

KINGS

EPIPHANY TO HOLY WEEK 2020
ST. MARK'S CHURCH



GOSPEL
READINGS



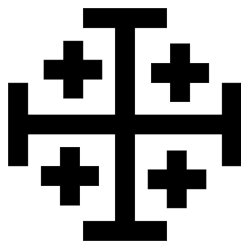
Dear St. Markers,

The present and coming kingdom of God is a prominent theme running through this year's all-church study which begins on Epiphany and will lead us through Lent. While Christ was here on earth, individuals who encountered his teaching, miracles, and example witnessed a stark contrast between the power offered by this world and that sublime power which God offers in and through the heavenly kingdom.

I hope that during this 12-week study your faith will deepen and become more personal. And I invite you to enthusiastically share your faith with other St. Markers each week at Eucharistic services and in your Cornerstone Group. Until such time as the King himself returns, the gathered expressions of our St. Mark's community will serve as tangible reminders of his blessed rule.

Honored to serve the King with you,

Father Mark



THE KINGS EXPERIENCE

The readings for this Epiphany to Holy Week study come from the books of Matthew and John. Our exploration begins on January 6 with a personal reading of the Epiphany story, where an insecure earthly king obsesses over the heavenly king's mysterious arrival. It depicts contrasting notions of power and is a fitting start to this twelve-week journey through the Gospels. By reflecting on the ancient words, your Cornerstone Group will uncover and examine your own contemporary attitudes, actions and allegiances. In doing so you may find camaraderie with the individuals who encountered Jesus while he was physically here on earth, who were first presented with these kingdom alternatives.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- 1. Scripture:** The Gospel passages in this study are printed for use during Eucharistic services, personal devotions, and Cornerstone Group meetings.
- 2. Sermon Notes:** If desired, bring this guide to Eucharistic services in order to record insights and questions that arise from the weekly teaching.
- 3. Five-Minute Daily Devotions:** Simple devotional practices are given for each day of the week to encourage further growth. Begin or continue a habit of spiritual discipline throughout this study. For some, five minutes each day will be a stretch. For others, five minutes is just stretching out. Cornerstone Group members who wish to encourage each other in these devotions can discuss their experiences at each meeting.
- 4. Background/Context:** To enhance understanding and aid personal and Cornerstone Group interpretation, scholarly perspective is offered for each passage by Associate Rector Rev. Dr. Amy Peeler.
- 5. Cornerstone Group Meeting:** Leaders and groups will find icebreakers, discussion questions, and optional group ideas for each meeting.

NOTES FOR GROUP LEADERS CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE.

Additional tips and resources for group leaders can be found at
stmarks-geneva.org/cgleaders and lectionarypress.com/leaders

PREPARATION WEEK

(JANUARY 6-11)

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

MONDAY

Epiphany Reading: Read Matthew 2:1-12. What types of power and influence do you see in this passage?

TUESDAY

Simplicity: How busy or stretched do you feel right now? Where can you remove something for the sake of simplicity and spiritual health during this 12-week study? Review and address your calendar, if needed. Is anything interfering with your weekly worship experience? Bring any identified and needless complexity to God in prayer.

WEDNESDAY

Practice God's Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and within his people (e.g. Galatians 2:20). Pay attention to God's presence during this devotional time. Focus inward, then focus on your surroundings. How will you also pay attention to, and remind yourself of, his presence in the next 24 hours?

THURSDAY

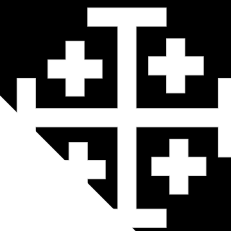
From the Old Testament: Read Isaiah 42:1-9. What themes do you see here in this prophecy? What characteristics of God emerge? What feelings or thoughts does this passage prompt in you?

FRIDAY

Self-Examination: Spend time considering your life and how ready you are for the heavenly king to lead you. Ask God in prayer to reveal to you your personal state of readiness and any areas of needed readiness improvement. Where are you distracted? How are you listening?

SATURDAY

Prayer (Petition): Spend time in prayer asking God to grant any specific requests currently on your mind. Are there any areas where you have substituted worry for prayer? He loves you and already knows what you want and need.



WEEK 1: DOVE

(JANUARY 12-18)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 3:13-17 (NRSV)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Silence: Spend your devotional time in silence. Be still. Keep your mind and body at rest. Actively listen for God or simply rest in His presence. Afterwards, note how easy or difficult this was for you. Was it refreshing or draining? How often is silence a part of your week?

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. As you read, notice which word, phrase, or part of the story stands out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you why this part of the Scripture captured your attention. Pray that your week ahead will be spiritually centered along the lines of these verses.

TUESDAY

Examen: The prayer of examen taught by Ignatius of Loyola is a spiritual reflection on the day's events. These steps are patterned accordingly.

1. Remind yourself of God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see clearly and with spiritual insight.
2. In an attitude of thankfulness, recall notable experiences from the past 24 hours.
Pay particular attention to your emotions.
 - If the experience was positive, note how God may have been active and present.
 - If the experience was negative, ask for perspective, patience and humility.
3. Prayerfully reflect on the next 24 hour period. Prepare your heart and lighten your burden by asking for God's assistance where you anticipate any need.

WEDNESDAY

Write Your Own Prayer: What is on your mind and heart this January? Write out a prayer of any length along those lines. Choose each word carefully or write in a stream of consciousness style. Pray and reflect as you write. Then pray your written prayer back to God.

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 29. What would you like to ascribe to the Lord? Listen for his voice. Ask for strength and peace. Be comforted, for "the LORD sits enthroned as king forever" (v. 10).

FRIDAY

Discernment: Use this time to consider and reflect on a needed decision. Who can provide wisdom and perspective for you? Do you need to pray for divine insight as you decide between two seemingly equal choices or for the courage to act? Listen carefully in this time of discernment.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Worship): Spend time in prayer praising God for who He is. Focus on his character and virtues. Resist any urges to make personal requests. He knows what you want and need. God is glorified and you build spiritual depth as you bring your words of adoration to Him.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Christians did not invent baptism.

Ritual washing was a defining characteristic of Second Temple Judaism. When archeologists discover mikvahs, small depressed areas that could hold water, it is a clear indication of Jewish presence. Distinct from Christian baptism, this ritual could happen frequently. Entrance into and out of the mikvah provided a bodily expression of a physical and spiritual reality. To wash one's body was a way to remove impurity and set one in right standing with God.

John is performing this kind of baptism at the Jordan River. He is calling people to a new way of life and to show their repentance through this act.

Hence, when Jesus comes to be baptized, John resists him. How fascinating. His reaction indicates that John clearly recognizes Jesus, knows he does not need to be baptized for repentance, and that Jesus is superior to him. John first appears in Matthew's gospel in this chapter with no explanation of their previous relationship. Yet his recognition assumes the story that Luke conveys, that John is Jesus cousin, and would have known who Jesus actually is.

Jesus convinces John that for him to be baptized may not be fitting, but it is righteous. Jesus does not need baptism, but his act moves beyond equity (getting what one deserves) toward the full fulfillment of the intention of the law in which he comes to rescue people who need to repent from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

God's response to Jesus' baptism shows both Jesus' superiority, he alone is the beloved Son who inherits the royal promise (Psalm 2), and his humility. For him to undergo the common and sinful people's ritual of baptism pleases his father.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Who is someone with whom you are “well pleased”? Why?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- What do you think baptism signified for John?
- Why do you think John is hesitant to baptize Jesus?
- What might Jesus mean by the phrase “to fulfill all righteousness”?
- What do you think this passage shows us about God?

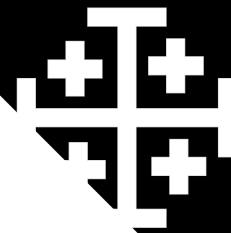
APPLICATION

- What do you think baptism signifies now?
- Is there anywhere you have felt hesitant to serve or act because of your perceived lack of qualifications? Describe.
- In what ways do you hope to grow during this 12-week study?
- What do you hope to contribute to this group during this period?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

If this is your first meeting as a Cornerstone Group, discuss what expectations you have for each other, for the meeting, for the daily devotions, and for Eucharistic service attendance. If a group member misses a weekend sermon, is he/she encouraged to watch or listen online before the group meeting? Writing these expectations down can help with clarity and accountability. If your group is an established group, revisit any group expectations and check in on any needed adjustments for this study.

Past sermons can be found at [**stmarks-geneva.org/resources/sermons**](https://stmarks-geneva.org/resources/sermons).



WEEK 2: LOOKING

(JANUARY 19-25)

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 1:29-42 (NRSV)

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵ *The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?"³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).*

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Song: The hymn “Behold the Lamb” written by Russell Kelso Carter draws on the theme of Jesus as the “Lamb of God”. Consider the verses as they retell the gospel story.

Behold, behold the Lamb of God!
The Lamb for sinners slain;
That taketh away the sin of the world,
That bore our grief and pain.

Behold, behold the Lamb of God!
By death and sin assailed;
The heav’ns they resound to praise His name,
By love He hath prevailed.

Behold, the Lamb of God!
Who had no place to lay His head;
Rejected of men, the gift of God,
A Lamb to Calv’ry led.

Behold, behold the Lamb of God!
Redeemed from sin I am,
I’m under the blood and now I sing,
Behold, behold the Lamb!

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week’s passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again, if helpful.

TUESDAY

Prayer (For Your Cornerstone Group): Pray for the individuals in your group. Pray that God will be especially present at the next group meeting. Pray for your group leader, service projects, outreach to newcomers or anything else that makes up the ministry of your group. Pray especially for your own participation and investment.

WEDNESDAY

Sabbath: *“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” - Genesis 2:1-3 (NRSV)*

How will you emulate God this week in marking out a day for rest? What plans do you need to make or cancel? Examine your patterns in general and pray specifically for any needed adjustments this week.

THURSDAY

From the Epistles: Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Where do you identify with the church in Corinth? Where don’t you identify with them? Let this passage inform a time of prayer.

FRIDAY

Fasting: Voluntarily opt out of a meal or another earthly need or desire in order to focus on your spiritual needs and desires. What can you do without over the next day, week, or for the rest of this study for the purpose of prayer and spiritual formation? Pray for discipline, strength, and the invisible effect of your devotion.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Confession): Spend time in prayer remembering and acknowledging the ways you have recently participated in the sins of the world.

"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." - 1 John 1:9 (NRSV)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Only in John's gospel does he specifically refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God. An infrequent term in the New Testament (Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19), the image of the Lamb connects deeply with the Jewish covenant. Lambs serve as the perpetual daily offering before the Lord, in morning and evening, to provide a fragrant offering to the Lord so that he might meet with the people of Israel (Exodus 29). Lambs are given for the burnt offering to prepare for God's arrival for the whole people (Leviticus 9, 23) or for individuals who are unclean (Leviticus 9, 12). It is the blood of a sheep that was smeared over the doorpost to protect the firstborn of Israel from the angel of death (Exodus 12). Lambs mediate between God and humanity when uncleanness, error, and death form a barrier. John knows this is true of Jesus, even though he has only known him for a relatively short time compared with the whole of his existence.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

- Who has been one of your favorite teachers or mentors? Why?
- If you could change your first name, to what would you change it? Why?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

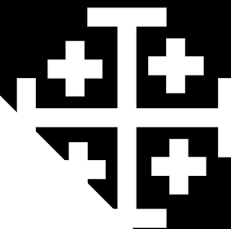
- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- If John the Baptist were here, what question would you ask him?
- What do you think John means by “the sin of the world?” (v. 29)
- What do you think the term “baptizes with the Holy Spirit” means? (v. 33)
- Why do you think it might have been important for the two disciples to see where Jesus was staying?

APPLICATION

- Is there any place where you are having a hard time letting others take the lead? Describe.
- How easy or difficult is it for you to share and discuss your faith with your family or friends?
- Who in your circles might you invite to visit this Cornerstone Group or a St. Mark’s Eucharistic service?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

If you lead an open group, your group prayer time can include or focus on inviting and welcoming others to your Cornerstone Group. Pray specifically for those group members who have identified individuals to invite.



WEEK 3: IMMEDIATE

(JANUARY 26-FEBRUARY 1)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:12-23 (NRSV)

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Nicene Creed: Jesus' endless kingdom is referenced in the second part of the Nicene Creed. Read this creed aloud or silently to affirm and encourage your faith. What else do you notice? End your time with prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down
from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius
Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again

in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the
living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the
giver of life, who proceeds from the Father
and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped
and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

**We believe in one holy catholic and
apostolic Church.**

We acknowledge one baptism for the
forgiveness of sins. We look for the
resurrection of the dead, and the life
of the world to come.

Amen.*

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. This time enter into the scripture. What do you feel? Who do you relate to? What would you do similarly? Differently? Are there any related situations in your life? Reflect in prayerful conversation with God.

TUESDAY

Compassion: Consider those you have encountered in the past few days. Who may be in need of Christian compassion? How can the love of God become credible to them through your words or an act of service? Pray for that individual and your own courage to act. Pray also for your heart to become more like Christ's, as you serve in his name.

*from The Book of Common Prayer. (1979). Church
Publishing, Inc. Pg. 326-327.

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Prayer: From Matthew 6, Luke 11, or your memory. Pray and repeat as desired. What part of Jesus' model prayer is nearest to you today?

THURSDAY

From the Old Testament: Read Isaiah 9:1-4. How does this prophecy foreshadow Christ's ministry? Let this passage inform a time of prayer.

FRIDAY

Prayer (For Weekend Eucharistic Services): Ask God for his blessings on the upcoming weekend services at St. Mark's. Pray for the teaching team and for all who serve. For newcomers and long time members. Pray also for yourself, for your engagement in worship, in the hearing of Scripture, in generosity, fellowship, and joy.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Thanksgiving): How has God acted on your behalf in times past (recently as well as long ago)? Give him thanks. Remember how he has been merciful and generous. If desired, Psalm 100 or 124 can be your words of Thanksgiving.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Jesus transitions in the narrative from his hometown of Nazareth to the Galilean coastal town of Capernaum. He might have settled here as he took up a home base in the residences of some of his apostles. Matthew discloses the origin story of some of those friendships here.

The immediacy with which the disciples respond to Jesus might seem troubling. Who leaves their job because a guy walks by and asks you to drop everything? Several possibilities help explain the phenomenon. First, a narrative consideration: Matthew (and Mark whose account is quite similar) is recounting three years of world-changing events in a handful of chapters. They must leave something out. John's narrative indicates that Jesus has more than just one interaction with the disciples before they agree to follow him. Matthew's account may only tell the end of the story. Second, a cultural consideration: it was an honor to study with a rabbi. Teachers in local towns would choose young men to apprentice with them. The disciples, since they are working as fishermen, may have been passed over for such invitations. When Jesus asks them to join him on his mission to prepare the way for the coming Kingdom, it would have been an honor to study and work with a holy person. Third, a popularity consideration: Jesus was attractive. In his early ministry he attracts crowds to the degree that there is standing room only. The disciples too were swayed by his magnetism.

The Gospel writers hoped their readers would do the same. Matthew wants his readers to consider if confessing Jesus as Messiah is worth dropping everything and following his lead immediately.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

- Describe a time when you moved to a different home.
- If you could live anywhere besides the place you currently live, where would it be? Why?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What words or phrases in this passage seem significant or surprising to you?
- Why do you think Jesus was proclaiming that particular message from v. 17?
- Why do you think Peter, Andrew, James, and John responded so immediately to Christ's call?
- What do you think Jesus means by "fish for people" in v. 19?
- How would you describe the "good news of the kingdom" in your own words? (v. 23)

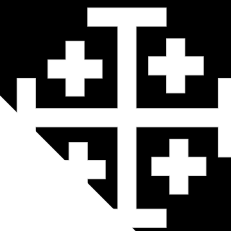
APPLICATION

- Is there anyway or anywhere that you are currently "fishing"?
- Is anyone in the group in need of healing? Pray for each request as a group.
- Where in your life, if any, do you feel a call to follow Jesus?

GROUP IDEAS FOR LEADERS

The theme of repentance may naturally lead to confession-focused prayer. This can be done out loud if you feel this would be suitable for your group. Or you can give group members time to privately write or silently name any areas of needed repentance. You can symbolically throw away, tear up, or even burn these as a sign of God's offered forgiveness. Close by reading Psalm 51 aloud.

If desired, discuss ways in which your Cornerstone Group meeting can effectively incorporate worship through music. Is someone in your group passionate about leading in this area? Does a group member play a suitable instrument? Would it be fitting for the group to sing together? Can recorded music be used effectively? Can a song-book be made available to your group? You may decide to have a trial run at one of your upcoming meetings.



WEEK 4: ATTITUDES

(FEBRUARY 2-8)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 5:1-12 (NRSV)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Simplicity: How well is your pursuit of simplicity going? Revisit any commitments from the second devotion of this study. Is anything interfering with your group meeting? Examine your calendar for needless complexity. Pray for a simple heart, mind and spirit.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again if helpful.

TUESDAY

Memorization: Practice memorizing one or more of the "Beatitudes" (Blessed are...). Write and rewrite. Speak them out loud and in your mind. Place in a location where you will see them regularly. Especially take note of how these scriptures affect your attitude this week.

WEDNESDAY

Practice God's Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and within his people (e.g. Colossians 1:27). Pay attention to God's presence during this devotional time. Focus outward on your surroundings, then focus inward. How will you also pay attention to, and remind yourself of, his presence in the next 24 hours?

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 15. What characteristics of God's character emerge from this Psalm? How do you feel about God's high expectations? Let this Psalm inform a time of prayer.

FRIDAY

Self-Examination: To prompt self-examination, thoughtfully answer the following question: Over the past week, to what extent did you "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (v. 6)?

I don't know	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Considerably	A great deal
0	1	2	3	4	5

Pray that God's Spirit would both create and satisfy this hunger in you.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Petition): Spend time in prayer asking God to grant any specific requests currently on your heart. Are there any areas where you have unhelpfully substituted work for prayer? He loves you and already knows what you want and need.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Matthew gathers up all that he wants to communicate about Jesus' teachings into five large sections (if you have a "red-letter" Bible notice how Matthew places the speech of Jesus into these groups). He places Jesus' first discourse on a mountain. Jewish readers would see rather quickly that Matthew is drawing a comparison between Jesus and Moses: both author five discourses, both do prominent things on mountains. Jesus did not come to abolish the law God gave through Moses, but to bring it to its full and fruitful intent.

Such fruit of the law and its blessings appears in the Beatitudes. Jesus proclaims blessedness for those who conduct themselves in certain ways, and this is a very positive way to proclaim a law. If you do this, you will be blessed. The implication is that one should live in such a way to fit into these categories.

The latter half, from v. 6 on, shows God to be faithful in giving the good that is desired by obedient living. If you desire righteousness, God will grant it. If you practice mercy, you will receive it. If you are pure, you will see the holy God. If you bring peace, God will put the name of the family of God upon you.

Obedience can also bring the curse of persecution, and this is the focus of the rest of the passage. Being a disciple of Jesus could also include poverty, mourning, humility, and persecution. These negatives allow another even more striking instance of God's faithfulness. When these challenges occur, God will still bless with encouragement and even an inheritance of both earth and heaven! God always desired for God's people to reign with him. Jesus is calling his followers into this inheritance as they receive the blessings of the divine covenant, long ago given and with his coming, now entering the age of fulfillment.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Describe a time when you were taught something particularly insightful or relevant.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

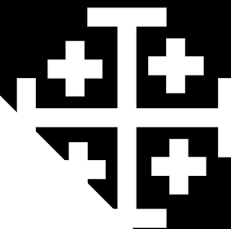
- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- What might the word “blessed” mean in this context?
- In Luke 6:20 Jesus says; “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (NRSV). Compare and contrast this phrase with v. 3.
- In what ways does each Beatitude match or not match its result?

APPLICATION

- Which Beatitude best describes you?
- Which Beatitude would you like to incorporate more fully into your life?
- Where, if anywhere, do you feel persecuted or reviled?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

For your time of prayer, ask every member to write a two-or three-sentence prayer. Encourage them to write in a way that incorporates Jesus’ teaching on the Beatitudes into their prayer. Also, encourage their prayers to center on themselves, not others. Each member who is willing can pray their prayer aloud.



WEEK 5: SALTINESS

(FEBRUARY 9-15)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 5:13-20 (NRSV)

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Silence: Spend your devotional time in silence. Be still. Keep your mind and body at rest. Actively listen for God or simply rest in His presence. Afterwards, note how easy or difficult this was for you. Was it refreshing or draining? How often is silence a part of your week?

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. As you read, notice which word, phrase, or part of the story stands out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you why this part of the Scripture captured your attention. Pray that your week ahead will be spiritually centered along the lines of these verses.

TUESDAY

Examen: The prayer of examen is a spiritual reflection on the day's events.

1. Remind yourself of God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see clearly and with spiritual insight.
2. In an attitude of thankfulness, recall notable experiences from the past 24 hours. Pay particular attention to your emotions.
 - If the experience was positive, note how God may have been active and present.
 - If the experience was negative, ask for perspective, patience and humility.
3. Prayerfully reflect on the next 24 hour period. Prepare your heart and lighten your burden by asking for God's assistance where you anticipate any need.

WEDNESDAY

Write Your Own Prayer: Write out a prayer of any length, focused on the shine of your light (v. 14-16). Choose each word carefully or write in a stream of consciousness style. Pray and reflect as you write. Then pray your written prayer back to God.

THURSDAY

From the Epistles: Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16.

FRIDAY

Discernment: Use this time to consider and reflect on an upcoming decision. Is there any scripture that speaks into your situation? Or read James 1:5-6 and simply pray for wisdom.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Extemporaneous): First, ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance of your heart and mind. Then spend time praying as your heart and mind direct. Trust that God wants to lead you to topics and words which reflect his love and concern for you. Notice which topics consistently compete for your attention.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

If Jesus respects the law so much, why is he constantly at odds with the Pharisees about the law? Here Jesus affirms his allegiance to the law down to the last jot and tittle, never wishing to destroy it but to fulfill it. Those around Jesus might have been confused, however, because the Pharisees and Scribes frequently ask him why he is disobeying the law. The confusion arises over a definition of terms. Jesus and the Jewish leaders are talking past each other based on their definition of "law." Jesus always affirms the written law, the law given by God to Moses. The Pharisees hold to that, but also to the many interpretations of the written law that arose in the time after the people of Israel returned from the Babylonian exile. As is true with the American constitution which has been amended to accommodate changes in time and situation, so too with the written covenant, different generations developed traditions of how to apply the law. These were not meant to be oppressive or exclusionary, but by the first century, the Pharisees were holding to many interpretations that were not easy for all people to maintain. The Pharisees struggled with a very human temptation: they missed the forest (the heart of the written law) for the trees (the many interpretations). Jesus frequently calls them back to the intent of the written law, every detail of it: human flourishing in relationship with God. If his followers keep the law in that way, their righteousness will exceed even that of the Scribes and the Pharisees because they will be able to honor God's original intent with the law.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- If you could author one rule that everyone on earth was required to follow, what would it be? (feel free to be light, creative or serious)

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- What do you think it means for salt to lose its taste, in this context?
- What might Jesus mean in v. 16 by “let your light shine before others”?
- What do you think it means to be “the least in the kingdom of heaven”? The greatest?
- How do you think Christians should relate to Old Testament laws?

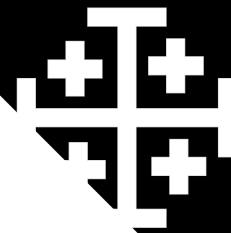
APPLICATION

- Where, if anywhere, have you seen v. 16 in practice?
- Where are you tempted to live by the rules more than by the intent of the rules?
- How can our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

Continue the theme of good works by leading your Cornerstone Group in a discussion on serving. Perhaps you'll decide to serve each other. Or perhaps you'll serve creatively in the community or at St. Mark's. This could be a simple introductory conversation to gauge interest. Is someone in your group passionate about leading in this area? Alternatively, you can ask group members where they are already serving and you can agree to regularly encourage, pray, and update each other.

For serving ideas in and through the church visit **stmarks-geneva.org**. Select the Serve menu for opportunities in the church, locally, and globally.



WEEK 6: YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID

(FEBRUARY 16-22)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 5:21-37 (NRSV)

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Collect: Examine and pray this week's collect (short structured prayer) from the Book of Common Prayer. Repeat if desired.

*O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again, if helpful.

TUESDAY

Prayer (For Your Cornerstone Group): Pray for the individuals in your group. Pray that God will be especially present at the next group meeting. Pray for your group leader, service projects, outreach to newcomers or anything else that makes up the ministry of your group. Pray especially for your own participation and investment.

WEDNESDAY

Sabbath: *"Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it." - Exodus 20:8-11 (NRSV)*

During the past few weeks, how has your weekly pattern of rest reflected God's? What plans do you need to make or cancel for this upcoming weekend? Rest right now, if needed.

THURSDAY

From the Old Testament: Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20. Where do you tend to choose life and prosperity over death and adversity? Where do you tend to choose death and adversity over life and prosperity? Let this passage inform a time of prayer.

FRIDAY

Meditation: Consider Matthew 13:44. Go over this passage in your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit for insight. What does it teach you about the kingdom of heaven? What does it tell you about yourself?

SATURDAY

Prayer (Confession): If any pattern of sin and brokenness (anger, insult, lust, adultery, lying etc.) in you was described by Jesus in this week's passage, acknowledge this to God in prayer.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes up three forms of brokenness in the human condition: anger, disrespect, and dishonesty. Historical details help paint the picture of what he is asking of his listeners.

To call someone a derogatory name was a weighty matter in an honor/shame culture where one's name was one's social capital. We might flippantly call someone a fool, but the modern equivalent would be closer to publicly voicing a racial slur. Such an act would disclose a brazen and unrepentant deeply held hate. Thus to offer a gift of thanksgiving to God would be false if you have done something unkind toward one of God's people. The horizontal relationship must be mended first before the vertical can be celebrated.

For the issue of disrespect between the genders, Jesus urges extreme measures so that women do not become the victims, even unaware, of derogatory thoughts. He also demands that men avoid divorcing their wives if at all possible. Rabbinic debates ranged from strict to broad allowances for divorce, but Jesus says that any reason save infidelity could result in more than one broken relationship (Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 will also allow the end of a marriage for abandonment and the theology of the church has recognized the necessity of ending abusive relationships).

Finally, Jesus urges his followers to speak with integrity. Other Jewish groups like the Essenes had similar commitments. Josephus records the Essenes belief that "one who is not believed without an appeal to God stands condemned already" (Jewish War 2.8.6 par. 135).

In each example, he presses beyond keeping the law as external box-checking to keeping the law as a matter of internal integrity. In that way again, Jesus asks his followers to embrace the heart of the law.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Share a principle or a proverb which you learned early in life.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- If Jesus were here, what question would you ask him about this scripture?
- In your own words, summarize v. 21-26.
- In your own words, summarize v. 27-30.
- In your own words, summarize v. 31-32.
- In your own words, summarize v. 33-37.

APPLICATION

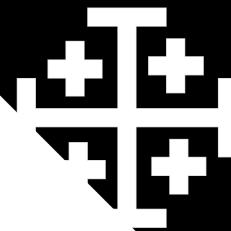
- Which form of brokenness that Jesus addresses hits closest to home? Describe, if appropriate.
- With whom, if anyone, do you need to be reconciled?

GROUP IDEAS FOR LEADERS

To encourage reflection and full participation, have group members quietly reread and examine each section of the passage (as above) and then write out their summaries for sharing. This may be best done one section at a time.

Begin or end the meeting by praying aloud the collect from the Sunday devotional.

Ash Wednesday services at St. Mark's next week are at 7:30 AM, noon, and 7:00 PM. Discuss attending one of these services as a group to begin the season of Lent.



WEEK 7: CLASSIFIED

(FEBRUARY 23-29)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 17:1-9 (NRSV)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Response: What from the sermon or weekend scripture reading(s) provoked a response in you? Is there a direct application or a change of attitude prompted by the Holy Spirit? Write this down, if helpful. If nothing stirs in you, reflect on where you are already experiencing and practicing these truths and thank God accordingly.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. Enter into the story of Christ's transfiguration. What do you feel? What do you see? Hear? Who do you relate to? How might you have reacted? Reflect in prayerful conversation with God.

TUESDAY

Compassion: Consider those you have encountered in the past few days. Which of them might be in need of compassion? How can the love of God become credible through your words or an act of service? Pray for that individual and your own courage to act. Pray also for your heart to become more like Christ's, as you serve in his name.

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Prayer: From Matthew 6, Luke 11, or your memory. Pray and repeat as desired. If you feel prompted by one of the words or phrases, go further in prayer along those lines.

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 2. How might you paraphrase this advice to earthly kings?

FRIDAY

Prayer (For Weekend Eucharistic Services): Ask God for his blessings on the upcoming weekend services at St. Mark's. Pray for the teaching team and for all who serve. For newcomers and long time members. Pray also for yourself, for your engagement in worship, in the hearing of Scripture, in generosity, fellowship, and joy.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Thanksgiving): Give thanks to God in prayer for all that you have received but did not earn.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

What was Peter proposing to build on the mountain, and why was this a problem?

When Jesus is transfigured before them and Moses and Elijah appear with him, Peter expresses his gratitude to be present. It is good they are on the mountain with Jesus because they can get to the important business of building tents. In Israel's formative history, everyone lived in tents, but the most important tent was the tent of meeting, the place God instructed Moses to build and to carry so that God's holy presence could dwell with the people of Israel (Exodus 33). It makes good sense with Moses present that Peter wants to construct a place to possibly invite again this glorious manifestation. His desire to build a structure echoes as well Jacob's setting up of a stone to commemorate the ladder he saw stretching to heaven (Genesis 28). Peter may want a structure as a memorial of the good God did before them on this day.

The problem with both possible motivations is that Peter plans to build three tents instead of one. Is he confusing divine presence with God's servants? If the tent is where God meets the people, why would there need to be a tent for Moses and Elijah to meet with them. Alternatively, if he sees these tents as commemorative, he is placing Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah, memorializing in the same way the revelation of the Son of God along with the appearance of the prophets. When God speaks, God directs attention to Jesus alone and instructs Peter to stop talking about his building plans and listen.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

- Share about a time you climbed a tall mountain (or hill).
- Describe a time when you changed in a significant way.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- In what ways might this experience have been significant in Jesus' life and ministry?
- Why might Jesus have asked Peter, James, and John to hold back this story until after his resurrection?

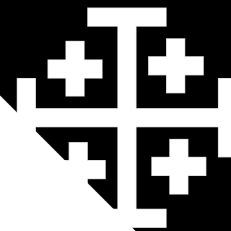
APPLICATION

- In what ways, if any, do you relate to Peter's response?
- Where do you tend to have a hard time listening?
- Describe how easy or difficult it is for you to keep a secret?
- Have you ever had a vision that you can describe to the group?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

Now over halfway through Kings, this would be a good meeting for a check-in discussion with your Cornerstone Group.

- What strengths do we have as a group?
- What growth areas exist?
- Does anything in our weekly meeting need adjustment?
- Is this study format effective for us? What can be adjusted?
- How can we increase participation and ownership?



WEEK 8: WRITTEN

(MARCH 1-7)

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-11 (NRSV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,

⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Simplicity: How successful were you at eliminating needless complexity this past week? What is one less thing you can do in this coming week? Revisit any commitments from the second devotion of this study or make new goals for the road ahead. Pray for the courage and discipline needed for a life of focus and depth.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. What words or phrases seem meaningful to you? Copy, highlight, or simply reflect on these. Is there a personal invitation from God to you somewhere in this scripture? Read it again, if helpful.

TUESDAY

Memorization: Following after Jesus' practice of Scripture recollection, select one of the Old Testament verses which he quotes and begin putting it to memory. Write and rewrite. Speak it out loud and in your mind. Place in a location where you will see it regularly. Especially take note of how these scriptures direct your behavior this week.

WEDNESDAY

Practice God's Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and within his people (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:19). Pay attention to God's presence during this devotional time. Listen with your body, mind and spirit. How will you continue to remind yourself of his presence in the coming week?

THURSDAY

From the Epistles: Read Romans 5:12-19. Reread v. 18 as a summary of the theological concept. Then, reread the passage as a prayer of thanksgiving.

FRIDAY

Self-Examination: Jesus faced the tempter and successfully resisted. Where are you currently facing temptation? Pray for strength and God's help. What scripture passages will aid your resistance?

SATURDAY

Prayer (Petition): Where do you need the kind of help that only God can provide? Spend time in prayer asking God to intervene on your behalf.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

When Jesus is tempted by Satan in a time of great weakness, he consistently responds out of his knowledge of the Scriptures. Jesus' selected texts respond directly to the temptations, and also tap into the wider narratives of their Scriptural locations.

Satan first tempts Jesus with his most pressing need of food. Jesus will not let the enemy dictate when he meets his physical hunger, so he responds from Deuteronomy 8 that humans do not live by bread alone but by the words of God. Deuteronomy 8 features God telling his people that he will test them with hunger to see if their hearts will be faithful. Jesus passes the test.

Then, the devil meets Jesus' Scripture with Scripture. If he were to throw himself down from the top of the temple, surely as Psalm 91 says, the angels would protect him. But Satan has committed the hermeneutical error of taking a verse out of context. God promises protection not when a person puts God to the test, but when enemies are pursuing. Jesus calls him on the error by citing from Deuteronomy 6, a verse in the context of the command to worship the Lord God alone and not to align with any other gods. Satan is tempting Jesus to move his allegiance from God to himself.

In the final statement he makes that temptation explicit. Worship me, and I'll give you the world. In response, Jesus pulls again from Deuteronomy 6, now from a statement just a few verses earlier, but in the same discourse that commands monotheism.

Thematically, Deuteronomy 6–8 asks the people of Israel to trust that God alone is God and that one God is truly good. Jesus draws from this foundational narrative of his people to counter Satan's temptation to meet his desires immediately. Jesus will be filled, protected, and granted all the kingdoms of the world, but only in the true God's good time.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- You're famished. Angels appear and ask for your food order. What do you request?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- What do we learn about Satan from this passage?
- What do we learn about Jesus from this passage?
- Why do you think Jesus uses scripture in response to each temptation?

APPLICATION

- Which of the devil's temptations in this scripture would have been the most difficult for you to resist? Easiest?
- When do you tend to be most susceptible to temptation?
- What has been your experience, if any, with scripture memorization?

GROUP IDEAS FOR LEADERS

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-8 as a group in order to aid your discussion on scripture memorization.

Pray for each other on the subject of temptation. If anyone shares a specific area of concern, pause to pray for that person.

WEEK 9: BORN

(MARCH 8-14)



SCRIPTURE: JOHN 3:1-17 (NRSV)

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Silence: Spend your devotional time in silence. Be still. Keep your mind and body at rest. Actively listen for God or simply rest in His presence. Afterwards, note how easy or difficult this was for you. Was it refreshing or draining? How often is silence a part of your week?

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. As you read, notice which word, phrase, or part of the story stands out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you why this part of the Scripture captured your attention. Pray that your week ahead will be spiritually centered along the lines of these verses.

TUESDAY

Examen: The prayer of examen is a spiritual reflection on the day's events.

1. Remind yourself of God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see clearly and with spiritual insight.
2. In an attitude of thankfulness, recall notable experiences from the past 24 hours.
Pay particular attention to your emotions.
 - If the experience was positive, note how God may have been active and present.
 - If the experience was negative, ask for perspective, patience and humility.
3. Prayerfully reflect on the next 24 hour period. Prepare your heart and lighten your burden by asking for God's assistance where you anticipate any need.

WEDNESDAY

Write Your Own Prayer: What is on your mind and heart? Write out a prayer of any length along those lines. Choose each word carefully or write in a stream of consciousness style. Pray and reflect as you write. Then pray your written prayer back to God.

THURSDAY

From the Old Testament: Read Genesis 12:1-4. Do you sense a call - small or large - which would require you to leave a place of familiarity? Who might go with you? Pray along these lines.

FRIDAY

Discernment: Consider a decision you have recently made. How have things progressed since that decision? Do you need God's help to continue on this course? Alternatively, reflect on an upcoming decision that needs to be made. Listen carefully for God's voice in this time of discernment.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Worship): Spend time in prayer praising God for who He is. Focus on his character and virtues. Resist any urges to make personal requests. He knows what you want and need. God is glorified and you build spiritual depth as you bring your words of adoration to Him.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Nicodemus is on the right path. When he comes to Jesus, he acknowledges his recognition that the works performed must have a divine source. His burgeoning vision provides glimmers of another birth dawning in him, the birth from the Spirit.

As a teacher of the Jewish law, Nicodemus would have been aware of God's Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity is not a Christian invention. God's Spirit was, for example, present at creation, facilitated the rescue of the Israelites, inspired those who created the tabernacle and its instruments, and fell upon leaders and prophets. God's Spirit had been at work from the beginning.

Nicodemus seems to trip upon the idea that the Spirit would be involved in the process of new birth. In the Scriptures of Israel, never is the Spirit connected to birth. The Spirit comes upon those people born naturally into the family God has elected. Thus, if Nicodemus is part of the people of God, why would he need to be born anew? Alternatively, the Spirit comes upon people God plans to use in a particular season, but the Spirit is not present in such a way that brings about a permanent reorientation of life. By connecting the Spirit with new birth, Jesus is asking Nicodemus to see afresh all things, including who Jesus really is, not just a man born of water, but also the Son of Man who has come from from above.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Are you a “night owl” or a “morning lark”? Describe what that looks like.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What do you think Nicodemus was struggling with?
- What do you think Jesus’ term “born from above” means, in this context?
- What do you think Jesus’ terms “water and Spirit” mean, in this context?
- What do you think v. 8 means?
- What does Jesus teach Nicodemus about himself?

APPLICATION

- Where or when are you confident in your beliefs?
- Where or when do you struggle with belief?
- Who, if anyone, in your circles is struggling like Nicodemus?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

The following scriptures can give perspective on this week’s passage:

- John 7:45-52 / Nicodemus and the Pharisees
- John 19:38-42 / Nicodemus and Jesus’ burial
- Numbers 21:4-9 / Moses lifts the serpent

Read one, two, or all of these as a Cornerstone Group. Discuss observations.

WEEK 10: BARRIERS

(MARCH 15-21)



SCRIPTURE: JOHN 4:5-42 (NRSV)

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet." ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely

no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Song: Isaac Watt's hymn "I Sing the Mighty Power of God", was written in 1784. Use these words for worship and appreciation of God's creative power.

I sing the mighty power of God, that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command, and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, that filled the earth with food,
He formed the creatures with His word, and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, where'er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky.

There's not a plant or flower below, but makes Thy glories known,
And clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from Thy throne;
Creatures that borrow life from Thee are subject to Thy care;
There's not a place where we can flee, but God is present there.

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. Highlight a word, phrase, or verse that seems meaningful to you.

TUESDAY

Prayer (For Your Cornerstone Group): Pray for the individuals in your group. Pray that God will be especially present at the next group meeting. Pray for your group leader, service projects, outreach to newcomers or anything else that makes up the ministry of your group. Pray especially for your own participation and investment.

WEDNESDAY

Sabbath: Read Mark 2:23-28. Reflect on Jesus' teaching regarding the Sabbath? What do you think verse 27 means? How might you apply his teaching this week?

THURSDAY

From the Psalms: Read Psalm 95. Notice the change of tone within verse 7. How do the themes of this Psalm fit together? Let this Psalm guide a time of prayer or simply reread the Psalm back to God in worship.

FRIDAY

Fasting: Reflect on your fasting experience from earlier in the study (see the Friday devotion from Week #2). What made it a positive or negative experience? What did you learn in the process? Did it help your spiritual formation? Consider fasting in some way during the next week.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Healing): Spend time in prayer specifically interceding for those who are sick. Include yourself if needed. The weekly Eucharistic service on Wednesday mornings at 7:30 AM in the St. Mark's chapel has a healing focus. Attend once or for a season if you have a personal healing need or if you want to pray for others.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Samaritans and Jews shared a contentious relationship. Samaritans, a people group who lived to the north of the Jewish capitol, asserted that they derived from a group of Jews who did not like how the temple was being rebuilt after the exile and so departed up north to build their own (more correct) temple. Jews believed the Samaritans were a mixed people group who descended from the Jews left by the Assyrian exile and others who dwelt in the area. With distinct temples and Scriptures but a claim to a common story, animosity ran high. Neither group trusted the other.

Such ethnic tension forms the backdrop of Jesus' conversation with the woman who comes to draw water. Based on her multiple marriages, some have interpreted her lone presence at the well in the afternoon as a sign of her shame and societal disdain. The text says neither. While the number of her marriages is higher than anything recorded in the ancient world, no explanation is given for them. Her husbands could have died or they could have divorced her. Her current situation of cohabitation was not unheard of in ancient Judaism and could have arisen from moral laxity or something less vicious like lack of a dowry. When the woman receives Jesus' identity and testifies to her people, they follow her. No barrier of race or gender (whatever her situation might have been) prevents them from coming to receive the living water.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Share something about yourself that most people in the room don't know.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- What do you think Jesus means by the term "living water"?
- On what matters do you think the Samaritan woman is confused?
- On what matters do you think the Samaritan woman is clear?
- What do you think worshipping "in spirit and truth" means?
- What do you think the disciples were most concerned about?
- What do you think v. 38 means?

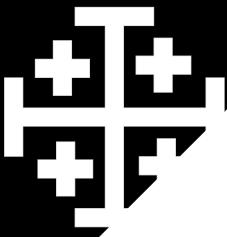
APPLICATION

- What part of this story, if any, is most specifically speaking to your current situation? If so, share accordingly.
- To what extent have your own recent worship experiences been "in spirit and truth"?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

The passages for Week 10, 11 and 12 are particularly long. Here are three suggestions to aid discussion and comprehension.

- Read and discuss one section at a time.
- Shorten the reading (e.g discuss only v. 5-26 this week).
- Give extra time for personal reading and reflection before group discussion.



WEEK 11: BLINDNESS

(MARCH 22-28)

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 9:1-41 (NRSV)

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we

do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Apostles' Creed: Jesus asks the question "Do you believe in the Son of Man?". Read the Apostles Creed silently or out loud to affirm and encourage your own faith.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage. Read slowly enough to fully digest each sentence.

TUESDAY

Compassion: Consider those you have encountered in the past few days. Who may be in need of Christian compassion? How can the love of God become credible to them through your words or an act of service? Pray for that individual and your own courage to act. Pray also for your heart to become more like Christ's, as you serve in his name.

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Prayer: From Matthew 6, Luke 11, or your memory. Pray and repeat as desired. What part of Jesus' model prayer is nearest to you today?

THURSDAY

From the Epistles: Read Ephesians 5:8-14. Meditate on the phrases and verses that seem significant to you. Is God speaking to you in any way through this passage?

FRIDAY

Prayer (For Weekend Eucharistic Services): Ask God for his blessings on the upcoming weekend services at St. Mark's. Pray for the teaching team and for all who serve. For newcomers and long time members. Pray also for yourself, for your engagement in worship, in the hearing of Scripture, in generosity, fellowship, and joy.

SATURDAY

Prayer (Thanksgiving): Remember when or how God has been graceful and openhanded with you. Make a list of things for which you are most grateful today. Thank him for these in prayer.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The disciples' question about the blind man displays a relationship between sin and embodiment common in Israel, but much less appreciated today.

In the first covenant, the category of sin included moral infractions, but it also encompassed impurity, bodily realities not caused by any wrongdoing, including illness, menstruation, pregnancy, and contact with a corpse. These issues also demanded a sacrifice so that the impure person could be in proper relationship with a holy and pure God.

It isn't a sin to have a bodily ailment, but it isn't surprising that in such a broad understanding of being outside the holiness of God, the disciples would ask about blindness and sin.

Jesus' healing of this man's body is also very tangible, a little disgusting even, but common within his context. The use of spittle, particularly from a virtuous person, features as a likely method of healing in a variety of ancient sources, both Jewish and Roman. The healing doesn't happen until Jesus wipes this salve on the man's eyes, and the man goes to wash with water. Jesus instructs him to go to the pool of Siloam, and recent archeological discoveries indicate that the place could have been used as a site of ritual cleansing. Hence, and perhaps surprising to modern readers, Jesus aligns with the association between bodily purity and wholeness and healthy relationship with God.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKER

- Share a time when you were very confident, but eventually proved wrong.

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What themes do you see in this passage?
- What incorrect presumptions do you see in this passage?
- In what ways do you see the term “blindness” used in this scripture?
- What do you think of the man’s comment in v. 31?
- What does Jesus mean in v. 41?

APPLICATION

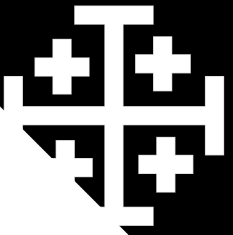
- On a scale of 1-10, how teachable do you feel you are? Why?
- Is there any challenge you are currently facing which might require you to relook at your assumptions?

GROUP IDEA FOR LEADERS

Holy Week is coming soon. Discuss how your group might experience some part of Holy Week as a community. Attend the Maundy Thursday service or Good Friday service together, gather for a meal, select a day to fast together, serve in the community or at Eucharistic services together, etc. Visit stmarks-geneva.org for a schedule and details on the Holy Week opportunities at St. Mark’s.

WEEK 12: THE CROWD

(MARCH 29-APRIL 4)



SCRIPTURE: JOHN 11:1-45 (NRSV)

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When

Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

SERMON NOTES

FIVE-MINUTE DAILY DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY

Simplicity/Holy Week Preparation: How will you clear your schedule for Holy Week? Spend time planning and prioritizing. How does your church community uniquely experience Holy Week? Where will you participate?

MONDAY

Devotional Reading: Reread this week's passage, paying specific attention to emotions and motivations.

TUESDAY

Memorization: Practice memorizing this sentence from verses 25 and 26 (NRSV):

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Write and rewrite. Speak it out loud and in your mind. Place in a location where you will see it regularly.

WEDNESDAY

Practice God's Presence: The triune God is everywhere, and specifically present with and within his people (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:14). Pay attention to God's presence during this devotional time. Focus inward, then focus on your surroundings. How will you also pay attention to, and remind yourself of, his presence in the next 24 hours?

THURSDAY

From the Old Testament: Read Ezekiel 37:1-14. What does this scripture passage communicate about God's character or motivations? What parallels do you see between this passage and the gospel narrative of Mary, Martha and Lazarus?

FRIDAY

Self-Examination: In what way, if any, do you feel changed as a result of this 12-week study? Which scripture passages were most meaningful to you? If you could only remember one truth from this study, what would it be?

SATURDAY

Review and Renew: Which of the devotional practices in this guide were most comfortable or natural for you? Which were the most difficult to engage in? What practices from this study will you want to continue? Invite God's Spirit to guide you toward your next devotional rhythm.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The people of Israel knew that their God, the only God, was the God of life. Glimmers flash in the Old Testament that God's victory over the forces of darkness would mean life for God's people (e.g. Moses' Song in Deuteronomy 32 or Job's hope for a redeemer in Job 19), but those eras before Christ do not give example of a wide spread assurance that individuals will bodily rise again. Resurrection appears more often in texts written in the period between the Old and the New Testaments, like the martyrs of the Maccabean revolt who willingly face death because they hope for the restoration of their flesh.

By the time of the New Testament, even though not all Jews believe in the resurrection of the body, for instance the sect of Jewish priestly leaders known as the Sadducees, it was becoming the dominant idea. Mary reflects it here. When Jesus promises her that her brother will rise again, she has no trouble accepting that fact. She believes that a resurrection is coming at the end of time. Jesus' immediate beginning of that end (not with the resuscitation of Lazarus but his own bodily resurrection) surprises her and everyone else who hears about the Christian message. How could only one person be resurrected without the rest of humanity? Jesus' position as the "first fruits" of the end in progress becomes one of the beautiful but difficult things for Christians to explain when telling the story of God's salvation.

CORNERSTONE GROUP MEETING

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

- What is one of the most amazing things you have ever seen?
- What is one of your favorite Easter traditions?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from the sermon this past weekend?
- What questions did the sermon prompt in you?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION

- What jumps out at you from this passage? Why?
- Does anything surprise you about Jesus' behavior in this passage?
- Compare and contrast Mary and Martha in this scripture.
- What does Jesus seem to prioritize?
- If Jesus were here, what question would you ask him about this story?

APPLICATION

- What events have played the most significant role in your faith journey?
- What occupies more of your attention, the past, the present, or the future? Describe what that looks like with any related pros and/or cons.
- What are you looking forward to this coming Holy Week?

GROUP IDEAS FOR LEADERS

During your time of prayer, remember your church community. Pray that the gathered expressions of remembrance will be meaningful and full of spirit and truth. Pray for those who serve. Pray for newcomers and guests. Pray that your own heart might grow and be refreshed as your community of faith shares again the ancient story of God's love.

The story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus continues in John 12:1-19. Close your group and prepare for Palm Sunday by reading this passage aloud as a closing prayer and benediction.

NOTES FOR CORNERSTONE GROUP LEADERS

- The purpose of Cornerstone Groups is to provide a relational community where individuals can experience three aspects of St. Mark's ministry: Christian Community, Historic Teaching, and Christ's Mission. After each meeting, reflect on how effectively your group accomplished these purposes. What, if anything, needs to change for your next meeting?
- Your leadership is critical. However, be sure to help everyone to own the group by involving all participants as contributors in ways that make them indispensable to group success. Think of yourself as a conductor not a solo artist.
- The Cornerstone Group meeting questions and elements should be customized for your group. Some groups will use all of the questions and items while some groups will simply include the icebreaker or a single sermon reflection question as a tie to the weekend teaching. Add your own questions and adjust the given questions to tailor the study to your Cornerstone Group.
- While they are related, the weekly topics can stand alone. This allows Cornerstone Groups to start anytime this winter.
- If your group meets every other week, don't feel like you have to squeeze two weeks of content into one meeting. However, you may want to reserve some time to share anything learned or experienced during the prior week.
- The icebreaker for each Cornerstone Group meeting can be given before or after the group scripture reading. However, it will likely work best as the very first agenda item after the group begins.

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT SUGGESTION: In order to increase your group's attention to the scripture passage, give five to ten minutes of silence for rereading and personal engagement after the initial group reading of the passage. It can be particularly helpful for discussion if individuals use pens and highlighters to record observations, identify meaningful parts of the passage, and to note any questions.

“

Christianity, therefore, is not a doctrine about the unity of the divine and the human, not to mention the rest of the logical paraphrases of typical religious thought. Christianity is not a doctrine but a fact: God came into existence through a particular human being at a particular point in history.

- SØREN KIERKEGAARD



LECTONARY **PRESS**

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