

Growing up I always thought that there were just three political parties in the UK: Conservatives, Labour and Liberal.

The first time I became aware that these parties were not particularly united within themselves was when the Liberal Party became the Liberal Democrats. Of course, as I have grown older, and considerably less wise, I have realised that political parties are themselves full of factions... the European Research Group, Momentum and so on. I'm sure that the Liberal Democrats probably have factions too – but there are so few of them that it seems likely that each individual MP is their own faction. And they fight amongst themselves instead of working together, united as one party, to try and reform whatever unfair policies the other parties are suggesting.

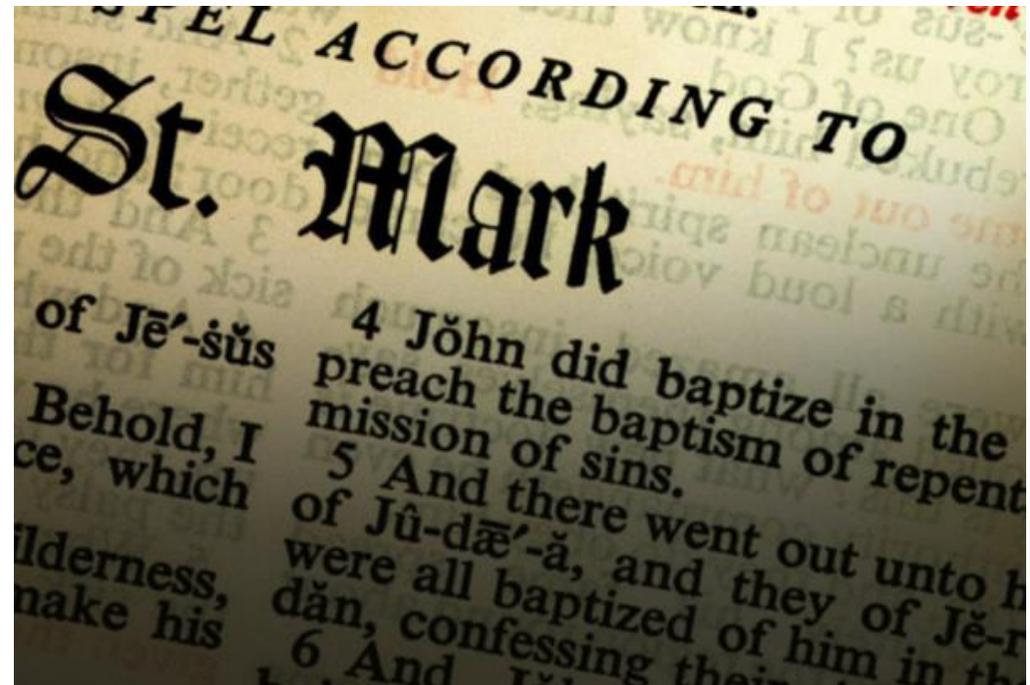
“A kingdom that fights against itself will not survive. And a family that is divided will not survive. If Satan is against himself and is fighting against his own people, he will not survive. That would be the end of Satan”
So, that's political parties warned, then, eh? Thank goodness we Christian denominations aren't like that.

Prayer

Loving God, You have told us what is good. You have told us to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with you. We promise to try better.
Amen

Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

St Mark's Gospel
Chapters 1:1 to 3:30



Thursday 7th – Saturday 16th January

[Introduction](#)

Between now and Easter we will be reading through the fast paced St Mark's Gospel.

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Thursday 7th January St Mark 1: 1 - 13

Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, Church Related Community Worker, Ansty Road
United Reformed Church, Coventry

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight”’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who

Saturday 16th January St Mark 3: 13 - 30

Leo Roberts, Children and Youth Development Officer, North Western
Synod

He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’ And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.’ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

‘Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin’ — for they had said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’

with a disability, but does so on a Sabbath. Worse still, he rubs their faces in it by first challenging them with the ethical question of whether it is lawful to save life on the day of rest? Their silent answer is a negative and Jesus' ire is raised.

No 'gentle, meek and mild' Jesus here - his anger is evident at their lack of compassion and, instantly, and with passion, restores the man to full fitness, further offending his opponents and setting them on the road to put an end to this trouble-maker! Meanwhile he sets off to continue his healing and teaching ministry elsewhere.

I write this still in the grip of a global pandemic restrictions, when there has been criticism of Church Leaders who have dared to enter the world of political controversy by questioning the government's approach and the effectiveness of its Covid policies.

One Tweet suggested that the 'Bishops' [sic] should keep their noses out and stick to spiritual matters. In the face of deaths and suffering that might be made worse by national policy, today's reading would answer the question of WWJD? After all as the URC Basis of Union says, 'In the things that affect obedience to God, the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head.'

Will we Christians never stop stirring things up? I do hope not!

Prayer

Radical God who calls us to passion for life and the living,
guide us and encourage us;
to speak up for those without a voice;
to stand alongside those who stand alone;
to share energy with those too weary
or ground down to fight any longer;
and to have the wisdom to know when, where and how to stir things up
when circumstances demand. Amen

is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved;] with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Reflection

I really like Mark's gospel, it's known by some as the Gospel of action – it doesn't meander, its one jam-packed event after another, no waiting around, just "Pow! Pow! Pow!" and then on to the next event.

The beginning of the Gospel sets us up for how it is going to continue, and it is powerful – Mark starts with "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ", it is just the start, and not just the start of the book, but the start of everything, the start of hope that has endured for over two millennia.

In 13 short verses a lot happens, we get a declaration, a reference back to Hebrew scripture, we meet John the Baptist – who would win "I'm a Celebrity" without even trying, John prepares the way, we see Jesus, Jesus is baptised, the Spirit drives Jesus to the desert to be tempted for 40 days, and we break off as the angels are looking after him.

I know that it might not carry the pomp and splendour of Matthew's gospel or the creative imagery of John's gospel, but it gives us everything that we need to know Jesus, to want Jesus in our lives, to become followers on the Jesus Way. We are inspired by this Jesus who shows us

how to live.

I encourage you to sit and read the whole of Mark's gospel in one sitting, maybe do it on zoom with others, it will take 2-3 hours but could bring unexpected changes in your faith and mindset. It will at the very least inspire you and offer the light of hope in a world that continues to feel dark and uncertain. Let us embody the Hope of Mark's gospel as we engage with the world.

Prayer

God of action, you sent Jesus to be our example of how we should live and move through the world. Remind us of the Hope we have through Jesus when things feel impossible, and help us freely share it with those around us without judgement. Amen.

Friday 8th January St Mark 1: 14 - 20

The Rev'd David Scott, Minister Duke Street & Saughtonhall URCs, Edinburgh

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; [k] repent, and believe in the good news.' As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Reflection

Today we reflect on one of these very familiar passages that has perhaps influenced the route your life has taken. It's an appropriate text when

Friday 15th January St Mark 3: 1 - 12

The Rev'd Peter Clark, URC Minister in the Bridport & Dorchester Joint Pastorate

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Jesus departed with his disciples to the lake, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!' But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

Reflection

Jesus is stirring things up again. He's cured a paralysed man, controversially telling him his sins were forgiven in the process, adding to controversy by then mixing with and, horror of horror, sharing meal fellowship with 'sinners' - folk considered to be beyond the pale!

Will he never learn to stop courting the displeasure of the powerful? Well, obviously not, as he deliberately not only heals another person

grain on the Sabbath.

When people asked about fasting, Jesus responded with an apocalyptic image that runs throughout scripture - the heavenly wedding banquet that awaits God and God's people. However the way Jesus told it foreshadowed his death. Jesus also pointed to God doing something new here – that's what the talk about wineskins was about. Today we might talk about mobile phones and software. Jesus might have said, "You can't download the new NHS app on a phone that has out of date software. You need a new phone with the latest software, so the new app will download and work." Basically, Jesus' operating system was love and grace, and it was incompatible with strict piety of the Pharisees. Throughout Mark's gospel, we see that Jesus was not afraid to be unashamedly gracious towards the so-called unrighteous.

When people asked about Jesus and his followers plucking the heads of grain, Jesus told them a story of David. Not only did David eat the bread for the priests, but so did the men travelling with him. Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath was for our benefit as people. The day of rest was to help us, not harm us.

Jesus put faith in context. Traditions and religious practices should make sense in the context that we are in. If they don't, then we should take it back to scripture and find out why. There is a good chance we humans have missed something. And for Jesus, whatever scripture we read is to be read through the lens of God's grace and abundant love for both the "righteous" and "unrighteous".

Prayer

God, help us to be aware of how we practice our faith. Do we love others? Are we quick to condemn or quick to encourage and inspire? Help us to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus. Amen.

decisions about a commitment to service are sought or after they have been made, as it creates the sense that a new chapter begins. And it comes with many hymn accompaniments. One that immediately comes to mind is Edith Agnew's when Jesus saw the fishermen in boats upon the sea, he called to them, 'come leave your nets and follow, follow me.' Another is the popular hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule, 'will you come and follow me if I but call your name?' With familiarity and catchy hymn accompaniments, we can be easily distracted from the directness of the Gospel writer. In all of the words spoken by Jesus there is a clarity and an impression of urgency. There is no sense of ambiguity or a need to read between the lines in the hope that people will understand. When it comes to the fishermen, Simon, Andrew, James and John; what they receive from Jesus is more of an instruction than an invitation. There is no encouragement to follow or hope that they will follow. It is much more direct, which results in an immediate response.

Sometimes we have to say it as it is. We have to have the courage to use words that are clear and direct. However, we have to make sure the time is right, choose them carefully and say them with integrity. This is a passage about activity and action so what works best for you? When you are asked to think about doing something or when you are asked to do something? And what about the words we use as we address God in prayer?

Prayer

God of grace.

Give me the courage to use the words I want to say.

Show me how to say them.

And make them reflect all that you call me to be and do. Amen

[Saturday 9th January St Mark 1: 21 - 34](#)

The Rev'd Julian Macro, Retired Minister, Member of Verwood URC

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Reflection

Mark's Gospel plunges us straight into the active ministry of Jesus and today's passage indicates the impression that Jesus had on those who witnessed and heard him. There was wonder at what happened and an enthusiastic expectation that further demonstrations of divine power would be revealed. They were exciting and exhilarating times.

However, I want to focus on two aspects of this passage: places and people.

Nazareth and Capernaum are both noted here but neither is mentioned in the Old Testament, possibly because Nazareth was an unimportant

Dear God, create in us an awareness of our need matched only by an awareness of your acceptance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday 14th January St Mark 2: 18 - 27

The Rev'd Angela Rigby, Minister at St Johns Hill URC Sevenoaks and Christ Church URC Tonbridge

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 'No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.' One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

Reflection

People compared Jesus and his disciples to John the Baptist, the Pharisees and their followers, and they noticed big differences. Jesus' disciples didn't fast, and they had no qualms about plucking the heads of

sinner, too. Levi worked for the Roman government and was a tax collector. Tax collectors were renowned for their dishonesty. Naturally, since Jesus and his disciples ate with such people, they were classed as sinners too.

Assumptions prevented people from seeing what was really going on. God was not interested in appearances but hearts. Jesus was coming into contact with sinners. But instead of the sinners making him unclean, he made them clean. The grace of God ministered through Jesus Christ isn't limited to righteous people. It extends to sinners, even to the kind of sinners that disturb righteous people.

Jesus found out what the Pharisees were asking and answered the question himself. He told them that healthy people have no need of a physician, but rather those who have an illness. Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Pharisees made a foolish assumption. They assumed that they were "healthy people," having no need of a physician. They assumed that they were righteous so Jesus' call to sinners did not apply to them. They had found righteousness in their diligent faithfulness to do everything they believed God had required of his people.

Jesus said "Follow me," and Levi got up and followed him. Levi found righteousness in the Son of God. He saw with his own eyes what the accusing Pharisees also saw but could not recognize. He saw what Paul described in his letter to the Romans: "In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" (Romans 1:17).

Levi made no assumptions. He saw, he listened, and he believed. He trusted the One sent from God because he trusted God. May we, too, listen and believe and then live by faith, and not by assumptions?

Prayer

backwater up in the hills and Capernaum was a trading and customs post which developed later.

We read elsewhere in Luke 4 of the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth and his response that "no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town." In any case a hill town in Galilee would have been no place to base a nationwide ministry. Capernaum was so very different; it was a significant trading and customs post on the Via Maris, an important route from Egypt to Syria and beyond which would have attracted and served a diverse, multinational community, so giving Jesus access to a far wider audience than in his home town.

People: Jesus enabled the recovery of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. How much more we should like to know about the family life of the disciples and apostles. 1 Corinthians 9.5 implies that the apostles, the brothers of Jesus and Peter himself were accompanied by their wives in their work and witness. We should like to know how this fitted in with family and working life – but we can assume that it did. While over the centuries there have been those who have remained celibate to facilitate their ministry (and Paul may have been one such) it is clear that many early followers of Jesus were married.

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for quiet places where we can find renewal and for busy places where we can witness to many people. We thank you that some have freedom to serve you without family ties and we thank you that others have the support of family and friends as they Walk in the Way of our Lord. We pray that, whatever our personal circumstances, we may always appreciate that we are never alone for you are always with us: Amen

Sunday 10th January Psalm 26

The Rev'd David Coaker serves with Grays URC in Essex.

Let this be my supreme desire,
my object and my prayer,
until I stand before your throne
to glorify you there:

2 To lead a blameless life, O Lord,
to trust you without fear,
to bring my humble heart to you
and know your love is near:

3 To walk before you in the truth,
to shun all evil ways,
to come into your house to pray
and shout aloud your praise:

4 Let this be my supreme desire,
my object and my prayer,
until I stand before your throne
to glorify you there!

Michael Perry © The Jubilate Group 1989
You can hear the tune, Winchester New, here
<https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/188462>

Reflection

Imagine praying these words before you enter church? Praying through the three steps of: asking for God's judgment, justifying yourself, and then being certain of your righteousness. A very risky exercise. I fear that I would be lost for words with the second and third steps, and hesitant to take the first. It brings to mind the sketch where someone starts praying the Lord's prayer and the voice of God replies to each phrase challenging whether they understand what they are saying.

There is the tendency within us to hold fast to reassurance and look away, or apply to others, the challenge within Scripture. An obvious example being on a rainy Sunday the partial quotes of Matthew 5:45 of it raining on the righteous, to which I instinctively reply 'and the unrighteous as well.'

It does no good for us to always concentrate on just the affirmations or only the judgments in Scripture. They are held in tension, full of paradox, and we will only ever partially comprehend them on this side of eternity. So with those caveats let me offer a retelling of Psalm 26:

disputed elections? Answer: attack the person not the problem. I do get frustrated with the WWJD, (What would Jesus do) question. Did he set to work repairing the roof of the house? A good means to clear the mind while working. Go for a walk along the shore. A good way to find a different perspective. Whatever happened, as we read on, we discover that Jesus found a way to balance the discord over forgiving of sins with human and godly conversation, while some of the scribes built an internal edifice of anger that could only be resolved with retribution.

Prayer

Lord, when I am faced with opposing views help me to find balance and a way to understand. Then, when I have understood, help me to decide on the value, for right or wrong, of this new viewpoint.
Amen

[Wednesday 13th January St Mark 2: 13 - 17](#)

Sue Knight, Local Church Leader, Reigate Park URC & Lay Preaching
Commissioner, Southern Synod

Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

Reflection

The Pharisees assumed that if a person ate with sinners, they were a

Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic— ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’ And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’

Reflection:

When I was a child I always thought it was easier to say “your sins are forgiven” because no one could see. If you said “Stand up and walk” and the person didn’t - how embarrassing! Since then, knowing as we do that much is in the mind I find the next questions don’t go away quite as easily: what did those at the back of the crowd think was happening and what did the occupier think of having the roof destroyed?

Assuming those at the back could hear, but without seeing what had happened, they would have heard a debate about authority. Imagine the whispers running round: “what did he say? No! That’s blasphemy” - only in a loose sense - but who will stand on the letter of the law when things get heated in a debate with no negotiation?

Mark ends this account saying everyone was amazed, and therein lies the problem. Some would be amazed and full of wonder, eager to tell the story. Others would be amazed and horrified, but rather than reflect and begin to understand, try to solve the problem of Jesus’ claim to authority by destroying what is not understood.

We have seen this problem time and again in the last months of 2020: what to do about the second wave of Covid19; the apparently intractable Brexit negotiations; fake news; state sponsored cyber attacks and

As far as I know my own heart, I fear no reprimand from God. I have lived honourably, faithfully, and have always trusted in God. Show me the truth? Test my resolve, my desires and convictions.

I can sense your love all around me and I step out in faith seeking your path.

I turn away from anything that distracts me from you. Only you are worthy, true, wholesome and good.

My whole life is devoted to you. Your Creation is all your holy place. My voice is raised giving thanks for life’s blessings and sharing stories of faith. I know your presence all around me and am lost in wonder, love and praise.

Prayer

O God,

May humility temper our certainty.

May love embrace our dislike.

May self-knowledge inform our pride.

May confidence lift up our doubts.

May awareness broaden our focus.

May mercy alleviate our guilt.

Amidst the tangles, loose ends, and tidy bows of life, may we hear your voice O God within it all and respond in love. Amen

[Monday 11th January St Mark 1: 35 - 45](#)

The Rev'd Ruth Whitehead, Moderator of South Western Synod & member of Taunton URC.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is

searching for you.’ He answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Reflection

As I’m writing this daily devotion, the second lockdown has begun in England. Our churches have been told not to gather for worship. Many congregations feel frail and vulnerable. Some doors may never re-open.

As you are reading this, 2021 is less than two weeks’ old, but it’s hard to imagine that the new year has yet brought great clarity about the future: life may still seem very dark.

In the midst of the uncertainties of world politics, climate emergency, and pandemic, local churches up and down the land are wondering how to be church, when so much of life feels to be built on shifting sand.

So I’m grateful for this section of Mark’s gospel, which reminds us of so many different elements of Jesus’ life.

Jesus, our rock, is shown taking time away to pray, responding to those in need through preaching and healing, proclaiming love and grace to all, and in all this he does not seek fame, but serves the kingdom of God.

That seems to me like a pretty good agenda for any Christian fellowship seeking to be Walking the Way and living the life of Jesus today.

And did you notice that although the leper is told not to tell anyone about his healing, he can’t help himself - he makes the whole story public. The Good News embodied in Jesus is unstoppable; people are drawn to Jesus from all quarters. Where there is prayer and preaching, proclamation of God’s love and grace, healing and service of those most in need, the world will notice. Where God’s love is known, fear and uncertainty can be conquered. Whatever 2021 holds in store, God the Father is with us, Jesus shows us the way, and the Spirit fills us with the ability to be servants of God’s kingdom.

Prayer

God whose love is greater than our fear, help us to see your path, to follow Jesus’ way and to know your Spirit of grace. Amen.

[Tuesday 12th January St Mark 2: 1 - 12](#)

The Rev’d Ruth Browning, retired minister, worshipping at Thornbury URC

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy!