

The journey of Lent is a journey to Jesus' **cross**. With this devotional, you're invited to slowly read through the Gospel of Mark from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to the crucifixion, along with the Gospel of John's account of Jesus' words at the Last Supper.

There are questions each day to ponder, and space to note reflections, as well as a suggested faith activity.

## Lent 2018 devotional (Part 1)



Feb. 14, Ash Wednesday

**Read:** Mark 11:1-6

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." ' <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

What an odd way to organize things. There doesn't seem to have been any pre-planning, no reservations made at Rent-a-Mule. The instructions are simply go, do and explain as necessary.

**Ponder:** What have you asked for and been given? What has been asked of you?

Faith activity: Ash Wednesday services at noon at St. Mark's and 7:30pm at St. Paul (Cesar Chavez and Brooklyn). Come and prepare for the beginning of Lent.

Feb. 15, Thursday

Read: Mark 11:7-11

<sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

<sup>11</sup> Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

What an exuberant gesture of welcome; to take your (probably only) coat and spread it in the dirt of the road for someone's mule to walk across.

**Ponder:** Think about the radical welcome shown Jesus when people spread their cloaks/coats on the road to welcome him. What extravagant gestures of hospitality are we called to?

Faith activity: write a postcard to an elected official advocating for people who are hungry

Feb. 16, Friday

**Read:** Mark 11:12-14

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

<sup>13</sup>Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup>He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it.

At first glance, this is a strange story.

It helps to know that throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> Testament, the fig tree was proverbial for its fruitfulness; and figs were an emblem of plenty. A fig tree in full leaf but without fruit is a proverb for a community keeping itself busy but without producing good, something like the saying "they're so heavenly-minded they're no earthly good." Jesus is obviously not happy with that sort of thing.

Ponder: What fruits *is* my busyness producing?

Faith activity: St. Mark's Food pantry today! Pray at intervals throughout the day for the people who need help putting food on the table

Feb. 17, Saturday

**Read:** Mark 11:15-19

15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; <sup>16</sup>and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. <sup>17</sup>He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written,

"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"?

But you have made it a den of robbers.'

<sup>18</sup>And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. <sup>19</sup>And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

It's easy, and all too-tempting, to read this episode as a critique of money-making in religious communities. It would be more accurate to see Jesus' critiquing the exploitation of the poor by the religious authorities, as in 12:41. The charge is that, rather than lifting up the poor and lowly, the religious system is oppressing and exploiting them. A modern parallel might be with the advertising and expectations that lead people of small means to lavish money on trips and presents for their kids, because "this is how to make your family happy" or "make a memory they'll always remember!"

**Ponder:** what systems and expectations around the spending of resources are exploitative rather than life-giving?

Faith activity: Get better acquainted the culture of our Chinese neighbors and friends. The international Lion Dance, celebrating the Year of the Golden Dog, will be at 315 NW Davis St, Portland at 10am.

Feb. 18, Sunday

**Read:** Mark 11:20-25

20 In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. <sup>21</sup>Then Peter remembered and said to him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.’ <sup>22</sup>Jesus answered them, ‘Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup>Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea”, and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. <sup>24</sup>So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 ‘Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.’

Just to hammer the last two days’ point home, the fig tree from Friday’s reading has now withered, and prompts the question of us Jesus-followers, are we truly doing what we say we are about?

What do we do with the mountain-moving? It is another way of saying “the world *can* be remade”, in contrast to everyone who would shrug their shoulders and mutter, “well, that’s just the way things are.” We are to pray fervently for God’s remaking of the world, and to spend our time forgiving and being set free rather than accumulating grudges.

**Ponder:** how is God at work remaking the world around me? How can I participate in that, through both prayer and action?

Faith activity: Worship is at 9:30am! Bible study is at 8:30am!

Feb. 19, Monday

Mark 11:27-33

27 Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him <sup>28</sup>and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?' <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>30</sup>Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.' <sup>31</sup>They argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?" <sup>32</sup>But shall we say, "Of human origin"?'—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. <sup>33</sup>So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

This question put to Jesus is clearly in response to the what we read on Saturday, and the key question is one of authority. Who grants authority to make change on behalf of the poor and oppressed? Does it have to be someone with a title or a degree? Or need it only be someone who clearly sees what's wrong with the way we've always done it?

**Ponder:** what change is waiting for you to step forward and claim your authority as a child of God to work on behalf of other children of God?

Faith activity: Are you receiving the St. Mark's prayer requests? Call or e-mail the church office, so you know who and what needs prayed for.

Feb. 20, Tuesday

Read: Mark 12: 1-12

Then he began to speak to them in parables. ‘A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watch-tower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>2</sup>When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup>But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup>And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. <sup>5</sup>Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. <sup>6</sup>He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” <sup>7</sup>But those tenants said to one another, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” <sup>8</sup>So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. <sup>9</sup>What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. <sup>10</sup>Have you not read this scripture: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; <sup>11</sup> this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes”?’ <sup>12</sup> When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

This is an unsettling parable, and we are right to be bothered by it. Where is the grace and love we look for from Jesus?

And yet, when we turn our attention to the continuing exploitation of the natural world and the 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s world, the blinders fall from our eyes. For too long, the wealthy people and the wealthy societies have treated the earth and its other inhabitants as their own property to use or trash for their own enrichment and pleasure. The Biblical witness is far



otherwise: “The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,” (Psalm 24:1); and the verse from Isaiah 5:7 that Jesus is almost certainly referencing here:

<sup>7</sup>For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
he expected justice,  
but saw bloodshed;  
righteousness,  
but heard a cry!

**Ponder:** How am I continuing to act as one of the wicked tenants of this planet? What might I do differently to acknowledge this planet and part of I inhabit as belonging to the Lord?

Faith activity: call or visit an elderly friend or neighbor

Feb. 21, Wednesday

Read: Mark 12:13-17

13 Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. <sup>14</sup>And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? <sup>15</sup>Should we pay them, or should we not?' But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.' <sup>16</sup>And they brought one. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were utterly amazed at him.

If we thought the previous two days' parables were unnerving, this one is worse. At first glance, it seems easy: to the earthly ruler/government what is properly the earthly ruler/government's; to God what is properly God's. Until we remember that "the earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it," until we remember what Jesus has just said about vineyard tenants who think they own and can exploit the vineyard. In other words, we cannot separate our political allegiances from our religious allegiances.

Ponder: How does what you've read so far speak to your social and political commitments in your neighborhood and in your city?

Faith activity: St. Mark's council meets tonight. Pray for the congregation's leadership and witness, that they might listen hard for the guidance of God, and make courageous and loving decisions.

Feb. 22

Read: Mark 12:18-27

18 Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, <sup>19</sup>‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. <sup>20</sup>There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; <sup>21</sup>and the second married her and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; <sup>22</sup>none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. <sup>23</sup>In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her.’

24 Jesus said to them, ‘Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? <sup>25</sup>For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>26</sup>And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? <sup>27</sup>He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.’

In a grotesque “what-if,” the literalist party unintentionally reveals that they are far more concerned with the maintenance of patriarchy and control of family wealth than they are with the poor woman, passed from male to male, shamed by not bearing offspring. Jesus’ argument turns on parallel truths: God is the God of the patriarchs; God is also the God of the living. Therefore, the patriarchs, though presently dead, must someday live. Life, not death, will surely be the destiny of all those linked with God in faith. God’s will for all God’s people is life, not the death-dealing ways of patriarchy and oppression.

**Ponder:** In what ways has God's disclosure of God's life-giving ways surprised your assumptions about God, and God's kingdom?

Faith activity: the quilters meet at 10am to tie quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Pay especial attention to news of disasters around the world; pray for the survivors and the ways in which we might help and support them.