

biblestudy: march 2022

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

March 6, 2022 Text: Mark 8:27-38 "Understanding Jesus' Identity"

It is about four hundred feet from my house to the mailbox. (This morning, my pedometer said it took me 342 steps to get there.) Sometimes, the walk back to the house after picking up the mail is stirred with joy (a letter from a long-away friend), concern (an unexpected bill), boredom (yet another solicitation), or smiles (a look at the cartoons in The New Yorker). Things may seem different because of what was in mail.

It must have been that way for the disciples after Jesus told them what it meant for Him to be the Messiah (Mark 8:31). Things were different because of what was in their "mailbox"! Peter was so upset that he whispered to Jesus that "Sir, you must be wrong. The Messiah is a winner, not someone to be put to death." Then, to dig the hole a little deeper, Jesus told the gathered crowd what it meant to be on His team (Mark 8:34): "You'll have your own cross to bear and if you fail to carry it fully, I'll be embarrassed and ashamed of you." That's a lot to read as you walk back to the house from the mailbox! Things suddenly got different for the disciples!

That was a strange kind of evangelism: "Come, follow me, and you'll get a cross to carry." That must be in the small print of what was agreed to when we were baptized!

The disciples had some bad guesses as to who Jesus might be (Mark 8:28). Sometimes, we still make some bad guesses as to who Jesus

might be, but the truth He told that day with the disciples is still the truth. When Matthew describes this account, he notes that Jesus points out to Peter that Peter didn't figure out that Jesus was the Christ all by himself; it was a divine gift if Peter was able to understand (Matthew 16:17). It is still true that we are able to acknowledge Jesus is the Messiah only by the divinely given gift of faith.

If we had been put in charge of designing the pattern for the Messiah, most of us would have come up with a plan far different from what Jesus undertook. Do you suppose God knows better than we do?! The final word in this focal text is a good, encouraging word: "The Son of Man will come in glory" (Mark 8:38). Sometimes we get a taste of that glory even as we pursue this life. Sometimes, we wait until Jesus shares heaven with us. Sometimes, we shall see it fully when the Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Isn't that how Jesus said we should pray?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In his commentary (*Mark*, John Knox Press), Lamar Williamson, Jr. says: "The cross Jesus invites his hearers to take up refers not to the burdens life imposes from without, but rather to painful, redemptive action voluntarily undertaken for others."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven..."

March 13, 2022 Text: Mark 9:38-50 "Recognizing Fellow Disciples Along the Way"

On this second Sunday of Lent, we get some hints about fellow travelers. There is a ton of insight and challenge and comfort in these verses. Space will not permit us to pick up all of it, but all of these are important reflections for a time when Christians struggle with what it means to stay together as one people.

It boils down to this: a cup of water (Mark 9:41). I rejoice in reading of a difficult mission in a hard, foreign place; Jesus speaks of a cup of water. I am amazed and impressed when someone makes a dangerous public witness for justice; Jesus speaks of a cup of water. I delight to see the report that attendance is growing in a community church; Jesus speaks of a cup of water.

This is not to say that Jesus does not value missionary work or that Jesus is not grateful for a plea for justice or that Jesus is not happy to see filled-up pews. But in this text Jesus honors the person who gives you a cup of water! Isn't that interesting? I would have thought that the reward would go to me because I gave away the water. Jesus says the reward goes to the one who gave me the water.

Maybe our Lord is reminding us to be recipients of grace. Do I have too much pride to let someone do me a favor? Do I have too much spiritual ego to accept the possibility that someone else may have a gift to

give me? Do I insist on being in charge rather than letting another be blessed by helping me?

Might that cup of water be a theological idea that had escaped me? Might that cup of water be an understanding of Scripture that I had ignored? Might that cup of water be a spirit of acceptance that I had not accomplished?

Silly me. Now that God has opened up these new avenues for grace, I am going to have to be open to change. A cup of water.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Insights, a reflection booklet for small Christian groups in the Roman Catholic tradition (DSD Publishing) contains this observation: "As followers of Christ, the only truth that matters is God's truth. His truth is the consecrated truth; it is sacred. It is a truth above all. If we live in God's truth we will stay united in His love and with others."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Come, Holy Spirit, and bring to me the love and care of other believers. Come, Loving Parent, and let me receive gladly Your truth that another has understood better than I. Come, Teaching Savior, and let me be open to Your presence in unaccustomed ways..."

March 20, 2022 Text: Mark 10:35-45 "Disciples Should Expect the Unexpected"

Five or six times I have started writing this week's commentary and five or six times I have erased what I had written and started again. It is hard to let go of how the world's kingdoms measure success and victory and how God's Kingdom measures success and victory.

After James and John messed up (Mark 10:38), the other ten disciples got all bent out of shape with James and John (Mark 10:41). (I suspect they would have been angry with me, too; I like the way James and John are forthright in stating what they want.) Jesus did what He often had to do when his followers got all mixed up: He called them together and explained things (Mark 10:42).

Basically, Jesus told them that things in the Kingdom of God were not as they thought they were. Kingdom value is measured not by greatness, but by servanthood. And Jesus Himself modeled that life (Mark 10:45).

The King James Version translates Mark 10:43 like this: "But so shall

it not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister." I am an ordained clergyman and around here we clergy are often referred to as "ministers." This got me curious about the word that the King James Version calls "minister" and the New Revised Standard Version puts as "servant" and the New English Bible says is "willing slave." The New Testament word is *diakōnōs*. It has a number of English expressions, including deacon, diaconal, table waiter, menial attendant, or teacher (as well as minister or servant or slave).

Any way you slice it, Jesus says that greatness in the Kingdom is measured by being for others. One becomes fully the person God has called him or her to be when that person is fully for others. That does not mean we deliberately become weak; in fact, it means we seek to be strong in order that we may be more effective servants. The greatness is not in the strength; it is in how we use that strength for others.

"Being for others" does not mean the same thing for each person in

continued on page 2

each setting. For example, James dies for his faithfulness (Acts 12:2) and there is no report that his brother, John, was martyred. God used both as servants. To such ministry we all are called.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In Thomas Langford’s book *Practical Divinity* (Abingdon Press), Geoffrey Wainwright has written: “According to the apostle Paul,

faith, hope, and love are the three gifts of God that last throughout the course of human salvation..”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Teach me, show me, Lord...”

March 27, 2022 Text: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 “Faith to Move Mountains”

The first part of this week’s focal text is a strange “miracle story” in that Jesus seems to blame a fig tree for not having fruit out of season (Mark 11:13-14). Some students of the Bible see these verses as an enactment of a point Jesus often made: There is no value to a life that does not bear fruit for others.

Later, Jesus and the disciples pass by where the fig tree had been and now it is withered and left with dead roots (Mark 11:21). Jesus was right! There is no value to a life that does not bear fruit; it might as well be dead.

Then, our Lord moves to talk about the power of faithful prayer (Mark 11:24). He uses hyperbole to express that there are no limits to the power of prayer. But, prayer is not a matter of trying to get God to change God’s mind; prayer is our effort to learn what is the mind of God. As Jesus prayed in the Garden, “Not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42).

One of the biggest mountains any of us has is the mountain of our sin. No wonder we want to throw it into the sea (Mark 11:23)! Jesus says the way to get rid of that mountain is to forgive those who have wronged us (Mark 11:25). This verse echoes the way Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:12).

There is a danger that we might look at these verses (Mark 11:20-25) and decide that prayer is like filling out an order blank for God to fulfill. In this sense, God becomes a kind of Amazon delivery system. No! That is not what our Lord is describing. Jesus begins His point by saying that effective prayer begins with faith in God (verse 22). If my faith is in a false God or my faith is in a value that is not God’s or my faith is centered in my will, it is not a faith that leads to God’s “yes.”

We are called to pray to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. So be it.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Interpreter’s Bible* (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), Halford E. Luccock wrote: “Christian prayer, then, is prayer within limits—in accord with the nature of God, directed toward communion with him, and imbued with the spirit of obedience to his holy will.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Move into our hearts that we might be at one with Your will and in keeping with Your love. Grant us grace to see the mountains that block us from You, and stir such faith that those mountains disappear into the sea...”

Biblical References - Feb. Mar. Apr. 2022

FEBRUARY

February 6, 2022 Text:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 22:34-40 “The Shema”

February 13, 2022 Text:

Matthew 5:14-16 “Making God’s Light Visible”

February 20, 2022 Text:

James 1:19-27 “Authentic Speech”

February 27, 2022 Text:

Matthew 28:16-20 “The Great Commission”

MARCH

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March 20, 2022 Text:

Mark 10:35-45 “Disciples Should Expect the Unexpected”

March 27, 2022 Text:

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 “Faith to Move Mountains”

APRIL

April 3, 2022 Text:

Mark 13:5-8, 28-37 “A Disciple’s Vigilance”

April 10, 2022 Text:

Mark 14:27-42 “A Motley Crew of Disciples”

April 17, 2022 Text:

Mark 16:1-8 “The Empty Tomb”

April 24, 2022 Text:

Psalms 104 “A Meditating on God’s Creation”

No one is
more
cherished
in this
world than
someone
who
lightens
the burden
of another.

Unknown