



edition: November 19, 2024

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Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Mark 1.¹⁻⁵

¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; ²As it is written in the prophets, “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. ³The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

⁴John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the first of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. There are two ways the following have been read.

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

Or

“The voice of one crying:
‘in the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

In the first, perhaps more traditional, the reference from Isaiah is used to indicated John the Baptist’s ministry in desert places.

In the second, individuals living in a wilderness are invited to prepare for the Lord’s arrival.

? How do you feel about individuals living in a spiritual desert being invited to receive the Lord?

? Can you apply this invitation to yourself? In what way?

? In what way is this invitation “a beginning to the good news that Jesus brings”?

2. When speaking of “confession of sin,” the LDS audience too often thinks in terms of confession to an ecclesiastical leader concerning “serious sin.” What John invites baptism initiates to do is something much more fundamental than this.

? How does the following passage relate to the confession that John encourages?

“But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord” (DC 59.¹²).

? Why is it so vital that we be always engaged in the acknowledgement of our inclination to sin and to the reality of our frequent yielding to those inclinations?

Mark 1.⁶⁻⁸

⁶And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; ⁷and preached, saying, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. ⁸I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Questionary

Today's reading is our second of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. Mark reports on something as seemingly mundane as John the Baptist's attire and diet.
 - ? What does John's unusual attire and diet tell you about his character?
 - ? What would you learn about John and his message if we suggested that his choice of attire and diet was as much commentary on his view of Jewish society as it existed in his day as it was about personal life-choices?
 - ? What would such an understanding suggest about Jewish society in those days?
2. In two ways, John draws a clear and dramatic contrasts between himself and the one coming after him.
 - ? What are those two ways?
 - ? In John's society, if I were not to remove my own shoes, who might I expect to remove them?
 - ? What is John saying about himself in confessing that he is not even worthy to remove the shoes of the coming One?
 - ? What is the relationship between a "master" and a "slave"?
 - ? How would you feel about John declaring himself unworthy to even be slave to the coming One?
3. John alludes to two baptisms—that which he performs (water) and that performed by the coming One (spirit).
 - ? How is the latter baptism as superior to the former as the first baptizer is inferior to the second baptizer?
 - ? What role does Jesus play in our obtaining of the Holy Spirit?
 - ? How "active" is he in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit?
4. We often focus on water baptism as being an "immersion," yet the same language is used of "Spirit baptism."
 - ? What is the significance of this language?
 - ? What would it mean to be "immersed" in the Holy Spirit?
 - ? Have you had experiences with the Holy Spirit that you might liken to a kind of "immersion"?
 - ? What type of person puts another's shoes on, and takes another's shoes off?
 - ? Later in his ministry, Jesus suggests that John was as great a prophet as any other Hebrew prophet. So, what does John teach us about our relationship with "prophets" as compared to our relationship with Jesus?
 - ? John suggests that just as Jesus is personally immeasurably greater than him, or any other prophet, so too is Jesus' baptism by fire immeasurably greater than any water baptism? What do you think and feel when you reflect upon this truth? Why is it true?

Mark 1.⁹⁻¹¹

⁹In those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. ¹⁰And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: ¹¹and there came a voice from heaven, saying, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Questionary

Today's reading is the third of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. Mark, with the other synoptic Gospels, informs us that “the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.”
 - ? We commonly hear that the dove is a symbol of peace. But why? Why is the dove a symbol of peace?
 - ? Is there something inherent in the dove as a species that signifies “peace”?
 - ? Can you think of a scripture passage or story in which the dove plays a role that is related to peace?
 - ? What did the dove signify in the story of Noah and the flood?

The dove, upon returning to the ark with a twig in its beak, signified to Noah that “the storm and flood was over.”

 - ? How might the dove signify that in Jesus “the storm is past”?
 - ? How does Jesus bring an end to the storms of life that we regularly face?
2. We learned earlier in Mark 1 that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.
 - ? How does Jesus' own baptism with the Holy Spirit, as signified by the dove, relate to this earlier promise?

Mark 1.¹²⁻¹³

¹²And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. ¹³And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

Questionary

Today's reading is the fourth of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. Earlier in Mark 1, we learned that symbolically, God would enter the wildernesses of our lives.
 - ? While Jesus literally entered the wilderness after his baptism, there to meet the challenges posed by the devil, how does the spirit "drive" Jesus to enter the wilderness of our lives?
 - ? What does it mean to you to be "driven" by the Spirit? Have you felt so driven? When and why?
 - ? As "the wilderness," into which Jesus enters is a symbolic as it is literal, what does Jesus' victory over Satan's temptation portend in our own lives?
2. We can understand the Evangelist telling us that Jesus was "tempted of Satan" and that "the angels ministered unto him. But Jesus' being "with the wild beasts" seems strange and out of place.
 - ? What, do you think, did the Evangelist find in this that he included it in his record?
 - ? Might the notice that Jesus was "with the wild beasts" have a doctrinal or theological purpose? What might that purpose be?

Mark 1.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ & Matthew 4.¹⁷— Jesus and the kingdom or rule of God (questionary 1)

¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus speaks of God’s kingdom some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus’ announcement of God’s kingdom were Jesus’ first words as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In the idea of God’s kingdom, Jesus found a primary and motivational principle and value. In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and God’s Kingdom or Rule,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God and what he hoped and intended to happen as a consequence of his focus on God’s kingdom. This questionnaire is the first in this series.

1. In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “heaven’s kingdom,” but says that “*from that time* Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven,” suggesting that the kingdom of God/heaven remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry. We will discuss the meaning and nature of the kingdom of God in this series of questionnaires.
 - ? What does the kingdom of God mean to you and what is its nature?
 - ? How does speaking of “the *rule* of God” impact/ alter/ amplify the way you think of “the *kingdom* of God”?
 - ? How do you think and feel if you think of the kingdom of God as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over them, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself lives and governs?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the inauguration or establishment of God’s kingdom was at the very heart of Jesus’ ministry and intentions?
 - ? What other principles and intentions do you place at the very heart of Jesus’ ministry?
 - ? How do these other principles and intentions relate to the idea of the inauguration or establishment of God’s kingdom?

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Mark 1.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ & Matthew 4.¹⁷— Jesus and the kingdom or rule of God (questionary 2)

¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

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In our first questionnaire, we suggested through our questionnaire that the kingdom of God be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over them, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself lives and governs.

1. In Jesus’ initial proclamation about God’s kingdom or rule, he announces that “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,” or, put differently, “the time has come, and God’s kingdom is imminent” (author’s translation).
 - ? This seems to suggest that the kingdom of God is not something that is far off in time or space, but that it is to be found on earth, not only in heaven, and that it is to be part of earth’s history not of some far-off hereafter.
 - ? How do you feel about this observation? If this does not jive with your view of the kingdom of God, why not? What is your view?
 - ? Did Jesus really hope to change the world, or was he merely hoping to set things up for a life hereafter? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? To what statements or actions of Jesus would you point to either assert or deny that Jesus hoped and intended to now only save souls in the great beyond but that he hoped and intended to change the world as he found it?
 - ? How are things going with the inauguration or the establishment of God’s kingdom or rule on earth? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Is the world any closer to adopting God’s principles and values and living a life consistent with those principles and values than it was in Jesus’ day? Why do you answer as you do?

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Mark 1.¹⁶⁻²⁰

¹⁶Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁷And Jesus said unto them, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.”

¹⁸And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. ¹⁹And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. ²⁰And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

Questionary

Today's reading is the sixth of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. In today's reading, four men respond immediately to a call for mission that they could certainly not understand or see clearly. Using your imagination...

? What do you think they heard in his voice and saw in his person that persuaded them to respond immediately and with such trust to his invitation?

2. Later in Mark, these same men, with others, are sent out on their first experience of mission and attempt to fish men.

“And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6.¹²⁻¹³).

? What do these verses tell you about the call to be fishers of men? What are the principle means of mission?

? What do you see in your mind when you consider the imagery of “fishing,” and its use for evangelizing?

? How does the invitation to be “fishers of men” apply to all disciples, not simply “called missionaries,” leaders, pastors, popes, apostles, etc?

? What do you do to “fish” men and women and bring them to Christ?

? How true and diligent are you to your sense of mission?

Mark 1.²¹⁻²²

²¹And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. ²²And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

Questionary

Today's reading is the seventh of thirteen from Mark 1. It is also the first of two readings exploring Jesus' healing of a man with an unclean spirit.

1. Today's reading speaks of Jesus' "doctrine."
 - ? How is "doctrine" about more than a system of beliefs, so as to include behavior, actions, and one's impact on others?
 - ? What does it mean to have "authority"?
 - ? How would it change your understanding of today's reading and the concept of "authority" if we suggested that, here, "authority" meant "capability"... Jesus, unlike the "scribes" showed himself to be capable of actually changing and improving lives?
 - ? How does Jesus "astonish" you? How does he exceed your expectations?

Mark 1.²³⁻²⁷

²³And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, ²⁴saying, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.”

²⁵And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him.”

²⁶And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. ²⁷And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the eighth of thirteen from Mark 1. It is also the second of two readings exploring Jesus’ healing of a man with an unclean spirit.

1. The “unclean spirit” asked these two questions:

“What have we to do with thee?”

“Art thou come to destroy us?”

- ? Must we think of these questions as coming only from some “alien life-force that inhabited another being”? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Can we understand these two questions to reflect feelings that the afflicted man possessed within himself?
 - ? Have you, or do you know someone who has felt as these questions suggest: “I am not worthy to associate with God and if he and I ever did make intimate contact, he would wish to punish and destroy me”?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that it was, in fact, just such thoughts and feelings that Jesus commanded to “come out of him”?
 - ? Have you had such thoughts “cast out” of you?
 - ? Do you know someone who needs such thoughts exorcised from them?
 - ? How might you use this story to assist yourself or another to be healed from such false and self-destructive thoughts and feelings?
 - ? Why do individuals who feel “unclean” assume that they cannot have anything to do with Jesus and that he will exert his power to punish and even destroy them?
 - ? How would you feel about Jesus’ act of cleansing being a demonstration that Jesus can associate with the unclean, and respond to them in a healing rather than destructive way?
2. The narrative concerning Jesus’ healing of a man with an unclean spirit ends the way it began, with the crowds amazement at Jesus’ capacities.
- ? How have you experienced Jesus ministry in your own life or witnessed it in another’s life in such a manner as to be amazed by him and his capacity to do wondrously?

Mark 1.²⁸⁻³¹

²⁸And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. ²⁹And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. ³¹And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

Questionary

Today's reading is the ninth of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. Mark reports that Jesus' "fame spread abroad throughout all the region."
 - ? What do you hear and see in your imagination when you consider the spread of Jesus' fame?
 - ? What might you take from the double occurrence of "immediately" in today's reading?
 - ? What message does the Evangelist send to any individual who is healed by his observation that Simon's mother "ministered unto them" after her healing?

Mark 1.³²⁻³⁴

³²And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. ³³And all the city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

Questionary

Today's reading is the tenth of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus astonished a crowd by cleansing a man with an "unclean spirit" (vs. 21-27). In today's reading, we hear three times of "devils." Jesus' doctrine and preaching is intimately connected with his power to release individuals from the power of unclean spirits. One can hardly consider Jesus' doctrine and preaching independent from his power of unclean spirits.
? What is the significance of this observation in today's world and in relation to Jesus' continuing ministry from the right hand of God?
2. Most of us have not experience ourselves or witnessed another experiencing "possession," most often thought of as "an alien life-force living in another being."
? What might we understand unclean spirits to be other than the dwelling of one life form inside another?
? How would you feel about understanding these "devils," "evil spirits," and "wicked spirits" as "overwhelming, uncontrollable influences and powers" that all of us face at times in our lives?
? If we understand it in this way, how are we to "liken" such stories to ourselves and the world in which we live?
? Is there some other way to understand these experiences?
3. Consider the following two passages. First, King Benjamin teaches that the Savior would "Cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men" (Mosiah 3.⁶).

Second, upon hearing the gospel preached, Lamoni's father asked, among other questions,

What shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit..." (Alma 22.¹⁵).

- ? How do these passages relate to today's reading?
? Must we think of these passages as reflecting our traditional notion of "possession"?
4. Mark tells us that "all the city was gathered together at the door" to see and be healed by Jesus.
? What thoughts, feelings, and even images come to your mind as you read this?
? What does this suggest to you about the "charisma" (a special magnetic charm, appeal, or power) of Jesus?
? Have you felt this "charisma" in your own experiences?
? How have you responded to it?

Mark 1.³⁵⁻³⁹

³⁵And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. ³⁶And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. ³⁷And when they had found him, they said unto him, "All men seek for thee."

³⁸And he said unto them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." ³⁹And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

Questionary

Today's reading is the eleventh of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. Mark informs us that Jesus arose "a great while before day... went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."
 - ? What do you see when you picture Jesus praying?
 - ? What does the fact that he did this "a great while before day" suggest about Jesus' "prayer life"?
 - ? Why did he feel the need to devote "plenty of time" to prayer?
 - ? What does the fact that Jesus "departed into a solitary place" suggest about his "prayer life"?
 - ? Why did Jesus feel the need for privacy?
 - ? How does your prayer life, your sense of needing plenty of time, and your need for privacy in expectation of communication compare?
 - ? What could you do to improve your prayer life?
 - ? How can you invite him into your prayer life and have him join you in prayer, making prayer much more effective?
2. In our previous reading from Mark 1 (28-34), we asked what you thought and felt and what images came to mind when you read, "all the city was gathered together at the door." Today, we ask the same question when you read his disciples' declaration that "All men seek for thee."
 - ? Do all men and women seek him? If not, what kind of men and women do seek him?
 - ? What does it mean to seek him and how is it done?
 - ? What do you do to seek him?
3. We have noted in previous readings from Mark's gospel how central Jesus' power over "unclean spirits" and "devils" was to his ministry.
 - ? How does today's reading amplify this focus?

Mark 1.⁴⁰⁻⁴²

⁴⁰And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

⁴¹And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, "I will; be thou clean."

⁴²And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

Questionary

Today's reading is the twelfth of thirteen from Mark 1.

1. In today's reading, Jesus heals a leper. Consider the following passages, found in the Old Testament, which discuss leprosy. Identify words and phrases that describe the leper's state and standing both in society and before God.

Leviticus 13.²⁻³

Leviticus 13.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶

Leviticus 10.¹⁰

Numbers 5.²⁻³

Numbers 12.⁹⁻¹⁴

Deuteronomy 23.¹³⁻¹⁴. (This final passage does not address leprosy. What is this passage's connection to the state of the leper?)

After reading the passages above, consider the following questions:

- ? What do you think the leper thought of himself or herself?
 - ? What do you think the leper felt about their relation to God?
 - ? What was God's attitude toward the leper?
 - ? How do you think the leper felt about God?
2. In approaching Jesus, the leper says, "If you want to, you can cleanse me."
 - ? Are the leper's words, a statement or a question?
 - ? What is the nature of the leper's uncertainty: Jesus willingness or Jesus' capacity?
 - ? Can you relate to the leper's uncertainty about Jesus' willingness to act in an imperfect, unclean life?
 3. Jesus replies to the leper, "I will; be thou clean."
 - ? What do you hear in Jesus' reply?
 - ? How would it alter your feelings if it read, "I do want to. Be clean"?
 - ? Why would he NOT be willing to respond to a heart-felt request?
 - ? How can the leper's experience help you the next time you question Jesus' willingness to act in your messy life?
 - ? Is faith belief/knowledge that Jesus has the power to act and participate in our lives, or the belief/knowledge that his character is such that he wants (is happy to) act and participate in our lives? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Upon which is your relationship with the Savior based?
 4. After reading the account of Jesus healing the leper, close your eyes and image in the scene.
 - ? What does the leper look like?
 - ? What kind of "touch" is it with which Jesus "touches" the leper?
 - ? After the "touch" with its accompanying healing, how does the leper feel about Jesus? About God? About himself?

Mark 1.⁴³⁻⁴⁵

⁴³And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; ⁴⁴and saith unto him, “See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

⁴⁵But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

Questionary

1. Jesus counsels the leper to “See thou say nothing to any man.”
 - ? Why, do you think, did the leper not follow Jesus’ request that he not share his miraculous healing with others?
 - ? How, do you think, did Jesus feel about the leper widely sharing his miraculous healing?
 - ? When it comes to Jesus’ ministry, were the consequences of the leper’s experience being widely publicized positive or negative?

Mark 2.¹⁻²

¹And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

²And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

Questionary

This reading is the first of six readings that explore Mark's narrative concerning Jesus' healing of the palsied man (2.¹⁻¹²).

1. Today's reading informs us that upon arriving in Capernaum, "straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door."
? What do you see in your mind when you try to visualize this enthusiastic crowd gather to see Jesus?

Jesus often seemed to draw people to himself. Consider the following passages.

- "Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter" (Mark 1.45).
 - "The people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them" (Luke 4.42).
 - "A great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased" (John 6.2).
 - "And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan" (Matthew 4.25).
- ? Many more examples from the four Gospels could be cited. Why do you suppose the authors choose to mention common peoples' response to Jesus so often?
- ? How do you feel when you contemplate that Jesus was such an attraction?
- ? How attracted to Jesus are you?
- ? How does that attraction manifest itself in your daily life?
- ? Where do you go to meet and visit with him today?

Mark 2.³⁻⁴

³And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. ⁴And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

Questionary

This reading is the second of six readings that explore Mark's narrative concerning Jesus' healing of the palsied man (2.¹⁻¹²)

- ? What do the extreme measures taken by the palsied man and those bearing him say not only about faith but about desperation?
- ? What sorts of desperation do you witness in your society?
- ? How do you respond?

Mark 2.⁵

⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Questionary

This reading is the third of six readings that explore Mark’s narrative concerning Jesus’ healing of the palsied man (2.¹⁻¹²).

1. Upon seeing the faith of men who bore the lame man before him in hopes of physical healing, Jesus responds with a surprising and seemingly incongruous, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”
 - ? Why, do you think, did Jesus responded in this way?
 - ? Perhaps you considered one or more of these three possibilities. How do you feel about each of them? Which seems likeliest to you?
 - a. Jesus discerned that the man came to him more concerned about his sins than his physical affliction.
 - b. The man, like many in his culture, associated his physical ailment with personal sin.
 - c. Jesus used this opportunity to act upon what he felt was his principle work and greatest value to others: his compassionate attitude (reflecting that of his Father) toward human sin and weakness.
 - ? Why do we so often feel that we have done something wrong when we undergo trials?
 - ? How do false doctrines perpetuate this misunderstanding?
 - ? How desperately do you seek Jesus for forgiveness, and to know you are acceptable to God?
 - ? On what basis did the man receive forgiveness?
 - ? What does this man’s experience suggest about how much one needs “know” or “understand” in order to have the gracious ministrations of Jesus in their life, including the forgiveness of sin?

Mark 2.⁶⁻⁷

⁶But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷“Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?”

Questionary

This reading is the fourth of six readings that explore Mark’s narrative concerning Jesus’ healing of the palsied man (2.¹⁻¹²). In today’s reading, we hear the scribes reaction to Jesus’ promise of forgiveness offered to the palsied man.

1. We are told that when the scribes heard Jesus’ statement concerning the forgiveness of sin, they responded, “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” We usually respond to the scribes’ response by assuming the very worst about them. Consider the following possible reasons for the scribal response to Jesus.
 - Concern for “doctrinal purity”
 - Concern that the lame man and those witnessing the encounter might be led into spiritual complacency
 - Questions concerning Jesus’ legitimacy and authority
 - Concern for their own reputation and authority
 - Zealousness for God’s honor

? You might think of others. How do you feel about these imagined concerns?
? Can you find any justification for any of them?
2. Consider the scribes question (and the implied answer: “No one”), “Who can forgive sins but God only?”
 - ? From your perspective, would it be accurate to say that no one but God and Jesus, God the Son, can forgive sin?
 - ? It may be true that at the “cosmic” level, only God can forgive sin. This would seem to suggest that forgiveness is one of the great powers of the universe. What makes forgiveness so powerful?
 - ? What are the chances, do you think, that our forgiveness of another can actually have a redeeming impact on the life of another and plays a role in God’s response to their need and plea for forgiveness?
 - ? How would that work?
 - ? What responsibility do you have to forgive?
 - ? How are you exercising the immense power to forgive?
 - ? Why do you suppose that the scribes, and sometimes we, are so stingy with forgiveness when it can have a powerful life altering impact on another?

Mark 2.⁸⁻⁹

⁸And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, “Why reason ye these things in your hearts? ⁹Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee;’ or to say, ‘Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?’

Q

This reading is the fifth of six readings that explore Mark’s narrative concerning Jesus’ healing of the palsied man (2.¹⁻¹²). In today’s reading, Jesus responds to the scribes’ skepticism concerning his right and power to forgive sins.

1. Jesus asks which is easier—the healing of the physical body or the healing of the soul.
 - ? How would you answer Jesus’ question? Which is “easier”?
 - ? For which is the evidence clearer: that one’s body has been physically healed, or that one’s soul has been spiritually/emotionally healed?
 - ? What are the evidences of these two healings: the physical and the spiritual/emotional?
 - ? How do the two types of healing require the same power and, essentially, represent the same labor for Jesus?
 - ? How does Jesus willingness and ability to heal the physical body serve as witness to his willingness and ability to heal the soul?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that in this episode Jesus is as much concerned that everyone know of his willingness and ability to forgive sins as he is for them to see that a man can be and was healed so as to be able to walk again?

Mark 2.¹⁰⁻¹²

¹⁰“But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,” (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) ¹¹“I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.”

¹²And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, “We never saw it on this fashion.”

Q

uestionary

This reading is the last of six readings that explore Mark’s narrative concerning Jesus’ healing of the palsied man (2.¹⁻¹²).

- ? How did Jesus’ physical healing of the palsied man serve as a proof that he could also forgive sins?
 - ? What role should/did the “immediacy” of the man’s healing play in the proof?
1. Mark records the astonishment of those who witnessed the healing of the palsied as “We never saw it on this fashion.” We have asked before, but we ask again,
 - ? How does Jesus exceed your expectations of what is possible in your life?
 - ? How does Jesus exceed your expectations of God, His character, and the kind of Being that He is?
 2. Those who witness the man’s healing exclaimed, “We never saw it on this fashion.”
 - ? How is the Savior’s ministry in the life of others superior to the ministry of every other gospel minister before and after him?
 - ? The scribes and other ministers might be threatened by such a reality. Why should they not be?
 - ? What would you hope their reaction to this truth be?
 - ? How has his ministry in your life been incomparable to that of any other minister?
 3. This entire episode begins with the notice of the crowd’s attraction to Jesus and ends with the crowd’s witness of Jesus’ superiority.
 - ? What is the emotional and spiritual impact on you of this sort of bracketing structure?

Mark 2.¹³⁻¹⁴

¹³And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. ¹⁴And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, "Follow me."

And he arose and followed him.

Questionary

- ? What do you see in your mind's eye when you imagine "the multitude" that "resorted" to Jesus?
- ? What does that word, "resorted" mean to you?
- ? From what you know about the reputation of Roman tax collectors (and perhaps even those of today), what do you think and feel when you consider Jesus' easy willingness to have fellowship with Levi?
- ? What does it say about Levi and his commitment to his job that he immediately left his place of business and took Jesus to his home?
- ? How have you conducted yourself in your temporal and economic life that shows the same priority to establishing a fellowship with Jesus that Levi demonstrated?

Mark 2.¹³⁻¹⁷— atonement

¹³And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. ¹⁴And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, “Follow me.”

And he arose and followed him. ¹⁵*As Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. ¹⁶And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”

¹⁷When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

1. Mark informs us that “many” publicans and sinners followed Jesus and sat down with him to share table fellowship.
 - ? How do you feel when you read of “sinners” and that many of them were interest in and highly attracted to Jesus?
 - ? How does this reading reflect “atonement,” or, Jesus’ connectedness with Levi, publicans, and sinners?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus’ feelings of connectedness with “sinners” and other individuals deemed undesirable by their society?
 - ? How do you suppose Levi and the hated publicans and sinners felt when they sensed Jesus’ willingness to conduct table fellowship with them and thus demonstrate his feelings of attachment to them?
 - ? To what types of sinners and “undesirables” might Jesus feel connected in today’s society?
 - ? How might today’s society, especially that portion called “Christian,” respond to Jesus’ willingness to assist and find connection with them?
2. Jesus speaks of “they that are whole” and “have no need of the physician.”
 - ? Do such individuals exist?
 - ? Do “the righteous” really have no need to repent?
 - ? What then, is Jesus saying?
 - ? How would you respond if we understood Jesus saying that those who “imagine” that they are whole and are in need of no repentance have no need of him?
 - ? What sorts of people imagine such a lie and thus feel no need to turn to Jesus?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Mark 2.¹⁵

^{15*}As Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

Questionary

Today's is the second of four readings covering Jesus' visit at the home of Levi during which he engaged in table fellowship with "undesirables" as found in Mark 2.¹³⁻¹⁷

- ? What is the reputation of "publicans and sinners"?
- ? Mark reports that "many publicans and sinners... followed" Jesus. What should we understand by "followed"?
- ? What should we think and feel toward these classes of people who followed Jesus?
- ? What should we think and feel about Jesus, so comfortable in easy fellowship with such disreputable people?

Mark 2.¹⁶

¹⁶And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”

Q

uestionary

This reading is the third of four covering Jesus’ visit at the home of Levi during which he engaged in table fellowship with “undesirables” as found in Mark 2.¹³⁻¹⁷.

1. In Mark’s previous episode—in which Jesus, healed a lame man and pronounced him forgiven of sin—the scribes responded negatively by asking their question, “Who can forgive sins but God only?” In today’s reading from Mark, the scribes and Pharisees, seeing Jesus so comfortably fellowship with a looked-down-upon portion of society, asked, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”
 - ? We ask here, as we have before, “What, do you suppose, is the nature of the religious leadership’s concern/objection?”
 - ? Have you ever felt uncomfortable when seeing someone deemed “righteous” associating freely and comfortably with “unsavory” characters?
 - ? Have you ever worried that a “righteous” person’s comfortable association with a “sinner” might be seen as condoning and even promoting sin?
 - ? Have you ever felt “jealous” over the success and even popularity of another, as the scribes and Pharisees may have felt toward Jesus?
- ? With what types of “disreputable” people might Jesus hold easy fellowship if he were to return today?
- ? How surprised would you be if they choose to “follow” Jesus?
- ? How would you respond to Jesus’ easy fellowship with them?
- ? How do you feel about the criticism against Jesus’ easy fellowship with “disreputable” individuals coming from religious leaders?

Mark 2.¹⁷

¹⁷When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Q

uestionary

This is the last of four readings covering Jesus’ visit at the home of Levi during which he engaged in table fellowship with “undesirables” as found in Mark 2.¹³⁻¹⁷.

1. Jesus speaks of “they that are whole.”
 - ? Are there, in fact, any who are in and of themselves “whole”?
 - ? How would you respond if we were to read, “They that think they are whole have no need of the physician, but they who know they are sick”?
2. Consider the following passage from Paul’s epistle written to the Roman church.

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying,
‘Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered.
Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin’” (Romans 4.⁵⁻⁸).

 - ? How does Paul’s rather jarring declaration of justification without works relate to today’s reading?
 - ? After reading the five verses reporting Jesus’ encounter with Levi, consider how the narrative witnesses at-one-ment on the part of Jesus toward Levi and his dinner guests.
 - ? Jesus clearly identifies whom he wishes most to serve. Who do you suppose the scribes and Pharisees were most interested in serving?
 - ? How do we fall into the trap of comfortably serving the “righteous” while we ignore the “unrighteous”?
 - ? How does Mark’s previous episode of Jesus healing the lame, today’s episode of Jesus’ willing fellowship with sinners, and the response of the religious leadership really tell the same story and make the same point?

Mark 2.¹⁸⁻²²

¹⁸And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?”

¹⁹And Jesus said unto them, “Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

²¹“No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. ²²And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.”

Q

uestionary

1. Jesus seems to suggest that his disciples have no need to fast as long as they have Jesus with them.
 - ? Why would this be?
 - ? What do Jesus' words about fasting suggest about the purposes of fasting?
 - ? What experiences have you had when you found fasting valuable?
2. As the context suggests, the saying about the “the old and the new” is certainly in response to the uncertainty and even skepticism of John's disciples toward Jesus.
 - ? How might it also relate to all the other uncertainties and skepticism that has been expressed in Mark's second chapter—that of those who heard Jesus' promise of forgiveness for the palsied and that of those who saw Jesus' easy fellowship with disreputable people?

Mark 2.²³⁻²⁸

²³And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. ²⁴And the Pharisees said unto him, “Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?”

²⁵And he said unto them, “Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? ²⁶How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?” ²⁷And he said unto them, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: ²⁸Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”

Q

uestionary

In the first two episodes found in Mark 2—that involving the lame man, and that involving Alphaeus and Jesus’ comfortable association with sinners—the scribes and Pharisees seem insensitive to the plight and needs of weak and vulnerable people while, at the same time, being concerned about doctrinal purity and religious appearances.

1. In the third episode—that involving the question of fasting—the scribes and Pharisees seem hyper-sensitive to matters related to ritualistic/legalistic righteousness. In today’s reading, the Pharisees show themselves to be, once more, sensitive to Jesus’ apparent neglect toward ritualistic/legalistic matters—this time minute details concerning Sabbath observance.
 - ? Do you feel that Mark’s juxtaposition of these scribal and Pharisaical attitudes is purposeful?
 - ? If so, what message/s do you hear being sent?
 - ? What are modern day examples of religion that becomes more interested in legalistic matters than in individuals?
 - ? How do we determine when we have crossed a line such that we give more attention to such legalistic behavior than to caring for needy and vulnerable people?
2. Jesus uses David as an example of one who looked to be breaking religious taboos while, in fact, he was meeting the needs of vulnerable men.
 - ? Again, can you call to mind or imagine occasions when the needs of vulnerable people may call for actions that might seem “unrighteous”?

Mark 3.¹⁻⁶

¹And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.

²And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

³And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, "Stand forth."

⁴And he saith unto them, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?"

But they held their peace. ⁵And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, "Stretch forth thine hand."

And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. ⁶And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

Questionary

1. Today's reading seems to have as much to say about the sabbath day, legalism, and the religious leaders who opposed Jesus as it does about Jesus' power to heal.

? What do you learn about Jesus' sense about the sabbath day and its true meaning and significance?

In Deuteronomy, Moses reaffirmed the importance of sabbath day observance, In doing so, he stipulated,

"And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (5.¹⁵).

? How do Moses' instructions relate to Jesus' sense of the sabbath day and its meaning?

The sabbath day is closely tied to Israel's servitude in Egypt and God's delivering them from that servitude?

? How does the sabbath day serve as a symbol for God's deliverance from bondage?

? How have you been freed from bandage—temporal or spiritual—through observing the sabbath?

? How do you observe the sabbath so that it becomes an opportunity for others to be released from whatever servitude they may suffer under?

2. We learn from today's reading that the religious leaders "watched" or "eyed" Jesus; that they sought to "accuse him;" that they refused to respond to his instructive questions; that they were "hard-hearted;" and that they were so anxious to get rid of Jesus that they willingly entered into a plot with one of their most hated antagonists, those loyal to Herod.

? What does all of this tell you about the religious leaders?

? What do you think and how do you feel when contemplate the fact that the worse of enemies can be united by a common enemy?

Mark 3.⁷⁻¹²

⁷But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judæa, ⁸And from Jerusalem, and from Idumæa, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him. ⁹And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. ¹⁰For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues. ¹¹And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, "Thou art the Son of God."

¹²And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.

Questionary

1. Mark supplies quite a list of regions from which multitudes of people came to see Jesus for themselves and, possibly, even to touch him.
 - ? What do you see in your mind's eye when you contemplate these "throng" of people?
 - ? How do you feel when you consider that so many desperate people were so powerfully attracted to Jesus?
 - ? Do you feel the same attraction? How is your attraction to him manifested?
2. It seems that Jesus could not stop "unclean spirits" from revealing his divine sonship as he exorcised them, but he seems to have requested that those out of whom the evil spirits were cast not broadcast his divine sonship.
 - ? Why, do you think, he did not want these individuals to say more about him?
 - ? How literally do you take "evil spirits" and "possession," i.e. the possession of one life form by another?
 - ? If you take it literally, how do you explain the apparent limited expression or even absence of the phenomenon in today's world?
 - ? If you do not take it literally, what physical and emotional ailments might represent what the ancient texts thought of as "possession" of one life form by another?

Mark 3.¹³⁻¹⁹

¹³And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.

¹⁴And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,

¹⁵And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

¹⁶And Simon he surnamed Peter;

¹⁷And James the son of Zebedee,

and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:

¹⁸And Andrew,

and Philip,

and Bartholomew,

and Matthew,

and Thomas,

and James the son of Alphæus,

and Thaddæus,

and Simon the Canaanite,

¹⁹And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him.

And they went into an house.

Q

uestionary

1. In today's reading, Jesus calls the first 12 Apostles.
 - ? Take a moment to review what you know about each of them a.) before their call; b) as they followed Jesus during his earthly ministry; c) after Jesus' resurrection?
2. We have seen repeated how central to Jesus' personal ministry was healing and control over unclean spirits.
 - ? What do you learn as you read that the apostles ministry was to be similarly focused?
 - ? What do you think and feel as you consider that the apostles ministry was to be judged on their following Jesus in this focus?
3. Nephi reports the following vision seen by his father, Lehi.

“And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. And* he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament” (1 Nephi 1.⁸⁻¹⁰).

In the original manuscript, and for 150 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, the text read that Lehi saw “one” descending out of the midst of heaven. But today the text reads “One.”

- ? What do the editors wish us to understand from this change?
 - ? To what sort of light is the Savior compared?
 - ? To what sort of light are the twelve who followed Jesus compared?
4. Think about what you can see—the details and colors—in the full light of the sun at its daily brightest as compared with the dim light of the stars (without the moon).
 - ? In what ways did Jesus' first apostles show themselves to be vastly inferior to Jesus in perception, attitudes, and actions?
 - ? What do you learn about the apostles, past and present, from this metaphor?
 - ? How can you walk by the greater light of Jesus rather than settling for the inferior light of apostles?

Mark 3.²⁰⁻²⁷

²⁰And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. ²¹And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, "He is beside himself."

²²And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils."

²³And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

²⁴And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. ²⁷No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

Questionary

1. It was Jesus and his disciples that were having trouble eating because of the crowds.
? What was it, do you think, about this fact that convinced Jesus' friends that he was yielding to excessive, out-of-control behavior?
2. At the same time that "friends" were questioning Jesus' behavior, his enemies were also attacking him—religious leaders accusing him of exercising the power of Satan.
? How do you feel and what do you think, when you consider Jesus being under attack from all directions, friends and foes alike?
3. Jesus speaks of "binding the strong man" in order to "spoil his house."
? How is Jesus' frequent command over unclean spirits a form of "binding" Satan and "spoiling" him of those whom he "possesses"?
? Jesus' control of unclean spirits is central to his sense of himself and his mission. How, then, do you feel about his enemies choosing to attack him on just this point?

Mark 3.²⁸⁻³⁰

²⁸“Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: ²⁹but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:” ³⁰because they said, “He hath an unclean spirit.”

Q

uestionary

1. In today’s short reading, Jesus speaks three times of “blasphemy.”
 - ? What does it mean to “blaspheme”?
 - ? What constitutes blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit?”
 - ? How is suggesting that Jesus was possessed of “an unclean spirit” “blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit”?”
 - ? What do you understand Jesus to mean when he says that “all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men...”
 - ? Do you understand him to mean that when all is said and done all human sin will be forgiven except that against the Holy Spirit, or that all human sin is potentially forgivable, except that against the Holy Spirit? Why do you answer as you do?

2. Consider the following passage.

“And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him; who glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him” (DC 76.⁴⁰⁻⁴³).

 - ? How does this passage relate to the last question?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider that in the mind of God, Jesus “*saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition*”?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that “salvation” is very nearly universal?

Mark 3.³¹⁻³⁵

³¹There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.

³²And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee."

³³And he answered them, saying, "Who is my mother, or my brethren?"

³⁴And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, "Behold my mother and my brethren! ³⁵For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."

Questionary

1. The King James Bible's "brethren" may cause confusion. "Brethren" can, probably should be translated "brothers."
 - ? Does recognition that it was Jesus' blood brothers that "stood without" alter the way you feel or what you think when you read today's reading?
 - ? What does today's reading tell you about the way Jesus thought of "family"?
 - ? A female could not be both "sister" and "mother" to Jesus. So what is it that Jesus is saying?
 - ? What does it mean to you to know that you can be "sealed" to Jesus as family if you "do the will of God"?

Mark 4.¹⁻⁸

¹And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

²And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

³“Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: ⁴And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

⁵“And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: ⁶But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

⁷“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

⁸“And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the first of ten taken from Mark 4 and the first of six readings that that explore Jesus’ parable traditionally named, “Parable of the Sower, but which could just as justifiably be named, “Parable of the soil.”

? Why do we suggest that the parable could be thought of as a parable about soils?

1. No doubt, you are already familiar with the parable and the interpretation Jesus provides. We tend to rely heavily on the interpretation that follows the parable. However, the parable itself provides many clues. Consider and ponder the following questions.

? What is the character of each soil mentioned?

- Soil adjacent to an agricultural field
- Stony agricultural soil
- Agricultural soil in which weeds have taken over
- Agricultural soil properly tilled and weeded

? What type of crop is each of these soils likely to produce?

Mark 4.⁹⁻¹²

⁹And he said unto them, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

¹⁰And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. ¹¹And he said unto them, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: ¹²That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the 2nd of ten taken from Mark 4, and the 2nd reading to explore the “Parable of the Sower,” or, as I prefer, the “Parable of the Soils.”

1. Jesus says that his disciples will be “given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God”?
 - ? What is meant by “mystery”?
 - ? What is an example of a “mystery of the kingdom of God”?
2. In verse 12, Jesus essentially quotes Isaiah 6.⁹⁻¹⁰. Here, after Isaiah’s call, the prophet is warned that the people will not respond to his message to repent, thus bringing national catastrophe.
 - ? How would you feel about being given a mission or a calling and being told that you would not succeed in your efforts to save people from negative consequences and ultimate destruction?

To some, the language of verse 12 makes it sound as if Jesus is commanding or mandating or purposing that the people will not receive his message or repent.

- ? How do you explain this apparent sense?
- ? How would such a reading dishonor the agency of the people?
- ? So, how do you explain the form that Jesus’ statement takes?

In being threatened by another, I might say, “Go ahead, hit me!” using the “command” or mandate form.

- ? What would I be saying or trying to do in issuing such a “command”?
- ? How does my so saying attempt to help the individual who is threatening me to see the violence of their activities and bring them to their senses—bring a change or repentance?
- ? How might this apply to the manner in which Jesus issues his warning that he will not be understood, or the people repent?

Mark 4.¹³⁻¹⁵

¹³And he said unto them, “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?”

¹⁴“The sower soweth the word. ¹⁵And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the 3rd of ten taken from Mark 4, and the 3rd reading to explore the “Parable of the Sower,” or, as I prefer, the “Parable of the Soils.” Take a moment to review the parable itself, if you feel the need (verses 1-8).

1. The soil that lies outside the agricultural field and is therefore unplowed is likened to an individual who immediately rejects the gospel.
 - ? What types of attitudes, ideologies, and actions are so opposed to the gospel that it is never even given serious consideration, but is rejected out of hand?

Mark 4.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

¹⁶“And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.

Questionary

Today’s reading is the 4th of ten taken from Mark 4, and the 4th reading to explore the “Parable of the Sower,” or, as I prefer, the “Parable of the Soils.” Take a moment to review the parable itself, if you feel the need (verses 1-8).

1. Unlike those who are likened to non-agricultural, untilled soil, those likened to “stony soil” gladly accept the word.
 - ? How do you explain this difference?
 - ? What private spiritual attitudes and feelings does the stony ground represent?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read that those likened to “stony soil” initially found “gladness” in the word?
 - ? What were their expectations for the future?
2. Those likened to “stony soil” went from gladly receiving the word to being “offended” when, rather than having expectations met, they met with “affliction or persecution.”
 - ? What do you think when you think of being “offended”?
 - ? What is so “offensive” about “afflictions” and “persecutions”?
 - ? What does this say about our “expectations” within the context of the gospel?

Consider the following passages.

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1.²⁹).

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8.¹⁷).

“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps...” (1 Pet. 2.²⁰⁻²¹).

- ? How do you feel about this message and the assumption that accepting the gospel implies suffering?
- ? How would you feel about this part of the “gospel message” being included in introducing others to the gospel?
- ? What are the potential benefits of doing
- ? What are the dangers of not doing so?

Mark 4.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

¹⁸“And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, ¹⁹And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

Questionary

Today's reading is the 5th of ten taken from Mark 4, and the 4th reading to explore the “Parable of the Sower,” or, as I prefer, the “Parable of the Soils.” Take a moment to review the parable itself, if you feel the need (verses 1-8).

1. The word sown in non-agricultural soil, did not sprout at all. The word sown in rocky soil, sprouted, but soon died. The word sown in soil that went un-weeded sprouted and grew into a plant, but yielded no harvest.

- ? What do you see in your mind when you contemplate the plant surrounded with and growing amid weeds?
- ? What is the nature of weeds? How do they stunt the growth of desirable plants?

Imagine a huge, luxuriantly green tomato plant that produces no tomatoes.

- ? How would you feel about having such a plant?
- ? How does such a plant run in complete opposition to the purposes for which it was created and grown?

2. Weeds are likened to “the cares of this world,” “the deceitfulness of riches,” and “the lusts of other things”?

- ? How are “riches” “deceitful”? What do they falsely promise to individuals? To societies, cultures, and nations?
- ? What negative effects do riches actually produce?
- ? How does the following passage relate to today's passage and what does it contribute by way of answering the previous questions?

“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Timothy 6.⁹⁻¹¹).

- ? What fruit do “the cares of this world,” “the deceitfulness of riches,” and “the lusts of other things” stifle?
- ? How do riches sap our spiritual concentration, desires, motives, and strength?
- ? How do worries over this world's needs sap our spiritual concentration, desires, motives, and strength?
- ? Given the killing effect of “the cares of this world,” “the deceitfulness of riches,” and “the lusts of other things” how fruitful are you in matters of the spirit?
- ? Given the killing effect of “the cares of this world,” “the deceitfulness of riches,” and “the lusts of other things” how fruitful is society in matters of the spirit?
- ? How do “the cares of this world,” “the deceitfulness of riches,” and “the lusts of other things” diminish an individual's and society's ability to assist more vulnerable individuals and nations?

Mark 4.²⁰

²⁰“And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”

Q

Today's reading is the 6th of ten taken from Mark 4, and the last of 5 readings to explore the “Parable of the Sower,” or, as I prefer, the “Parable of the Soils.” Take a moment to review the parable itself, if you feel the need (verses 1-8).

1. In today's reading, Jesus explains the meaning of “good ground.”
 - ? What kind of people does it represent?
2. We are not intended to simply do good work. We are meant to “bring forth fruit.”
 - ? What does it mean to “bring forth fruit”?
 - ? What is the nature of the fruit we are to produce?
 - ? Think of our earlier tomato plant. How much “credit” comes, or how much reward is found, in working to grow a plant that produces no tomatoes?
 - ? What is the nature of the relationship between the seed (the word) and the soil (the individual) in the budding, growing, and fruiting of the plant?

Mark 4.²¹⁻²⁵

²¹And he said unto them, “Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? And not to be set on a candlestick? ²²For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. ²³If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”

²⁴And he said unto them, “Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. ²⁵For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

Q

uestionary

1. Today’s reading is the 7th of ten taken from Mark 4, and follows immediately Jesus’ “Parable of the Sower,” or, as I prefer, the “Parable of the Soils” with his interpretation of the parable.
 - ? What, do you think, is the relationship between today’s saying and the parable?
2. Jesus warns, “Take heed what ye hear...”
 - ? How does this apply to your search for understanding and truth?
 - ? How does it relate to the sources you look to for understanding and truth?
 - ? How do you discern the reliability of such sources?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that searches for understanding and truth improperly conducted can lead to the loss of the understanding and truth that you do possess?
 - ? What will you do to avoid this dangerous consequence?

Mark 4.²⁶⁻²⁹

²⁶And he said, “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; ²⁷And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. ²⁸For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. ²⁹But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

Questionary

Today's reading is the 8th of ten taken from Mark 4.

1. Jesus speaks of a man “casting seed into the ground.” The meaning of the “seed” is likely the same here as it was in the parable of the sower found earlier in the chapter; i.e., it is the “word” about “the kingdom of God.”
 - ? What is meant by the sowing of the word?
 - ? What role do you have in sowing the word?
 - ? How do you sow the word concerning God's kingdom?
 - ? What does “the kingdom of God” mean to you?
2. While we can sow the word, Jesus suggests that its growth and the fruit it ultimately produces is beyond our control or comprehension.
 - ? What or who does control and comprehend the growth of the kingdom of God within individuals and groups?
 - ? How do you feel about having no control and being out of the loop on comprehending the growth of the kingdom of God within individuals and groups?
3. When the fruit is finally ripe, Jesus says that “he putteth in the sickle.”
 - ? Who is the “he”?
 - ? What is the fruit of the kingdom of God?
 - ? What is meant by harvesting it?

Mark 4.³⁰⁻³⁴

³⁰And he said, “Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what comparison shall we compare it? ³¹It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: ³²but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”

³³And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

Q

Today's reading is the 9th of ten taken from Mark 4.

1. Jesus compares “the kingdom of God” to a “grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth.”
 - ? How is “the kingdom of God” so insignificant in its initial introduction?
 - ? How is it “less” than other “kingdoms” in its initial stages?
2. Eventually, the mustard seed produces a plant/tree (kingdom of God) larger than other plants that produce herbs (kingdoms of this world); one that “the fowls of the air may lodge under” for shade.
 - ? What benefit/s of “the kingdom of God” can be likened to the shade of a mustard tree?
 - ? From what does “the kingdom of God” protect us?
 - ? What does it mean that “the kingdom of God” becomes something greater than any other kingdom of the world?

Mark 4.³⁵⁻⁴¹— atonement

³⁵And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, “Let us pass over unto the other side.”³⁶And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. ³⁷And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. ³⁸And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”

³⁹And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, “Peace, be still.” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

⁴⁰And he said unto them, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”

⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” * It is also the final reading of ten taken from Mark 4.

1. One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.
 - ? How does Jesus’ calming of the storm show his sense of connectedness to his disciples?
 - ? How does Jesus’ calming of the storm demonstrate his connectedness to and at-one-ment with nature—the cosmos?
2. Faced with the terrifying storm, the disciples exclaimed, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”
 - ? How do you feel about their fear?
 - ? How do you resist giving in to such doubt in the midst of trials?
3. Mark records that “the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.”
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you see a ship “full” of water?
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you imagine the tempest?
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you see the “great calm”?
 - ? What types of storms have and do come into your life?
 - ? How strong or weak is your faith that Jesus can calm those storms?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Mark 5.¹⁻⁵

¹And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. ²And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: ⁴because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. ⁵And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

Questionary

1. Mark describes a man Jesus met when he came “into the country of the Gadarenes.”
 - ? How does Mark characterize him?
 - ? Consider what Matthew and Luke say about the man. How do they add to his description?

“And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way” (Matthew 8.²⁸).

“And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs... For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness” (Luke 8.^{27, 29}).
 - ? What do the following descriptions of the man suggest about his psychological state, and how he feels about himself?
 - He “ware no clothes.”
 - He “neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.”
 - He “was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands.”
 - He “was driven of the devil into the wilderness.”
 - He was “exceeding fierce.”
 - “Neither could any man tame him.”
 - He “cut himself with stones.”
 - ? How does he feel about others? What is his relationship with others?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when we suggest that in his living in the tombs and cutting himself with stones, the man evidences a desire to be dead and has likely attempted suicide?
2. The man is said to have “an unclean spirit.” Later, we will see that this seems to mean he was “possessed” by other life forces?
 - ? What do you make of “possession” by other life forces?
 - ? Is this something with which you are familiar in your own experiences?
 - ? When you consider the psychological state of the man, would you say you have met people who felt about themselves and treated themselves the way this man felt about and treated himself?
 - ? How are what we identify today as mental illnesses like or different from what was thought of as “possession” in Jesus’ day?

Mark 5.⁶⁻¹³

⁶But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, ⁷and cried with a loud voice, and said, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.” ⁸For he said unto him, “Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.”

⁹And he asked him, “What is thy name?”

And he answered, saying, “My name is Legion: for we are many.”

¹⁰And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. ¹¹Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. ¹²And all the devils besought him, saying, “Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.”

¹³And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

Q

uestionary

1. We have already seen in our reading from Mark 5.¹⁻⁵, what the psychological state of this man was and how he felt about himself and his life. Review Mark 5.¹⁻⁵, Matthew 8.²⁸ and Luke 8.^{27, 29} to remind yourself of the man’s emotional state.
 - ? What do you find in today’s reading that gives you additional insight into the man’s psychological state and how he feels about himself?
2. The man’s initial response to Jesus’ presence was to ask, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?”
 - ? What does this response tell you about how the man felt about himself—do not get distracted by the fact that this question is presented as if coming from the mouth of another “life force” living in the man, for the sentiment surely belongs to the man himself?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this feeling of unworthiness was not only possessed by “the legions of devils” but also by the man himself?
 - ? Have you ever felt that you could have nothing to do with Jesus or that Jesus could have nothing to do with you? Why did you feel this way?
 - ? As you continue to read the account of this man’s encounter with Jesus, consider how Jesus responds to this man’s feelings of unworthiness.
3. Upon expressing his sense of unworthiness, the man then pleaded, “I beseech thee, torment me not.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the man himself, not simply some other “life force” residing in him, thought of Jesus as a “tormentor”?
 - ? How do we often possess the same feelings of unworthiness and distrust of Jesus’ love and commitment to us that this man felt?
 - ? Have you felt that Jesus was a tormentor in your life? Why? How did you overcome such feelings? If you still have such feelings, how does this reading help you understand the fallacy of such thinking and feeling?
4. When asked his name, we hear the man reply, “My name is Legion: for we are many.”
 - ? What does “legion” mean?
 - ? Again, if we consider that the man is speaking for and of himself, what does his reply, “Legion,” imply about the depth of the man’s disturbance?
 - ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that this reply signifies the man’s awareness and feelings that his emotional, psychological, and worthiness issues were very, very severe?
 - ? Have you ever felt that you were beyond Jesus’ power to heal and save? How have you overcome such feelings? If you have not overcome such feelings, how might this man’s encounter with Jesus help?

5. When Jesus sent the “unclean spirits” into the swine, they “ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.”
 - ? How does this add to your appreciation of the depth of the man’s emotional/ psychological disturbance and his feelings of unworthiness?
 - ? How does it add to your faith in Jesus’ ability to handle whatever unworthiness you may feel?

Mark 5.¹⁴⁻²⁰

¹⁴And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. ¹⁵And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. ¹⁶And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. ¹⁷And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

¹⁸And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. ¹⁹Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

²⁰And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

Questionary

In Mark 5.¹⁻⁵, we observed the psychological state of this man with Legion. He was self-destructive and suicidal. He was uncontrollable. In 6.⁶⁻¹³, we observed how he felt about himself and his life. We saw that he deemed himself unworthy of Jesus presence or consideration.

1. In today's reading, we see the man after his healing encounter with Jesus.
 - ? What stands out to you as you read of his condition after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? What is the symbolic message in his being "clothed" as contrasted to his previous nakedness?
 - ? What is the symbolic message in his "sitting" at the feet of Jesus rather than running wild?
 - ? What does the contrast between before and after tell you about Jesus and his power to heal and transform?
2. Before the man's encounter with Jesus, he felt unworthy of Jesus' presence.
 - ? How did the man feel about being with Jesus after his encounter with Jesus? Why do you answer as you do?
3. While the man understandably wanted to remain in Jesus' presence, Jesus gave him an assignment or mission.
 - ? What was that mission?
 - ? What sort of story about Jesus do you have to tell?
 - ? What transformations has he wrought in your life?
 - ? How can you spread the word of what he has wrought in your life and encourage others to seek Jesus too?

Mark 5.^{21-23, 35-43}

²¹And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. ²²And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, ²³and besought him greatly, saying, “My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live”...

³⁵While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house certain which said, “Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?”

³⁶As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, “Be not afraid, only believe.”

³⁷And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.

³⁸And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. ³⁹And when he was come in, he saith unto them, “Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.”

⁴⁰And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

⁴¹And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, “Talitha cumi;” which is, being interpreted, “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.”

⁴²And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. ⁴³And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

Questionary

1. In this reading we learn of a Jewish religious leader, Jairus by name, who came to Jesus in hopes of having a dying daughter healed. Upon approaching Jesus, we read that “he fell at his feet.”
 - ? What do you see and feel when you close your eyes and imagine the scene in your mind?
 - ? What other instances of people falling at Jesus’ feet come to mind?
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have when you consider the many people who are reported to have fallen at Jesus’ feet?
2. Even as Jairus was making his plea, he was informed that his daughter was already dead. But Jesus encouraged Jairus, “Be not afraid, only believe.”
 - ? As you again close your eyes and imagine the scene, how does Jairus look and feel as he receives both the news of his daughter’s death and Jesus’ encouragement?
3. Everyone that had stayed behind at Jairus’ house at he went in search of Jesus, knew for a certainty that the young girl was dead. Yet, upon arriving, Jesus asserted that she was not dead, but only asleep.
 - ? What are the chances that Jesus discerned that the girl was, in fact, not dead—her vital signs being too weak for people in that time to discern? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Is it vital to the significance of the story that the girl be dead rather than dying? Why do you answer as you do?
4. After raising the girl, Jesus directed that “something should be given her to eat.”
 - ? Consider what symbolism might be found in this directive?

There are times when, like the girl and her parents, we are in a such a state that we can do nothing to help ourselves. For example, no matter what we try or do we cannot give spiritual birth to ourselves. We are 100% dependent upon Jesus for this. Yet, after being born again, we are directed to act for ourselves, use our agency, and work to develop increasing spiritual maturity.

- ? How do you feel about being helpless to spiritually birth yourself and being 100% dependent upon Jesus for the remission of sins?
- ? How do you feel about being responsible for developing your spiritual maturity through personal effort coupled with Jesus' nurturing help?
- ? Have you been raised to new life—spiritually born again—through Jesus' exercise of power in your life? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How diligently are you working to develop greater spiritual maturity?
- ? What sorts of spiritual development are you currently working on?
- ? What is the relationship between your own efforts and Jesus' assistance?

Mark 5.²⁴⁻³⁴ — Atonement

²⁴And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. ²⁵And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, ²⁶And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, ²⁷When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. ²⁸For she said, “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.” ²⁹And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

³⁰And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹And his disciples said unto him, “Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?”

³²And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. ³³But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

³⁴And he said unto her, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

- ? In light of this, how does Jesus exhibit his “connectedness” with the woman with an issue of blood?
- ? How do they literally become “connected”?
- ? How does the literal physical contact between Jesus and the woman—she “touched his garment”—signify Jesus’ emotional and spiritual “connectedness” with the woman and the impact that his “connectedness” had on her?

1. Mark relates the encounter between Jesus and “a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years.”

- ? What is meant by “an issue of blood”?
- ? What would have been the physical impact on the woman of the ailment lasting “twelve years”?
- ? After reading the following Old Testament passage, consider the question: What would have been the spiritual impact on the woman of the ailment lasting “twelve years”?

“And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean. Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation....

Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is among them. This is the law of him that hath an issue...” (Lev. 15.^{25-26, 31-32}).

- ? How, do you imagine, did this woman feel about herself after being unworthy to enter either synagogue or temple for over a decade?

This woman was but one of innumerable women over centuries who were made to feel

unclean and unworthy before God because of either monthly or exception female vaginal bleeding.

- ? What, do you feel, are the chances that God actually viewed such woman as unclean and unworthy of his presence? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If God did not feel this way about women, who did?
 - ? Why did God allow such ignorance to stand for centuries? Why not correct it?
 - ? What human ignorance does he not have the power to withstand and correct today?
 - ? What does God's powerlessness to alter such human ignorance say about 1) his power and 2) the agency of humankind?
2. Mark tells us that the woman had "suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse."
- ? What does this tell you about Jesus' power?
 - ? What is the symbolic significance of this notice?
3. Jesus seems to have gone out of his way to call attention to the woman's healing through physical contact.
- ? Why, do you think, was it important to Jesus that the woman's boldness in touching him and her healing be made public?
 - ? What might the consequences been to him of the woman's touch?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that although Jesus was made unclean by the woman's touch and thus excluded for a time from the synagogue and temple he nevertheless made public her touch and his consequential uncleanness?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus experiences a kind of "uncleanness" through his association with us?
 - ? Even though we might think that the woman (and we) are not really spiritually unclean, yet, it was a deeply held belief in Jesus' day. What does it say about Jesus that he so easily and willingly defied so many religious conventions of his day?
 - ? Does he, and if so, how, defy cultural and religious conventions today?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- "Fall: Our Need of Atonement"
 - "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"
 - "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"
 - "Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"
 - "Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"
 - "Justification: How We Repent and Change"
 - "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"
 - "Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus' life of Atonement"
 - "Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"
 - "The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Mark 9.³³⁻³⁵ & Matthew 18.²⁻⁴

³³And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?”

³⁴But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. ³⁵And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³And said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Questionary

Today’s is the fifth in a series of readings focused on “True Greatness and the Godly Use of Power” (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²¹; Matthew 16.²²⁻²³; Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶; Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}; Mark 9.³³⁻³⁵ & Matthew 18.²⁻⁴; Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶; Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵; Matthew 21.¹⁻⁵; Revelation 5.¹⁻⁷). According to Luke’s chronology, the events of today’s reading, took place just a week after those examined in our previous three readings.

In the first reading (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²¹), in reply to Jesus’ inquiry concerning what his disciples thought of him, Peter uttered his famous confession, “Thou art the Christ. The Son of the living God.” Sensing, perhaps, that Peter misunderstood the meaning of his Messiahship, and the true nature of his greatness, Jesus issued his first warning that he would be rejected and killed.

In the second reading (Matthew 16.²²⁻²³), Peter rebukes Jesus for his warning. Jesus replies with his own rebuke of Peter, suggesting that Peter’s rebuke was satanic and driven by selfish desires rather than the will of God.

In the third reading (Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶), Jesus follows up his rebuke of Peter with instruction concerning the true nature of greatness, suggesting that those who wish to be disciples of Jesus, must follow him in self-sacrifice in the service of others.

In the fourth reading (Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}), Jesus’ glory is revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration. There Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah concerning his coming rejection and death in Jerusalem. Because his disciples avoided this unwelcome message through sleep, Jesus delivers his second death warning at his very first opportunity to be alone with his disciples. Still, the disciples refuse to understand this warning and its implications for the nature of true greatness.

1. The disciples’ discussion or argument about who of them would be the greatest took place as they accompanied Jesus back home to Capernaum from the Mount of Transfiguration.
 - ? What do you think and feel as you contemplate this discussion in light of Jesus’ previous two warnings, intended to clarify what true greatness was, and the instruction he has offered concerning the nature of true greatness?
2. When Jesus asked them what they had been “disputing,” the texts tells us that “they held their peace.”
 - ? What does this suggest to you?
 - ? How would you feel about the suggestion that they were ashamed of their argument?
 - ? What were they ashamed of?
 - ? Were they simply ashamed that they had been arguing? Or, is their shame at arguing about who would be greatest perhaps indicative of the fact that they knew their argument was a sort of denial of all that Jesus had been trying to teach them about the nature of greatness?
 - ? What does it suggest to you that, while they apparently sensed that Jesus would not approve of such an argument, the disciples could not stop themselves from engaging in such a debate?

3. In response to the disciple's argument Jesus teaches, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."
 - ? How does this confirm and enhance Jesus' previous instruction on greatness and the use of power?
 - ? What do you do to act consistent with this instruction?
 - ? How consistent with such instruction is our society today?

4. Jesus' instructed that "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven," relate to Jesus' earlier instruction,
 - ? How does this compare and relate to Jesus' earlier instruction that "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it"?
 - ? What does it mean to "humble" oneself "as a little child"?
 - ? What is such humility a sign of greatness?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that God is the greatest of all beings in heaven?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that if God is the greatest of all beings in heaven, he must be, by Jesus' logic, the most humble?
 - ? How does the following passage relate to God, his greatness, and his humility?

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart..."

Mark 10.²³⁻²⁷ — just scripture

²³And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”

²⁴And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, “Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

²⁶And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷And Jesus looking upon them saith, “With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

Questionary

1. Jesus warns, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” When the disciples express their astonishment, Jesus responded with, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!”

? What is the difference between the two statements?

We might explain the difference in different ways.

- We might read the second statement as a clarification or even modification to the first as if Jesus is suggesting that, actually, what he meant to say and what he means is that one can “have” riches and enter into the kingdom as long as they do not “trust in” riches.
- On the other hand, the second statement might be expanding on the first, indicating that “having” riches is pretty much the same thing as “trusting in” riches because the former is impossible without the second creeping in.

- ? Which of these two explanations for the difference in the two statements seems most likely to you? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How likely and common is it for those who “have” riches to not come to “trust in” their riches?
- ? What does it mean to “trust in” riches, anyway?

2. After his second statement, Jesus goes on to say, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” There is no evidence that the small, security conscious “eye gate” was in existence at the time of Jesus. If it existed at all, it was of later invention. Therefore, many have considered the translation, “camel,” to be faulty. The Hebrew and Aramaic root, *gml*, can mean either “camel” or “rope,” depending on the vocalization of the root.

- ? How do you feel about Jesus’ statement that it is easier to thread a needle with a rope “than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”?
- ? How do you feel about the observation that this statement seems to include both those who “have” wealthy and those who “trust in” wealth?
- ? Even if one accepts the traditional reading with the imagery of unloading the camel to enter the city, how many wealthy people shed, not bits and pieces of it, but all their wealth?

3. Twice we are told that the disciples were astonished by Jesus’ assertions concerning those with wealthy. The second time, they were “astonished out of measure” and asked, “Who then can be saved?” as if they felt that if the wealthy couldn’t enter the kingdom, no one could

- ? Why, do you think, were the disciples so astonished at Jesus’ assertions?
- ? What does their astonishment tell you about the disciples’ feelings about wealth, the wealthy, and about the “spirituality” or “righteousness” of the wealthy?
- ? How do you feel about the disciples’ apparent assumption that wealthy people were in shoe in to enter the kingdom of God?
- ? To what degree do you find Jesus’ assertions surprising, and find yourself sharing the

disciples' positive attitude toward wealth, the wealthy, and spirituality/ righteousness?

4. The disciples seem to have concluded that if the wealthy could enter the kingdom, no one could. Jesus' reply was, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."

? What does this suggest to you?

Some read it as if it said, "It is impossible for wealthy men to enter the kingdom without God's help, but with his help it is possible." Others have read it as Jesus' agreement with the disciples that no one was getting into the kingdom on their own. All needed God's superhuman assistance.

? How do you read it? Why?

Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵

³⁵And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, “Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.”

³⁶And he said unto them, “What would ye that I should do for you?”

³⁷They said unto him, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.”

³⁸But Jesus said unto them, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

³⁹And they said unto him, “We can.”

And Jesus said unto them, “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: ⁴⁰But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”

⁴¹And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. ⁴²But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. ⁴³But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: ⁴⁴And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Q

uestionary

I think of today’s reading as almost comedic, yet tragic. That James and John would, after the repeated instruction Jesus had provided his disciples in the recent past concerning the true nature of greatness and the use of power, make a request for power and prestige is testament indeed to the persistence of the false traditions concerning the nature of greatness and the use of power that have been handed down from the fathers and that still, to this day, unfortunately too often holds sway.

? What is the meaning of Jesus’ statement that the apostles would “drink of the cup that I drink of”?

1. As we often do, we ask again that you use your imagination to explore the meaning of the text more deeply. For example, the text says that “when the ten heard [James’ and John’s request for the privileged places], they began to be much displeased with James and John.

? What does the “displeasure” of the other ten look like?

? How is their “displeasure” manifested?

? How does the tension between the ten and James and John feel?

2. Jesus speaks of “exercising lordship over.”

? What does it mean to “exercise lordship over”?

The Greek word translated “exercise lordship over” often means, “to exercise power for one’s own gain”?

? Have you, someone you have known, or a societal leader/organization exercised power in this way and to this end?

? What is your responsibility when personal or societal power is exercised in this way and to this end?

? What were the consequences in Jesus’ life for his refusal to exercise power in this way and to this end?

3. Jesus teaches that those who would be great among his disciples are to be “ministers” and “servants.”

? What is the difference between a “minister” and a “servant”?

The original meaning of “minister” was “to wait tables.”

? How do you feel about this notion of “ministering”?

? Does it seem appropriate to the idea of societal/religious “leadership”?

Mark 11.³⁵⁻⁴⁵

¹⁵And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; ¹⁶and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. ¹⁷And he taught, saying unto them,

“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?’ But ye have made it a den of thieves.”

¹⁸And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. ¹⁹And when even was come, he went out of the city.

Questionary

1. Mark reports that in seeing Jesus “cleanse” the temple, “all the people was astonished at his doctrine.”
 - ? What, do you think, was it that so astonished the people?
 - ? Was it the very act of cleansing the temple? The boldness of it?
 - ? Was it his seeming resistance to the “economic” aspect of temple worship—an economic aspect that seemed so natural and necessary to the temple administrators?
2. Paul teaches
“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3.¹⁶⁻¹⁷).
 - ? How can we defile the temple of God through our improper attitudes toward economic and materialistic efforts and resources?
3. Our own temple teaches us several economic lessons. For example, it warns of the Satanic temptation of thinking that we have the right to “buy anything in this world with money.” It reminds that the economic standard for his people is to have “sufficient for our needs.”
 - ? How well are you hearing and adhering to such temple direction?
 - ? Is there anything you can do to be more in harmony with such temple direction? If so, what?
 - ? What are the dangers to our society of not heeding such temple direction?
 - ? What can you do to encourage more responsible and godly economic and materialistic attitudes and efforts on the part of your community.
4. Like the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, Jesus refers to the temple as a “den of thieves” (See Jeremiah 7.³⁻¹¹).
 - ? What is a “den of thieves”?
 - ? How had the temple become a place where guilty people went to hide out from the law?
 - ? What are the ways that we can turn our temple into a “den of thieves”?

Mark 14.³²⁻⁴¹— atonement

³²And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, “Sit ye here, while I shall pray.”

³³And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; ³⁴and saith unto them, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.”

³⁵And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶And he said,

“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

³⁷And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, “Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour? ³⁸Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. ⁴⁰And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. ⁴¹And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, “Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us.” *

1. In Jacob 1.⁸, Jacob admonishes us to do several things. One of them is to “view his death,” meaning the Savior’s death. We have and will yet review many passages, such as today’s, that reveal what the Savior suffered for us. Through these, we will seek to “view his death.” After reading today’s reading a couple of times, consider how you can follow Jacob’s admonition to “view his death.” Find a quiet moment to close your eyes and imagine being in the garden with the Savior. Picture him kneeling, praying, pleading. While doing so, consider the following questions.
 - ? What does Jesus look like?
 - ? What does the garden look and feel like?
 - ? What do you think you would want to say to him if you had been there?
2. Mark reports that when Jesus entered the garden he “began to be sore amazed,” and indicated to those around him that he was “sorrowful unto death.”
 - ? What do you think it means that Jesus was “amazed”?
 - ? What is it, do you think, Jesus felt, thought, and experienced that caused him to be “amazed”?
 - ? What do you think when you think of Jesus being so sorrowful that he felt death looming?

Consider Mosiah 3.⁷.

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.”

- ? How does this passage amplify and enhance your appreciation of Jesus’ confession?
3. Mark reports Jesus saying to his disciples, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”
 - ? We can legitimately read this as good general advice, but is there some reason that this counsel is particularly needed on that night in that place?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Mark 15.²²⁻³⁷— atonement

²²And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. ²³And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. ²⁴And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

²⁵And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. ²⁶And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. ²⁸And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith,

“And he was numbered with the transgressors.”

²⁹And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, ³⁰save thyself, and come down from the cross.”

³¹Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, “He saved others; himself he cannot save. ³²Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”

And they that were crucified with him reviled him.

³³And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

³⁴And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying,

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is, being interpreted, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

³⁵And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, “Behold, he calleth Elias.” ³⁶And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, “Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.”

³⁷And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us.” *

1. After reading today’s passage, close your eyes and attempt to “view his death” in your mind (See Jacob 1.⁸). You might consider doing so while in prayer.
 - ? What do you see?
 - ? How do you feel about what you see?
 - ? What would you have wanted to say to him if you had been there? Say it now.
2. “The scripture was fulfilled,” writes Mark, “which saith, ‘and he was numbered with the transgressors.’” Of course, “transgressors” refers to the two thieves with whom Jesus was crucified. However, it has larger application. It has reference to all of us.
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider Jesus’ willingness to be “numbered” with you, a transgressor, especially as such cost to himself?
 - ? Many have and do find the idea of God being willing to be “numbered,” or be willing to associate with sinners scandalous. Do you find the idea scandalous in that you have difficulty believing Jesus is willing and anxious to associate with you even in your sin?
3. Consider the sentiment expressed in Hebrews 2.^{10-11, 17}.

“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

- ? How does this passage relate to the idea of Jesus being “numbered with the transgressors”?
- ? What does it mean to you when you read that Jesus was “*in all things...* like unto his brethren”?

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“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Mark 15.²²⁻³⁷— lent

²²And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. ²³And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. ²⁴And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

²⁵And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. ²⁶And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁷And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. ²⁸And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, “And he was numbered with the transgressors.”

²⁹And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, ³⁰Save thyself, and come down from the cross.”

³¹Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, “He saved others; himself he cannot save. ³²Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”

And they that were crucified with him reviled him.

³³And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

³⁴And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is, being interpreted, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

³⁵And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, “Behold, he calleth Elias.”

³⁶And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, “Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.”

³⁷And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. ³⁸And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

Questionary

Today’s is our 45th reading for Lent/Easter 2024. According to the traditional chronology of Jesus’ final week, the events recorded in today’s reading took place on Friday afternoon.

1. In a previous reading, we reviewed part of Jacob’s admonition to his people that they “view his [Jesus’] death” (Jac. 1.⁸) and suggested that you do so at each stage of Jesus passion. After reading today’s passage, close your eyes and attempt to “view his death” in your mind. You might consider doing so while in prayer.
 - ? What do you see?
 - ? How do you feel about what you see?
 - ? What would you have wanted to say to him if you had been there? Say it now.
2. “The scripture was fulfilled,” writes Mark, “which saith, ‘and he was numbered with the transgressors.’” Of course, “transgressors” refers to the two thieves with whom Jesus was crucified. However, it has larger application. It has reference to all of us.
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider Jesus’ willingness to be “numbered” with you, a transgressor, especially as such cost to himself?
 - ? Many have and do find the idea of God being willing to be “numbered,” or be willing to associate with sinners scandalous. Do you find the idea scandalous in that you have difficulty believing Jesus is willing and anxious to associate with you even in your sin?
 - ? If you feel skeptical about Jesus’ willingness and anxiousness to associate with you even in your sin, how might today’s reading help alleviate such feelings?
3. Jesus began his ministry, remember, by spending 40 days in the wilderness and being tempted of the devil. Jesus’ temptations never ceased. Even on the cross, Jesus had temptations hurled at him.
 - ? What temptation or temptations do you see Jesus facing from the cross according to Mark’s account?

- ? How great a temptation, do you think, was it for Jesus to use his power to deliver himself from the pain and suffering of the cross? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How great a temptation, do you think, was it for Jesus to use his power to deaden his pain and suffering even as he resisted the temptation to deliver himself from the cross? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How “skilled” are you at resisting the temptation to preserve yourself, your feelings, your reputation, etc.?
 - ? What other temptations can you imagine Jesus facing on the cross?
4. According to tradition, Jesus spoke seven times from the cross. Luke, we have seen in previous readings of his crucifixion narrative, recorded three of them. Mark records just one: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”
- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider this complaint/plea?
 - ? This utterance is actually a quote from Psalm 22.¹. Why, do you think, did Jesus utilize a prayer from the Psalms to express his agony in his darkest hour?
 - ? What experiences have you had with the Psalms in which you found expressions that matched your own feelings and thoughts?
 - ? If you can find time, read the entire 22nd Psalm and consider the ways in which it can be applied to Jesus’ experiences?

Mark 15.²²⁻³⁸

²²And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. ²³And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. ²⁴And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

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Today's is our 43rd reading for Lent/Easter. According to the traditional chronology of Jesus' final week, the events recorded in today's reading took place on Friday afternoon.

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 - ? What do you see?
 - ? How do you feel about what you see?
 - ? What would you have wanted to say to him if you had been there? Say it now.
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 - ? How great a temptation, do you think, was it for Jesus to use his power to deliver himself from the pain and suffering of the cross? Why do you answer as you do?

- ? How great a temptation, do you think, was it for Jesus to use his power to deaden his pain and suffering even as he resisted the temptation to deliver himself from the cross? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How “skilled” are you at resisting the temptation to preserve yourself, your feelings, your reputation, etc. at the cost of others?
 - ? What other temptations can you imagine Jesus facing on the cross?
4. According to tradition, Jesus spoke seven times from the cross. Luke, we have seen in previous readings of his crucifixion narrative, recorded three of them. Mark records just one: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”
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 - ? What experiences have you had with the Psalms in which you found expressions that matched your own feelings and thoughts?
 - ? If you can find time, read the entire 22nd Psalm and consider the ways in which it can be applied to Jesus’ experiences?

Mark 16.¹⁻⁶— atonement

¹And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. ²And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. ³And they said among themselves, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?”

⁴And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. ⁵And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. ⁶And he saith unto them, “Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him....”

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement.” *

1. As the women approached Jesus’ tomb, they asked, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” Then, immediately, the text informs us, “And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.”
 - ? Consider the larger symbolic meaning of this narrative. How would this apply to you, your life today, the impossible challenges of life, and the prospects of your own resurrection?
 - ? Have you had experiences in your life when you, wondering how you would accomplish something difficult, found that God had already prepared the way for you to accomplish that very thing?
 2. Take a moment to read and compare the other three accounts of Jesus’ resurrection (Matthew 28.¹⁻⁶; Luke 24.¹⁻¹²; and John 20.¹⁻¹⁸)
 - ? What unique items and principles do you learn from each account?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
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