13
- Kami Ross and family on the death of her father Adelbert "Thomen" Reece, 3/13
- Pamela Hillman and family on the death of her brother Philip Cox, 3/11
- Sheila Dalrymple and family on the death of her cousin Andrew Rohulich, 3/10
- Deane Parkin and family on the death of her husband Louis D. "Lou" Parkin, 3/6
- Joe McColligan and family on the death of his mother Jeanette McColligan, 3/4
- Todd Witt and family on the death of his father Cecil "C.E." Witt, 2/19