

Trinity Lutheran Church 2021 Lenten Grace Group Study Guide



Daily Discipleship
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First Sunday in Lent

Mark 1:9-15

The Path of Discipleship: *Into the Wilderness*

Focus Question: *What temptations will you face this week?*

word of life

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” Mark 1:12 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:9-15

Once more the Gospel of Mark keeps the story simple. There are not a lot of details, adjectives and adverbs. Hear the urgency of this story. Mark is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The voice at baptism is a clear one. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11 NRSV) All seems well as Jesus is launched into ministry and mission. The baptism of Jesus is a pinnacle experience. But Jesus does not linger, pondering the moment and mingling with the crowd.

Instead the Spirit immediately drives him into the wilderness. The Greek word used as the verb is often used to describe expelling demons. The Spirit does not give Jesus a gentle nudge towards the wilderness, but instead compels him out.

Many times we imagine God’s Spirit as comforting and encouraging. It is a jolt to realize the Spirit of God drives and pushes Jesus into a time of testing in the wilderness.

1. *Why do you think the Spirit drives Jesus to experience a time of testing?*
2. *What is the significance of the sequence of the baptism of Jesus followed by his time in the wilderness?*

There is an obvious connection between the forty days of Jesus in the wilderness and the freed slaves who spent forty years in the wilderness following the exodus. For those freed from slavery in Egypt, the forty years in the wilderness became formative and instrumental as they discovered new meaning for their identity as God’s people, chosen for purpose and blessing. It was a critical time of being tested and shaped by God. Likewise, Jesus is also being formed and tested.

3. *How might this experience in the wilderness have helped to shape the identity of Jesus?*

Unlike the descriptions of the temptation stories in Matthew and Luke, Mark does not elaborate on the types or the precise number of temptations. It seems important enough to mention, but Mark doesn't spend time or energy on this story. Onward with the mission of Jesus!

4. *Why do you believe Mark is so brief in his description?*

5. *How important is it for you to know the type of temptations Jesus faced?*

Mark is the only Gospel to mention angels waiting on Jesus. How precious for us to observe not only the struggles and temptations of Jesus, but also the tenderness and care of the angels. Jesus was not alone in the wilderness.

6. *Take a moment to imagine this scene. How might the angels have cared for him?*

7. *What might we learn from this passage?*

word among us

The pastor gathered with the confirmation class for the weekly lesson. Someone read the temptation text from the Gospel of Mark. The pastor slowly asked, "Do you understand what a *temptation* is?" The class quickly nodded their heads. The pastor continued, "Are there temptations at your school?" The class nodded their heads vigorously.

The pastor asked one more question. "What are some of the temptations at your school?" Immediately, the class became quiet. All eyes looked downward. There was a stillness that clouded the room. Dare the temptations even be mentioned? Would this discussion lead to confession of times when temptations had not been resisted?

The pastor could only imagine what temptations were so horrible to shut down the group. What tempts twelve and thirteen-year-olds? Slowly and after some urging, each began to talk about real issues facing a middle-school student on a daily basis – drugs, mean-spiritedness, cheating, lying, cutting class, jealousy, clichés. There were those who urged classmates to act like "big shots" by putting others down. Others tried to persuade their friends to stop studying and begin failing classes. What did school really matter? Peer pressure was intense.

The pastor listened to their stories, realizing more temptations waited each person in high school and throughout life. It was not too early to identify temptations and discern the ways to deal with temptations, trusting in the Spirit's guidance and protection.

1. *What are your daily temptations?*

2. *Are there more temptations facing any particular generation (or age group)?*
3. *For you personally, were there less or more temptations when you were younger?*

A surprising feature of this week's text is the Spirit's role in driving Jesus to the wilderness. It is the Spirit who *sends* Jesus to a time of temptation. Many times we understand the Spirit as a comforter - not the one to stir us.

4. *Describe a time when you felt the Spirit stirring and testing you.*
5. *How have you grown spiritually through difficult times and testing?*

The story of the temptation of Jesus is typically read in congregations on the first Sunday of Lent, a season lasting forty days. Hopefully, the forty days of Lent will provide you with an opportunity for prayer and reflection. What draws you from God? Lent is a time to change ways and face a new direction, aligning with Christ.

6. *Toward what path of discipleship is the Spirit leading you?*
7. *How might you set aside Lent to become more meaningful?*

Prayer

Mighty Spirit, lead us to the wilderness, but do not let us go. Help us learn through the times of testing to follow Christ. Amen

Dig Deeper

Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11

last word

This week identify three temptations
and pray for God's Spirit
to help you.

Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:31-38

The Path of Discipleship: *Beyond Oneself*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus?*

word of life

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Mark 8:34 (NRSV)

Read Mark 8:31-38

It is important to keep this passage in its context. Thus, take a moment to read the previous verses found in Mark 8:27-30. Jesus asks the disciples what people are saying about him. Then Jesus directly asks the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29 NRSV) It is a shining moment for Peter because he answers correctly. He declares Jesus to be the Messiah. This is Peter’s great declaration of faith.

Immediately following this confession of faith, Jesus begins to talk about his pending death and resurrection. It is as if the disciples are mature enough in faith to hear this critical development unfolding in the coming weeks. But Peter is not ready for such news. Peter imagines something different for the future of Jesus. No doubt Peter has good intentions as he tries to persuade Jesus that he does not have to die. Jesus speaks sternly to Peter. In just a few verses, Peter goes from star student to being called “Satan.”

1. *Why would the news of the death of Jesus have been difficult for Peter to hear?*
2. *Why was Jesus so tough on Peter?*

Jesus turns to the crowd and sets a standard for following him. It is going to take commitment and sacrifice. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34 NRSV) These are not popular words. Carrying a cross in the first century world of Palestine would have meant a death sentence. This image of a cross would have been most perplexing for the listeners. What would a cross have to do with following Jesus? It is important to keep in mind that Jesus is predicting his death, so his audience would not have the crucifixion as a frame of reference.

3. *What might have been the response of the crowd?*
4. *How do you imagine Peter and the disciples responding to these words?*

In reality, who wants to deny themselves? Who wants to sacrifice? This is not a positive marketing strategy. Yet the way of Jesus is not an easy path. Jesus is calling followers to not think of themselves or human things. Instead, Jesus requests followers to set their mind on divine things.

Following Christ is not for those who are undecided or lukewarm. Jesus is calling for a clear commitment. Jesus warns followers not to be ashamed of him. He turns things upside down. Those who cling to their life and possessions will certainly lose it. Those who lose their life will gain it.

5. *What is Jesus trying to say in this passage?*

6. *What are other ways of explaining the message of Jesus in this passage?*

word among us

It is only the second week in the season of Lent, but already the message from Jesus is getting intense. Jesus is describing the demands of discipleship. It is not an easy path, but one filled with sacrifice, suffering and service.

1. *Do you believe more people would follow Jesus if he would make it easier? Why?*

2. *What is lost if it becomes too easy to follow Jesus?*

We know Jesus is not just preaching idle words. Jesus is going to pick up a cross and die. Jesus means what he says. The way of the cross is not a theory. This is a radical calling, placing us against a society that encourages serving ourselves first.

3. *How does the teaching of Jesus conflict with some aspects of modern society?*

Jesus offers a radically different approach. With bold words, Jesus calls for a new humanity, born as people follow the ways of Christ and deny themselves. It is clear the path of discipleship is not going to be on flat ground and protected by shade. Instead, the path includes sacrifice and suffering.

4. *This session is called “Beyond Oneself.” What does that phrase mean as it relates to the words of Jesus?*

Consider your own life. Reflect how your understanding about being a disciple of Jesus has changed over the years.

5. *What is the hardest thing about following Christ?*

6. *What keeps you from being complacent and relaxed about this radical call?*

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he challenges the reader, "The cross is laid on every Christian.... As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ." Bonhoeffer continually warns followers of Jesus to not rely on a false understanding of a cheap grace given by God.

When we pick up our cross, automatically there is a shift as we open our hands and spirits to lift the cross. In order to make room to carry the cross, we put something else down, including hatred, anger, pride and other burdens.

7. *What are you being asked to put down in order to carry the cross?*

Prayer

Gracious God, expand my vision to see things from your perspective. Give me courage and strength to pick up a cross and follow you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Mark 15:21-32

last word

Draw a cross on a paper.
In each quadrant,
write something to let go
so you can follow Christ more fully.

Third Sunday in Lent

John 2:13-22

The Path of Discipleship: *Through the Maze*

Focus Question: *This week, what is worth investing your best energy?*

word of life

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John 2:19 (NRSV)

Read John 2:13-22

The Lenten reading shifts to the Gospel of John. In John’s Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry by calling the disciples and attending a wedding at Cana. From Cana, Jesus travels to Jerusalem for the Passover, the first of three Passovers described in the Gospel of John. It is here (in the second chapter of John) Jesus overturns the moneychanger’s tables. He does not wait for the scribes and Pharisees to test him. Instead, Jesus takes the initiative and makes his concerns known.

1. *What surprises you about this text?*

2. *Why is Jesus so angry?*

In the other Gospels, the cleansing of the temple comes at the end of the life of Jesus and after a series of clashes with those in religious authority. It is worth noting the cleansing of the temple is placed in the beginning of John’s Gospel and sparks fly. Jesus goes on the offensive, zealously stirring things up and righting wrongs.

3. *How does this image of Jesus fit with your understanding of Jesus?*

Jesus speaks for God, protecting the temple from misuse. He challenges the common pattern of selling cattle, sheep, and doves in the temple. The moneychangers were exchanging foreign currency with money acceptable for the Passover Festival. The overall scene was chaotic resembling a marketplace rather than God’s house.

4. *Why would Jesus intentionally stir things up?*

5. *What does it mean for Jesus to be filled with zeal?*

All this commotion catches the attention of those in the temple. The Jews challenge Jesus to show them a sign to justify such outrageous behavior, but Jesus' answer is unclear. His response actually stirs up more concern when he talks about the destruction of the temple. No one wants to imagine a time when their temple might be destroyed. His words about restoring the temple in three days seem like folly. It only confirms their impression of Jesus as a crazy man. These Jews remember it took forty-six long years to rebuild the temple after the Babylonian exile. Yet Jesus is describing the resurrection and his own body as the temple.

6. *Why is Jesus so intent on stirring up the Jews, especially during the Passover?*

There is clarity of purpose in the actions of Jesus despite the controversy or mixed reception from those in authority. This cleansing of the temple and the words of Jesus will make more sense to the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus.

7. *What difference does it make to have this story in the beginning of John's Gospel as compared to the other Gospels where it is placed at the end of the life of Jesus?*

word among us

The congregation council meeting was going along smoothly. In the past, there had been some heated debate and short tempers. The council tried to deal with its business, knowing there was one item on the agenda that would be tense. Sure enough, as soon as the topic was mentioned, voices began to be raised. One man stood up and demanded everyone listen to him. He even shoved some books off the table as he tried to persuade the group to agree with him.

But once he knocked the books to the floor, another council member gathered her things and walked out of the room. She believed this man had gone too far.

1. *How would you have responded to this man?*

2. *How can you determine if the zeal of a person is from God or not?*

3. *Would your reaction have been different if you agreed or disagreed with the man?*

4. *Describe a time when someone passionately shared his or her opinions and you disagreed with that person, but later realized you were wrong.*

When Jesus walked into the temple, he became angry about the current practices in the temple. Thus, in dramatic fashion he overturned the tables and exposed the people's disrespect for God. At the same time, Jesus angered others who disagreed with him and his actions.

5. *The Gospel lesson shows an angry Jesus who overturned tables. Was his anger justified?*

6. *When (if ever) is anger justified?*

Sometimes Christians can be passive about all things and carry no passion. This picture of an angry Jesus reveals his passion about his Father's house.

7. *What can we learn from this passage?*

8. *What feelings do you have about this description of Jesus?*

Sometimes life can be quite confusing. Life can be like a maze with turns and tangled webs of complex options. We can become consumed with issues of little importance; and we can fail to passionately address obvious wrongs. Yet, it is refreshing to see the clarity of Jesus as he went into the temple. He could see the mockery of the current practices and was willing to address the situation.

It is one thing to identify injustice or wrongdoing, but something else to step forward. That is the challenge. Yet, Jesus invites us to sort out the maze and offers clarity, even when that means confronting the current ways of doing things.

9. *How can you discern if your passion is from God or your own opinion?*

10. *How can you support each other in discerning God's will?*

11. *What this week is worth investing your best energy?*

Prayer

Guide us through the maze of this life. Fill our hearts with passion to serve you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19

Luke 19:45-48

last word

Identify one thing you would be willing to invest with your passion and energy.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 3:14-21

The Path of Discipleship: *Within the Light*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to walk in the light of Christ?*

word of life

But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. John 3:21 (NRSV)

Read John 3:14-21

The third chapter of John begins with the story of Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews who comes to Jesus at night to ask questions. The assigned verses are part of the answer by Jesus to the questions raised by Nicodemus. Jesus is challenging Nicodemus to grow in his faith. (To understand the context of these verses read John 3:1-13.)

Jesus draws upon Nicodemus' knowledge of Scripture by referring to Moses. Jesus uses the image of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent for the healing of the people (Numbers 21:4-9), but gives new meaning to it by expanding this image to include the Son of Man being lifted up in crucifixion and resurrection. *Belief* is critical. Healing occurs as new life is given.

1. *How does Jesus offer healing through eternal life?*

John 3:16 is a well-known verse emphasizing God's love, a love revealed through the sacrifice of God's own Son so everyone might have eternal life. This love is a gift for all people.

2. *What does John 3:16 mean for you?*

God desires for the whole world to be saved and not be condemned; yet John's Gospel asserts that not everyone desires God's salvation. Believing in God is critical.

3. *Why do some resist the goodness of God?*

4. *Why do some have difficulty trusting and believing in God?*

Jesus returns to the theme of darkness and light as it relates to Nicodemus coming in a dark night to seek Jesus. Light exposes sin and secrecy. It's hard to hide when light comes into a room or life. Jesus puts it this way, "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

5. *What does it mean to “love darkness”?*

Jesus speaks about people coming to the light and to God’s love. Obviously, when a pathway is lit, traveling becomes much easier. Dangers are exposed. The same is true in our faith walk. Staying close to the light of Christ helps a person walk in the path of discipleship, following the teachings of Jesus.

The goal is to live in the light of Christ. Then, deeds are done in God and for God’s pleasure. Hopefully, those actions invite others to come to the light.

6. *Describe possible responses from Nicodemus to the words of Jesus.*

word among us

The counselor at a summer church camp was to coordinate Night Camp, a new program in which campers would sleep during the day, eat their breakfast at 6:00 pm, do a variety of activities throughout the night, eat lunch at midnight, and have supper at 7:00 am. The campers would explore nocturnal life, hike the woods at night, call owls, and reverse their typical daily schedule.

In preparation for the week, the camp counselor began looking for a key theme verse in the Bible on darkness. Not much was found. Consistently, the Bible affirms living in the light of Christ. It is one thing to voluntarily spend a week wandering in the woods at night, but living outside the light of Christ is not recommended for every day living.

1. *What good can be said about wandering in the dark?*
2. *Why do people “love darkness”?*
3. *Describe a situation in which you longed for light.*

God’s love is intended for all people. Jesus was sent to save the whole world. John 3:16 is a powerful reminder of God’s immense love. This passage is a favorite for people to hold up at sporting events. Many times a television camera will focus on a sign with just these words, “John 3:16.”

4. *What do you think the person holding the sign is trying to convey?*

5. *What might be a more effective way to share God's love?*

Not all the world wants to live in the light of Christ. Sometimes there is resistance. It is helpful to be aware of this from the start. Otherwise, it can be discouraging to share faith with someone, only to meet resistance and rejection.

6. *Recall a time when you tried to share the love and light of Christ only to be rejected.*

7. *What do you advise someone who experiences rejection because he or she tried to share the love of Christ?*

When you consider your own life as a disciple of Christ, think about what it means to walk within the light of Christ. Ponder things that have helped you stay within the light of Christ.

8. *Share the story of someone who models walking in the light of Christ.*

9. *What are daily patterns of living which are helpful to disciples of Jesus who want to walk in his light?*

Prayer

Help me to walk in the light of Christ. Guide my choices to reflect your love. Amen

Dig Deeper

John 1:1-5

last word

Find a candle and light it during your daily devotions.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 12:20-33

The Path of Discipleship – *In the Footsteps*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to follow in the footsteps of Jesus?*

word of life

“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.

Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.” John 12:26 (NRSV)

Read John 12:20-33

It was the time of Passover in Jerusalem with the city full of people who had come from many lands for the festivities. Some Greeks had arrived who desired to meet with Jesus. How fascinating to observe Philip from Bethsaida as the one who attempts to connect these visitors with Jesus. Philip seems to be a personality who connects people with others. In John 1:43-51, it is Philip who, after being called by Jesus, goes to Nathaniel and invites him to come and meet Jesus. Philip’s words are simple, “Come and see.” To respond to the request from the Greeks, he seeks Andrew and together they approach Jesus.

1. *Why might Philip have gone to Andrew for assistance?*

Jesus does not seem to respond directly to the request concerning the Greeks; instead, he begins to speak about a grain of wheat falling into the earth to die. Only through death would the single grain be able to bear much fruit. Philip and Andrew were probably stumped by Jesus’ answer. It didn’t seem to relate to the request by the Greeks. Keep in mind this story follows Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem with people shouting “Hosanna!” Jesus seems clearly focused on his purpose to fulfill in his week in Jerusalem.

2. *How is this image of the death of the grain relevant to this final week in the life of Jesus?*

The words that follow from Jesus are convicting and are intended to weed out lukewarm followers. Jesus challenges those who love their life. In the end, they will lose their life. But for those who are willing to lose their life in this world, they will have eternal life. Jesus calls followers to serve him and follow on the path of discipleship. To walk in the footsteps of Jesus is to be a servant.

3. *What happened to the Greeks in the story?*

4. *If the Greeks were able to hear Jesus' words, what might have been their reaction?*

Jesus speaks candidly about the challenges that lie ahead of him. He admits his desire to pray to God for rescue from the very hour of suffering and pain; yet, at the same time, Jesus is well aware of his purpose and the need for his suffering.

5. *How does it feel to hear of the troubled soul of Jesus?*

6. *Is it troubling or assuring to see a very human side of Jesus? Explain.*

Once more a voice from heaven intervenes. The voice is accompanied by thunder. An angel speaks directly to Jesus, but the words are not shared in scripture.

7. *What might have the angel have said?*

In the end, Jesus seems reassured. He will continue his path to the cross, knowing his death will draw all people to him.

word among us

Samuel was thrilled. He had spent his life as a lawyer and dreamed one of his children might decide to go into law. Finally his wish came true. His youngest child passed the law exam, but there were still some unknowns. Would this new lawyer join Samuel in his law practice?

To celebrate the occasion, he proudly took his family out for dinner at a fancy restaurant. After the meal was finished, his youngest child stood in front of the family and announced the decision. "I have decided to follow in my father's footsteps and practice law with my father." Quickly, Samuel jumped to his feet and gave the newest lawyer in the family a hug and said, "Julie, you have made my day. It will be a joy to have you work with me."

Actually, he was quite surprised his daughter had chosen this path. Many years ago, Samuel had given up a lucrative career to work with the poorest of the poor. He took on clients discarded by many colleagues. Over the years, Samuel had developed a passion to be an advocate for those who suffered injustice. Realistically, he knew it wasn't the most attractive career for a young ambitious lawyer like his daughter.

Samuel did not know his daughter had been watching him. She had noticed his slowness of step and his lower energy level. She suspected his weak heart had weakened more, but it was typical for her father not to share such news with the family.

Julie had known for some time about her decision. There was nothing more that she wanted but to work beside her father, to learn from his experience and establish her career. She yearned to glean from his wisdom, absorb his compassion, and continue his legacy of advocacy. Julie knew it wasn't the typical first step for a talented lawyer, but it was a great decision for her personal life. She was determined to savor every moment with her beloved father.

1. *What did it mean for Julie to walk in the footsteps of her father?*
2. *How does walking in someone's footsteps relate to coaching or mentoring?*
3. *What does it mean to walk in the footsteps of Jesus?*

In this passage, Jesus is clearly aware he is heading to his death. The Greeks do not distract him. He continues a course, but the path involves sacrifice and death. Despite this clarity, Jesus struggles and his soul is troubled. His prayer becomes, "Father glorify your name."

4. *What might it mean this week to lose your life and serve others?*
5. *What changes might you need to make in your life in order to better follow in the footsteps of Jesus?*

Prayer

Gentle Jesus, be with us in our struggles and troubled times. Teach us to pray, "Father, glorify your name." Amen

Dig Deeper

John 13:1-20

last word

Give up a favorite activity this week and spend the time in prayer.

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion

Mark 14:1-15:47

The Path of Discipleship: *Beneath the Cross*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to stand in the shadow of the cross?*

word of life

“Then they led him (Jesus) out to crucify him.” Mark 15:20 (NRSV)

Divide the group, and ask each person to silently read one section of the Gospel reading (Mark chapters 14 and 15). Ask each to give a one-sentence summary of their reading as a way to briefly tell the story of Jesus’ death on the cross.

This Sunday begins the holiest of weeks in the church’s liturgical life. Through grand drama and moving liturgy, the faithful enter into the central event of the faith – the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Whether your congregation reads only the traditional Palm Sunday Gospel account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11) or reads the entire account of the Passion (Mark 14-15), the focus of the day remains the same: Jesus comes to die. The triumphal entry on Palm Sunday occurs in the shadow of the cross.

1. *What are your traditions on Palm/Passion Sunday?*
2. *How have these traditions helped you to begin Holy Week?*

It is difficult to study the full passion narrative in one session. Since the account of Jesus’ death is taken from Mark’s Gospel, it is helpful to reflect on the unique themes Mark emphasizes:

Theme 1: Throughout Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been portrayed as one who acts and teaches with power and authority. Yet throughout the passion narrative, Jesus is stripped of his power, and his voice is silenced. The taunts of the passersby and of those crucified with Jesus (Mark 15:29-32) ring out, “Let the Messiah ... come down from the cross.”

Note as well the increasing loneliness and abandonment of Jesus. The disciples fall asleep while Jesus agonizes in prayer alone. At his arrest, his disciples all abandon him. (One is even seen running away naked to escape the captors – see Mark 14:51.) Peter denies him. Jesus is stripped of his robe and his power. The final words from the dying Jesus are words of powerlessness and abandonment: “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34 NRSV)

3. *Have you known a time where you felt powerless and abandoned?*

4. *What is the significance of Jesus' cry on the cross?*

Theme 2: Time and again in Mark's Gospel, as Jesus performs miracles of healing, he commands those who see and experience these miracles to say nothing about it to anyone until after the resurrection – a theme called the “messianic secret.” Yet as Jesus breathes his final breath, the “secret” is revealed by an unlikely source – the centurion at the foot of the cross – in a bold proclamation of faith, “Truly this man was God's Son.” (Mark 15:39)

In Jesus' death is revealed the length and depth of God's love – a love willing to know utter god-forsakenness so that, no matter the depth of our despair, we can be assured that God is with us.

5. *What is significant about the centurion's proclamation?*

word among us

If you like great drama, this week is for you.

This is a week filled with passion and intrigue, with plots and espionage and political overtones.

If your life is filled with paradox, the story told and lived this week is for you.

A kiss of peace and welcome becomes a sign of betrayal. A guilty man whose name means “Son of the Father” (Barabbas) is set free, and an innocent man – the true “Son of the Father” – is condemned to a cruel death. A Roman centurion – a “pagan” – is the unlikely voice speaking a confession of faith at the foot of the cross. And women – seen as second-class citizens in Jesus' day – are the only faithful eyewitnesses in the end. Celebration leads to sorrow; cheers lead to jeers. Palm branches lead to a cross; and a Sunday of Palms becomes a week of Passion.

1. *How is life filled with paradox?*

If you have known times of feeling lost and alone, this week is for you.

Jesus agonizes alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples abandon and betray him. The soldiers mock him. Even the unknown travelers who pass by the cross taunt him. And the final words of Jesus on the cross ring out the depth of abandonment and agony he endures, “My God, why have you forsaken me?”

2. *How do you relate to Jesus?*

If you have known the need to experience forgiveness, this week is for you.

The story experienced during this week called Holy is really our story – our capacity to betray and abandon those we love, our ready acceptance of violence and injustice for a cause, our willingness to ignore suffering and evade responsibility, our acceptance of leaders who act to protect their privilege and position. Yes, we know only too well the sin and brokenness revealed this week in this story of Jesus’ death on the cross.

3. *How does it feel to know we need forgiveness?*

If you have known the need of a savior, this week is for you.

As you hear the voices in the garden and at the supper table; as you hear the cry of the crowd and the weeping of the women at the tomb; as you hear the sounds of sorrow and the silence of loss, listen closely. Listen closely, and you will hear the soft, sweet sound of our salvation. “This is my body ... this is the blood of the covenant, poured out for you.”

4. *When was the first time you realized you needed a savior?*

Yes, this week is for you.

5. *What does this week mean for you?*

6. *How might you set aside this week to focus on the passion story?*

Prayer

Loving God, as I stand this week beneath the shadow of the cross, help me experience anew the depth of your love for me. Amen

Dig Deeper

Read the entire chapters (Mark 14-15)

last word

With each person you meet this week, say in your mind, “Christ died for you.”