AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Diocese of West Malaysia

Archdeacon Eddie Ong
( Editor)
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Jesus Christ, The True Good News</td>
<td>The Rev Canon Dr Steven Abbarow</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>You Are My Son, Whom I Love</td>
<td>The Rev Miles Toulmin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tempted By Satan</td>
<td>The Ven Jacob George John</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Good News Is Not Good News If …</td>
<td>The Rev Dato’ Dr Yeoh Beng San</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Be Quiet! Come Out of Him</td>
<td>Ms A Annamaney</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Jesus Heals</td>
<td>The Rev Gerrad Emmanuel</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Prayer Before Preaching</td>
<td>Mr D Raja Singam</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Godly Compassion Is Passionate Action</td>
<td>Ms Jasmine Adaickalam</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>To Whom Does It Matter?</td>
<td>Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Jesus, The Sin Healer</td>
<td>The Rev Lee Kon Yim</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Holding The New And The Old Together</td>
<td>The Rev Canon Tony Barnard</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Crowds or Disciples</td>
<td>The Rev Nick Loi</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>My Brother, Sister And Mother</td>
<td>Mr Edward Clayton</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>The Four Types Of Soil</td>
<td>Mrs Veni Selvam</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Lamp On A Stand</td>
<td>The Rev Canon Richard Kirton</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>The Mustard Seed</td>
<td>The Rev Dr James Harding</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Master, The Tempest Is Raging</td>
<td>Mr Daniel Chai</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Let’s Begin The Game Of Life – Love All</td>
<td>Mr Philip Nainan</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>The Mission</td>
<td>The Rev Tim Philips</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>The Head Of John The Baptist</td>
<td>The Ven Edward M John</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Five Loaves And Two Fish</td>
<td>The Rev Dr Richard Loh</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Be Tested But Not Afraid</td>
<td>The Rev Gordon Kong</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 23</td>
<td>Clean And Unclean</td>
<td>Pastor Nesam Ebenezer</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 24</td>
<td>Great Faith</td>
<td>Mr Jaccob Thomas</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 25</td>
<td>Ephphatha, Be Opened</td>
<td>The Rev Dr James Low</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 26</td>
<td>A Sigh For A Sign</td>
<td>The Rev Dan Millest</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 27</td>
<td>Do You Still Not See And Understand?</td>
<td>The Rev Tan Meng Poo</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 28</td>
<td>Who Do People Say I Am?</td>
<td>Canon Emeritus Dr S K Teoh</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 29</td>
<td>His Clothes Became Dazzling White</td>
<td>The Rev David Cox</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 30</td>
<td>Robbed Of Speech</td>
<td>Mr Abel Cheah</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 31</td>
<td>Who Is The Greatest?</td>
<td>The Rt Rev Peter Tasker</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 32</td>
<td>Thrown Into Hell</td>
<td>The Ven Charles Fraser</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 33</td>
<td>Whoever Is Not Against Us Is For Us</td>
<td>The Rev Tom Cherian</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 34</td>
<td>Marriage: A Matter Of Principle</td>
<td>The Rev Paul Lau</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 35</td>
<td>Trusting Jesus Like Children</td>
<td>The Rev Tim Nicholls</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 36</td>
<td>Jesus Gave His All</td>
<td>Mrs Melissa Raj</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 37</td>
<td>The Eye Of A Needle</td>
<td>The Rev Dr Lim Kar Yong</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 38</td>
<td>Not To Be Served But To Serve</td>
<td>Mr G Nanda Goban</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 39</td>
<td>Was Blind But Now I See</td>
<td>Ms Marianne Liaw</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 40</td>
<td>The First Revolutionary Palm Sunday</td>
<td>The Rt Rev Dr Jason Selvaraj</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 41</td>
<td>Love – The Greatest Commandment</td>
<td>The Rev Jacqueline Rodwell</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 42</td>
<td>The Unknown Day And Hour</td>
<td>The Rev Jesvinder Singh</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 43</td>
<td>Give Sacrificially And Selflessly</td>
<td>Ms Esther Richards</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 44</td>
<td>The Mystery Of Love</td>
<td>The Rev Dr Vijendra Daniel</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 45</td>
<td>They Crucified Him</td>
<td>The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 46</td>
<td>The Day Jesus Was Buried</td>
<td>The Rt Rev Dato’ Charles Samuel</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 47</td>
<td>Resurrection, Commission And Ascension</td>
<td>The Rt Rev Datuk Ng Moon Hing</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>How Can Satan Stand Against Satan</td>
<td>The Rev Joshua Ong</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Collects - Holy Week &amp; Easter</td>
<td>Provincial Prayer Book</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is so easy to overlook and ignore a small booklet such as this for our Lenten Meditation. Over the years, our Diocese has engaged many writers who have faithfully, carefully and prayerfully written devotional messages during Lent. We are grateful to them. These Lenten Meditation booklets are produced with three main purposes in mind:

Firstly, to provide our members easy access to reasonably fair, devotional materials during Lent. We pray that they will be encouraged to use this devotional in their daily time with God.

Secondly, to create an opportunity for our members to write their own devotional materials which are relevant to the Malaysian situation. We pray that we can develop a good, writing culture throughout this Diocese.

Thirdly, to provide a platform for engagement and training of leaders amongst our own members. We pray that we can raise up more leaders who are passionate for the word of God.

May this Lenten Meditation booklet be your light and guide during this Lent!

Shalom,
DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA  
(DIOCESAN STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION)

Diocesan Theme 2011-2020  
Decade of Mission and Networking

Mission Challenge  
One in Christ

Our Mission & Themes

In response to the Gospel and the Mission Mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we seek to make disciples, to bring wholeness in the midst of our changing society and to grow our dioceses to the glory of God.

2011 Sowing the Seeds  
Enriching Partnership 2016
2012 Nurturing the Shoots  
Enhancing Ownership 2017
2013 Optimising God’s Vineyard  
Releasing Talents 2018
2014 Guarding the Yield  
Bringing in the Sheaves 2019
2015 Fostering Ventures  
Blowing the Trumpet 2020

DIOCESAN THEME 2020 - BLOWING THE TRUMPETS

Blowing the trumpets in the bible signify a call to assemble (Numbers 29:1), a command to march (Numbers 10:2), an alarm of war (Numbers 10:9), a holy convocation (Leviticus 23:24), a call to fast (Joel 2:15), the approach of festivals and feasts (Leviticus 25:9-10). It precedes the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1), the resurrection from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 11:15).

In our Diocese of West Malaysia, when we talk about “Blowing the Trumpets” it is a call to the assembly of Anglicans in West Malaysia to give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and mercy in blessing us not only this past decade, but these past 50 years (1970-2020)! We have been blessed with growth in membership, manpower (clergy, deaconesses, evangelists, lay pastors and a strong group of lay leaders), money, properties, new churches and most importantly, God’s holy presence. Like in the words of Numbers 10:10, we ‘blow the trumpets in times of gladness … the trumpets will remind your God of his covenant with you. I am the Lord your God.’ We praise him for his goodness ‘with trumpet sound’ (Psalm 150:3) and we re-affirm our loyalty and faith in the One who was, who is, and who is to come, Jesus Christ our Lord! Hallelujah!

Archdeacon Eddie Ong
LENT 2020

What is Lent?
The word ‘Lent’ originates from the Latin word ‘quadragesima’ or Greek ‘tessarakoste’ which is the ‘fortieth’ day before Easter. In old English, Lent simply is springtime (or ‘lenz’ in German and ‘lente’ in Dutch). In the early years of the Church it was confined to a few days before Easter. But by the Fourth Century it was extended to forty days before Easter, a period associated with the forty days and nights that Jesus spent fasting in the desert just after his baptism. Lent is still observed for this duration today.

When is Lent?
Ash Wednesday heralds the start of the season of Lent. There are six Sundays in Lent, all of which are distinguished as celebrations of the Resurrection on which Christians feast. Six days are added to complete the original forty days of the season.

Why Lent?
The main purpose of Lent is to enrich our awareness of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the individual four letters, L, E, N, T, will assist us in appreciating the significance of his mission.

Listening & Learning
Lent is primarily about our walk with the Lord – to listen, to learn and to obey the words of the Lord. For 2020, our Lenten reflection is taken from the Gospel of Mark. This Gospel, written around 57-63 A.D. highlights pertinent facts, narratives and acts of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mark establishes that Jesus is the Christ; he is the Messiah that the Jews were awaiting. It records miracles of Christ including calming the storm, walking on water, withering the fig tree (4:37-41, 6:48-51,11:12-14), healing the paralyzed man, the haemorrhaging woman, the deaf mute (2:3-12, 5:25-29, 7:31-37), casting out impure spirits (1:25-26), and raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (5:37-39). Six of the 16 chapters of Mark’s Gospel focuses on the passion, death and resurrection of Christ! Mark affirms that that there is no power that can overcome our Lord, not even death. Jesus is the One and only Son of God, risen and alive! As we
read through Mark’s gospel, we can clearly hear the voice of God speaking to our hearts and minds that Jesus is truly the beloved Son of God. The invitation is given for us to be his disciples who are called to share this gospel - good news indeed for our generation. May God the Holy Spirit, our divine Teacher and Counsellor, bless us as we reflect this year’s Lenten devotional articles.

**Examination**

Lent is a contemplative preparation for seeking spiritual renewal. “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial.” ([Liturgy of Ash Wednesday - Book of Common Prayer](https://www.bookofcommonprayer.net/ash-wednesday-liturgy/))

**Needs**

Lent exalts compassion-in-action in response to Divine love. Jesus said, “When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others.” Instead, we are to take care not to practice righteousness in front of others.

**Thanksgiving**

Lent is a time of Thanksgiving to the Lord for the blessings of life. If not for his grace, there will be no conversion, no abundant life, no forgiveness of sins, and no eternal life. Thanks be to God for his great love and mercy.

Remain blessed in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Archdeacon Eddie Ong

**Collect for Ash Wednesday**

*Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*
JESUS CHRIST, THE TRUE GOOD NEWS

“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.”
(Mark 1:1)

We begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday, preparing our hearts to immerse ourselves in the mystery of the suffering, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our hearts are often driven by the urgent and important. We may be distracted from pondering on the Word of God, and the divine in our daily lives. Slowly, our paths begin to diverge from the paths of a Jesus-shaped life. Eventually, we find ourselves far from being the kind of disciple our Lord would want us to be.

To have our lives shaped by Jesus, we first must truly know who he is, and he must reign in us. The Gospel of Mark provides answers to two questions; “Who is Jesus?” and, “What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?” The original 1st century recipients of Mark’s Gospel were attracted to the promise of the “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace), provided by the Roman Empire. It came at a price. The emperor was venerated as god. People in the Roman Empire declared their political and religious allegiance to the emperor declaring, “Caesar is Lord, and there is no other.” Anything other than this was treated as being disloyal to the emperor and punishable by death!

Mark’s Gospel declares right at the very beginning that the true good news begins with, and is, Jesus Christ: “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet”. Mark declares that Jesus, not the emperor, is “the Messiah, the Son of God.” This genuine good news began at the very beginning of time and was foretold by the ancient prophet. The readers are now presented with a choice of who will they now proclaim and worship as Lord. Is it going to be Jesus, or any other bogus saviour and gospel?

Like the 1st century readers of Mark’s gospel, we too face tremendous challenges and problems. We too are offered different solutions, and we too pay a price for our choice. We are shaped by the choices we make. The question is, “Are those choices reflective of, or leading us to, a Jesus-shaped life?”
What are some of the challenges you are facing now? What are some of the solutions or options you are presented with to solve your problems? Where is Jesus, and his Word in all these situations? Will you begin the Lenten pilgrimage to prepare the way of the Lord? Remember that your choices shape you.

“I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8)
“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.” (Isaiah 42:3)

Lord God, you breathed the Holy Spirit within me. Help me to find my way back to you. Grant me grace so that my life is shaped by Jesus, and reflect your glory to serve others. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

*Nisi Dominus Frustra!*

\(^1\) *Without God, (it is) in vain.*
Day 2 – Mark 1:9-11

YOU ARE MY SON, WHOM I LOVE

“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”
(Mark 1:11)

The account of the baptism of Jesus is an extraordinary passage told at the breathless pace of Mark’s gospel. It tells us three things about Jesus which, as we will see, are relevant and life-changing for us.

Firstly, we see that Jesus is part of the Godhead. All three persons of the Trinity are present at Jesus’ baptism – there is the voice of the Father, there is Jesus the Son, and there is the Holy Spirit descending upon him as a dove. The Father declares to Jesus, “You are my Son”. Mark is making it clear that Jesus’ identity is the Son of God. At this point Jesus hadn’t started his ministry and yet the Father declares, “with you I am well pleased.” Jesus works out of a place of secure identity as the Son of the Father, not in an attempt to earn his identity. The same affirmation of his identity by the Father is given on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9) half way through Jesus’ ministry, and towards the end at the last supper, John 13:3 says that Jesus knew “he had come from God and was returning to God”.

Secondly, we see that God is love. The Father says over Jesus, ‘You are my Son, whom I love’. Do you know that God is pure love and what’s more, loves you? When we put our faith in Jesus we become ‘children of God’, co-heirs with Christ. Not only is our identity secure, no longer having to strive for it, but you can know God loves you unconditionally and is well pleased with you because of Jesus.

Thirdly, we see that there was no barrier between heaven and earth for Jesus. Mark writes, “As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove” (v.10). Do you long for an open heaven in your life? Jesus is divine, Jesus is love, and Jesus opens heaven. Wow, but how is this relevant to us today? All these three aspects of Jesus are crucial at his crucifixion and mean that his death on the cross changes you and me forever. Precisely because Jesus was the Son of God, God himself took our sins upon him on the cross and dealt with them forever. No one else could have done this. Jesus’ divinity means you can know the cross works and you are holy in God’s sight, forgiven, free and the inheritor of eternal life.
If you need reassurance that God loves you then look at the cross. 1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” God’s love for you is unending, unconditional, perfect. We now live under an open heaven, filled with the very presence of God, precisely because of the cross. Mark describes how at Jesus’ baptism, heaven was torn open and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. In Mark 15:38 the gospel writer explains how at Jesus’ death on the cross the curtain in the temple was also torn from top to bottom. This curtain separated people from the Holy of Holies, the place in the temple where the very presence of God dwelt. Jesus’ death on the cross has removed our sins from us and in so doing removed the barrier or curtain between us and God’s presence. As a follower of Jesus you are now filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit and never alone. As a child of God, secure in your identity, you can know the reality of Romans 5:5, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Do you live with the secure identity of a child of God, loved by the Father, saved by the Son and filled with the Spirit?

Lord, thank you that you love me, sent your Son to die for me and now live within me by your Holy Spirit. Empower me today and may I live out of a secure identity as your child. In Jesus’ name. Amen!

Article by the Reverend Miles Toulmin, Vicar of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. Miles is also the Executive Director of Alpha Asia Pacific.
Day 3 – Mark 1:12-13

**TEMPTED BY SATAN**

“He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”

(Mark 1:13)

Mark does not write how and with what Jesus was tempted by Satan, whereas Matthew and Luke do. Being driven across the desert through Jordan and Israel in the year 2018, during my pilgrimage, I wondered how Jesus survived in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights! Mark further tells us that Jesus was with the wild beasts. What is interesting in these two verses is that Mark ends with, ‘and the angels were ministering to him’ (v.13). Three things come to my mind as I meditate on these two verses.

Firstly, Satan. We are told that Satan was tempting Jesus. We are reminded in 1 Peter 5:8 that Satan is like a hungry lion trying to devour God’s people. If Satan can try to do that to the Son of God, Jesus, who are we? We need to be aware at all times that Satan is prowling here and there looking for victims and we need to stay close to the Lord at all times. We cannot be sheep running away from the Shepherd! Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:10-18 about the weapons needed to protect ourselves from the powers of darkness. My nephew told me recently that he has fasted for 40 days for the past three years, but he still falls into temptation and fails. So I asked him, “How much time do you spend in prayer and reading the Word?” He could not answer. I told him, “fasting is one thing, spending time in prayer and studying the Word of God is another thing.” It is only when we spend time in prayer and reading the Word of God daily that God will give us the power to resist the devil (James 4:7).

Secondly, wild animals. In West Malaysia, unless you are driving along the East-West Highway, from Jeli to Grik, you will seldom see wild animals. During the days of Jesus, wild animals existed and they roamed freely at night. In our society, we may not have wild animals roaming our cities but there are other types of wild animals that are metaphorically devouring us! The moral decay, worldliness, lustfulness, selfishness, jealousy, hatred, anger, etc., are the “wild animals” of today! Many fail to realise that they are more dangerous than the wild animals. These wild animals are the ones we allow into intrude into our lives to destroy us and take us away from the Lord. These
are the very things that destroy our relationship with God. Jesus survived the wild animals all because he was ministered to by the angels.

Finally, the angels. I believe in angels and that the Lord has sent them to care and look after each one of us. I have had personal experiences in my life. Psalm 91:11 came very much alive to me when I was a soldier back in 1982. The bullets were flying over my head and being a very young soldier, I began to cry out in fear. The next morning when I took the Bible to read and pray, Psalm 91:11 spoke about angels God sent to guide and protect us. That was the turning point in my life as a soldier. In 1991, I was returning from St. Andrew’s Church, Kuala Terengganu late in the night. I was so exhausted and by the time I reached Pasir Puteh, I felt asleep! The next thing I knew was that I was sleeping on my bed in Kota Baru! The Lord drove the car for me and carried me back home safely. The same angels which ministered to my Lord were ministering to me!

**Ponder**

What do you think are the wild animals that seek to devour you?

**Promise**

“He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” (Psalm 121:3-4)

**Prayer**

“And mayest Thou not lead us to temptation, but deliver us from the evil, because Thine is the reign, and the power, and the glory -- to the ages. Amen.” (Matthew 6:13, Young’s Literal Translation).

*Article by the Venerable Jacob George John, the Archdeacon for the East Coast. Archdeacon Jacob is also the Priest at All Souls’ Church, Cameron Highlands, Pahang.*
GOOD NEWS IS NOT GOOD NEWS IF IT ARRIVES LATE

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”
(Mark 1:15)

Jesus’ ministry began at the time that John the Baptist’s ministry came to an abrupt end when Herod, ruler of Galilee imprisoned him (Matthew 14:3). Jesus’ earlier baptism and the descent of Holy Spirit upon him set the stage for this ministry (vv.9-11).

Jesus first went to Galilee to kick start this ministry. Galilee was a lesser known region compared to Jerusalem, a city of great kings and the site of God’s temple. However, he knew that a prophet must perish in Jerusalem. A ministry that was to be fruitful for all time must be exercised elsewhere, thus prompting Jesus to begin his ministry in the northern region of Galilee.

Jesus went to preach God’s good news indicating that this comes from God as the Father is both the author and sender of this good news.

Jesus had already set his heart and mind to do God’s will and even as a young teenager, he was able to tell his parents that he must be on his Father’s business (Luke 2:49).

Mark described that the time is at hand because Jesus himself was the herald of this good news and was sent by God to usher in the kingdom of God. Luke 4:18 describes clearly the ministry of Jesus. It is good news because Jesus’ ministry was to be holistic, bringing liberation from social injustice, healing of the body and spirit, and the reign of righteousness to all of mankind. It was to bring men and women back into a right and personal relationship with God.

Jesus then described two very necessary prerequisites for entry into the kingdom of God which are, repentance and belief. This was echoed by Paul in Acts 2:21,38. Repentance would mean, to turn away from sins and disobedience and then to redirect one’s life in a totally opposite direction towards God, trusting and obeying him.
Having repented, one then has to believe. Romans 10:9 states that we must believe with our hearts. So, believing is not just giving the good news our mental assent, having only head knowledge, but deep down in our inner being, we believe this God to the extent that we trust our lives into his hands and obediently follow him all the way.

Today, we are called to imitate Jesus. We are to obey the Great Commission to go and preach the good news to all nations. Let us carry out this urgent task with compassion and courage, presenting the gospel with clarity and confidence and doing it continuously with commitment. Let us walk the talk. Let our behaviour match our belief and our character correspond with our creed so that we can effectively carry out this mission. In doing so, let us not look down or neglect lesser known and less attractive areas to begin our ministry or avoid lower classes of people in our sharing of the gospel. The good news is for all people, in all places, for all times until Jesus comes again.

**Ponder**

When was the last time you shared the good news? Good news will not be good news if it arrives late. Let us sense the urgency of the matter and do our utmost to save the lost at all cost so that the unbelievers may repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Promise**

“And it shall be, every one -- whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, he shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21, Young’s Literal Translation)

**Prayer**

Father, we thank you for sending Jesus Christ not only to be the herald and bearer of good news but also the bearer of our sins on the cross for our salvation. Forgive us if we have kept this good news to ourselves. Give us compassion, passion and boldness to urgently share this good news with unbelievers. Amen.

*Article by the Reverend Dato’ Dr Yeoh Beng San, Priest at Parish of Cornerstone Sanctuary, Ipoh. Rev. Yeoh is also a medical doctor.*
Day 5 – Mark 1:21–28

**BE QUIET! COME OUT OF HIM**

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”

The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

(Mark 1:25-26)

This passage relates two separate incidents in which we hear of the people’s reaction to Jesus. It was amazement. (Mark 1:22,27)

In the first incident, in verses 21–22, Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath. The synagogue is a place for teaching the Scripture. Teaching in the synagogue was not unusual for Jesus. However, the people reacted with amazement when he taught, because he taught as ‘one who had authority, not like the teachers of the law’ (v.22).

To the Jews, there were two types of teachers of the law – those who interpreted the law (usually the scribes) and those who had the authority to expand the law (and speak with authority). Jesus fell in the category of those with authority.

In the second incident, a man in the synagogue was possessed by an evil spirit and Jesus exorcised the spirit. It would be natural to think that these two stories have nothing to do with each other. But there is a link.

In the first incident of teaching, Jesus spoke as one who had authority. In the second, he proved his authority as even evil spirits obeyed him. Jesus’ words were backed up with action which proved he did have authority.

Let us ponder on the reaction of the evil spirit. The spirit cried out the identity of Jesus – “Jesus of Nazareth … the Holy One of God” (v.24). The evil spirit recognized Jesus as man as well as God.

Instead of basking in that glory, Jesus told him, “Be quiet! Come out of him!”

Jesus did not need the evil spirit to authenticate who he is. Jesus spoke with authority because he knows God and spoke the truth about God.

Likewise, we too, should not always be impressed by good speakers. Instead we should pray for wisdom and listen if they are speaking the truth of God.
Sometimes, when hearing a good speaker giving wrong teaching, we figuratively, need to say, “Be quiet! Come out of him!”

**Ponder**

What was it that proved Jesus had authority? Was it because he spoke with a loud voice or had great oratory skills?

**Promise**

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

**Prayer**

Dear Father, thank you for Jesus who came to teach and show us your love. Thank you for his promise that he is always with us, to the very end of the age. Help us to make disciples and be witnesses of your truth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

*Editor’s Notes: “The devil is an unclean spirit, because he has lost all the purity of his nature, because he acts in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit of God, and by his suggestions defiles the spirits of men ... This unclean spirit hated and dreaded Christ, because he knew him to be the Holy One, especially against his holiness.” (Matthew Henry Concise Commentary)*

*Article by Ms A Annamaney, Chairperson of the Diocesan Anglican Care, and Anglican Alliance Regional Facilitator for East and South-East Asia. She is a member of St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.*
Day 6 – Mark 1:29-31

JESUS HEALS

“As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.” (Mark 1:29-31)

After teaching with authority and healing a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue, Mark tells us that Jesus went to Simon’s house together with a few disciples. He probably went over for a short rest before continuing his ministry in the evening.

However, Simon’s mother in-law was down with fever and they told him about it. He went towards her and held her by the hand to raise her up (the Gospel of Luke says he rebuked the fever too). She was immediately healed and began to serve them.

Why is this personal healing seen as important enough that all the Synoptic Gospels mention it?

Jesus healed many people as part of teaching the Gospel wherever he went. The gospels record many incidents of Jesus healing people and even today many testify to this truth in their own journey of faith. We understand that not everyone is healed of all sicknesses supernaturally and modern medicine can be seen as another form of God’s healing. However, we also know that some are definitely healed by God’s grace amazingly even when doctors have given up. It reminds us that God is the ultimate healer even as we may depend on modern medications and that we should not shy away from seeking him in our infirmities.

Coming back to the incident, Peter’s mother in-law is said to immediately serve them before Jesus began the next wave of preaching and healing. This tells us that God’s grace is given for us to continue to serve him in the ministry of the Gospel. Even if we are down in sicknesses or other weaknesses, God can heal or sustain us to continue to serve him.

May we depend on him as we continue to serve him for the ministry of the gospel of Christ.
Why is this personal healing of Peter’s mother-in-law seen as important enough that Matthew, Mark and Luke mentioned it?

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (Psalm 103:2-4).

Father God, our healer, we thank you that you grant us healing in body, mind and spirit that we may continue to serve you and live for the glory of your name. For those who are suffering in illnesses today, we pray that you will grant healing and strength according to your will and grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

*Editor’s Notes: “There is today in Capernaum a house that scholars believe to be the house of Simon and Andrew. It sits adjacent to the site of the synagogue, so it may have been a matter of only a few steps for Jesus and the disciples to move from the synagogue to the house. Matthew 4:13 tells us that Jesus makes his adult home in Capernaum, but nobody has been able to identify his house. Perhaps he lives in the house near the synagogue with Peter’s family... Simon’s mother-in-law is sick, and Jesus heals her on the Sabbath. It is also possible that the service that Peter’s mother-in-law will render (v. 31) also constitutes a violation of the Sabbath. A fever might not sound serious to us, but it was different in that pre-penicillin world. People died of fevers (or the infections that caused the fevers). This woman’s illness is no trifling matter.” (Source: https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/mark-129-39/)*

_Article by the Reverend Gerrad Emmanuel, Vicar of Holy Spirit Church, Ipoh._
Day 7 – Mark 1:35–39

PRAYER BEFORE PREACHING

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”
(Mark 1:35)

God created this world. He created humans to be fruitful, to multiply and to have dominion over his beautiful creation. God found everything he created was very good. (Genesis 1:28). However, due to the disobedience of people, beginning from Adam and Eve, we see a fast crumbling world. Today we live in a “broken world” which needs healing. Who can restore this broken world? How can we find “order” in this seemingly “irreversible disorder”?

In the midst of this very bleak backdrop, the church of God is constantly and continuously giving hope to humanity by boldly preaching and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus and his saving grace. The Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus is the only answer to the mess around us as the Scripture is God-inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Word of God is truly enlightening and thus must be preached for the benefit of humanity. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

It is the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:17)

Has the Word of God and the “voice” of Jesus and his goodness touched the hearts and minds of the people in the church and the community around us? Preaching the Word of God is a necessary process to give everyone the hope of salvation and a “light to the path”. The Word of God leads to the holistic development of an individual. What must we do before we preach the Gospel and teach the Word of God? We must pray for divine presence and intervention. It is evident in Mark 1:35 that ‘rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he (Jesus) departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed.’ Jesus spent time in prayer before he went to preach in the synagogues and to cast out demons. Why is praying essential before we preach the Gospel and teach the Word of God? We need spiritual strength, wisdom, knowledge and understanding to ensure that sound preaching would impact the target audience and lead them to Jesus. We must pray for the removal of all impediments, distractions and unjust structures which hinder the preaching of the Good News of Jesus. We need to pray for God to move the “heart of Pharaoh” to release the people to “the promised
land”, that is, to the Kingdom of God. Without Jesus, we can do nothing. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

Transformation of hearts and minds is brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by dynamic motivational speakers with powerful rhetoric, though it must be appreciated that good communication skills are helpful. Let us go on our knees in humility before the Lord and plead for the power of the Holy Spirit to inspire us to preach impactful messages from the Word of God. Otherwise it will be a futile exercise and we will be wasting everybody’s time.

**Ponder**

Do we spend quality time with the Lord in prayer before we preach and teach the Word of God?

**Promise**

Whilst the circumstances around us may appear to be hopeless and helpless to preach and to make disciples, let us be constantly reminded that “with God nothing is impossible”. Jesus has promised to be with us always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20).

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, inspire us to preach and teach your Word faithfully and diligently so that many lives will be transformed by your love and saving grace. Amen.

*Article by Mr D Raja Singam, the Diocesan Registrar and a member of the Provincial Synod. He is a member of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ipoh.*
Day 8 - Mark 1:40-45

**GODLY COMPASSION IS PASSIONATE ACTION, NOT PROMOTION**

“Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.”

(Mark 1:42)

Near the tail end of a Sunday service, a half-naked psychologically affected man entered a church and sat in the front pew. The congregation members looked puzzled, the elders and some strong young people walked quickly toward him, dragged him and thrown him out of the church, came back, and occupied their seats again with a look of accomplishment. But what would Jesus have done in such a situation?

In this passage, we see Jesus to be very different. He meets a leper crying for help at a time when lepers were not allowed into the village or town and shunned away to live in wilderness, where there is usually no human presence. People were prohibited to touch them, or else they will become ritually unclean (Leviticus 13:45-46).

What was Jesus’ response when he heard the cry the leper?

- He was compassionate: ‘He reached out his hand’ (v.41).
- He touched the untouchable: ‘He touched the man’ (v41).
- He healed him willingly: “I am willing, be clean!” (v.41)
- He gave a strong warning not to give publicity to him: “See that you don’t tell this to anyone.” (v.44)
- He instructed him to do what is lawfully right: “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” (v.44)
- He took the place that was vacated by the leper, outside the town, in the lonely places: Jesus ‘stayed outside in lonely places’ (v.45).

What was the response of the leper?

- He cried and appealed to the right man, Jesus, ‘the Holy One of God.’ (Mark 1:24)
- He had complete faith in Jesus: ‘he can make me clean.’ (1:40)
• After receiving the healing, despite told not to so, ‘he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news’ (v.45). His joyful gratitude was uncontrollable and contagious.

**Ponder**

How do I react to situations, when I’m in a helping position? Does it make me feel that I’m higher than those help seekers? Am I moved to Christ-like compassion or filled with arrogance? Am I selflessly willing to help or seeking for promotion and publicity? How am I identifying myself with the needy and marginalised?

As a help-seeker, where do I appeal in times of need, sorrow, pain and marginalization? Where do I place my faith and trust – on worldly influencers or on the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? After receiving the gift of healing, do I glorify God for his goodness and faithfulness? How faithful am I to the One who is worthy of all glory and honour?

**Promise**

“I am willing,” Jesus said. “Be clean!” (v.41)

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, at times I have looked for help at the wrong places. Forgive me, as I have given the glory that you alone deserve, to mortal human beings and have put my trust on perishable things. Nudge me with your still small voice to always look upon you. Lord, when you give me the opportunity to be of some assistance to fellow human beings, protect and preserve me from all sinful human cravings for self-promotion. Teach me to humble myself at all times like your only begotten Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ who reigns with you, in the unity of Holy Spirit, as One God now and forever. Amen.

*Article by Ms Jasmine Adaickalam, a member of the Diocesan Synod and worships at St James’ Church, Kuala Lumpur. Her calling is to serve the Lord through B40 Community Engagement and Holistic Transformation.*
TO WHOM DOES IT MATTER?

Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. (Mark 2:9-12)

Spectators – we find them everywhere. In a football match, there can be thousands upon thousands watching from their seats in the stadium shouting support or condemning the performance of the players. Each will have their own favourite – individual player or team. Sometimes spectators get too carried away and become violent. Sometimes they vent out their frustration through social media, voicing their grievances and hoping the world will notice and give a little attention to them.

In the world we live in today, that is the trend. There are spectators who will often easily, casually, and constantly give comments of various kinds. Often comments are made without tact and sensitivity. Many times it affected the lives of the people involved. Careers ruined, reputation tarnished, or sometimes life ended – all because of careless words.

 Believe it or not, this “trend” already existed during the time of Jesus! In the passage today, we read of an incident where some friends brought a sick man on a stretcher to Jesus for healing. Imagine this scene: a “famous” teacher was in town. News had it that he can even heal! No expensive treatment – the poor were attracted. But the “rich” were sceptical. Can he really heal? Was it just a deception? The “rich and powerful” were all too careful to observe every event that transpired. The room was slowly being filled by people – the “ordinary folks.” In the meantime, the “learned” and the religious teachers were carefully observing. After all, what do those “ordinary folk” know? Only the “learned” and the religious teachers can evaluate and comment.

With a simple remark, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (v.5) and the sick man was healed! How can this be? Spectators began giving their comments. “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (v.7) One said
this, the other that. But...what about the sick man? What truly mattered to him? He was sick but now he is healed.

In the church today, there are many spectators but few participants. Comments come from almost every corner when an event takes place, for example an outreach event. Spectators will comment, “Why feed the poor?” “Why bother about the homeless?” or “Why waste funds on unbelievers?” Have we ever considered what it means to the recipient of each kind gesture extended? It matters. It matters to the recipient and it matters to God (Matthew 25:35-40). Because it matters, we need participants who can be the “hands and feet” of the Church, applying what we preach from the pulpit as relevant to the community around us.

Ponder

Do we have the habit of being a spectator and criticising or commenting on church activities without lifting a finger to actively participate in church ministry? Let us pause awhile, look into the mirror, and examine our conduct as a member of the Body of Christ.

Promise

And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Prayer

Dear Lord, teach us to guard our conduct that what we do may edify and bless in order to build your church for your glory.

Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee, lecturer at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (Bahasa Malaysia Department). She works closely with indigenous people groups.
Day 10 – Mark 2:13-17.

JESUS, THE SIN HEALER

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:13-17)

In the previous section, some of the scribes were thinking “Why does he speak like this? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7) The charge against Jesus was that he was a blasphemer. However, Jesus answered their question by declaring that he had the authority as the Son of Man to forgive sin.

It is no coincidence that the calling of Levi and the healing of the leper (Mark 1:40-42) form a ‘Marcan sandwich’ around the ‘forgiveness’ of the paralytic. Mark is focusing on the subject of sin in all three stories particularly explaining how a sinner’s relationship with God can be healed.

The leper was declared ceremonially ‘unclean’ under the Mosaic Law and an outcast from the Jewish community (Leviticus 13:45-6). Sacrifices for atonement were required, suggesting a symbolic link between leprosy and sin (Leviticus 14:1-32). The sacrifices enabled the cleansed person to renew fellowship with God and his people.

Levi was a sinful Israelite, presumably a deserter from the priestly tribe. Tax collectors were hated because they collected money for the political hierarchy (whether Herod or the Romans). Not only was Levi a collaborator but tax collectors were also known for lining their own pockets.

Jesus’ association with ‘sinners’ reached a climax when he was seen having ‘table-fellowship’ with ‘sinners’ (v.15). The Pharisees asked, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” The charge against Jesus was of being a compromiser. Jesus answers their question with the analogy of a doctor’s role.
The healing of the leper and the call of Levi reveal that Jesus ‘calls out’ the worst of sinners to be in a right relationship with God and God’s people. Verses 16-17 clearly reveal the Pharisees had completely misunderstood God’s whole eternal purpose. The Pharisees went beyond the Law, even embracing the oral tradition to maintain a ‘clean lifestyle’. To them, anyone who did not observe the same rigorous rules was a ‘sinner’. However, nobody can be ‘clean’ through the works of the Law in God’s eyes but only through grace by faith (Romans 9:30-2).

In the analogy that Jesus uses, a doctor is not concerned with the healthy but rather his prime focus is the sick – in God’s eyes, it is those sick with sin. The truth is, everybody including the Pharisee is spiritually sick with sin. Jesus is the Spiritual Physician who came to call and heal sinners. Jesus has the authority to forgive sin and bring sinners into a right relationship with God and with forgiven sinners.

**Ponder**

Do I constantly remind myself I am a healed forgiven sinner?

**Promise**

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness; you have been healed by his wounds” (1 Peter 2:24).

**Prayer**

As one who has been healed and sins forgiven, I pray for this same mercy and grace for my ‘neighbour’.

*Article by the Reverend Lee Kon Yim, a Chartered Quantity Surveyor by training and Priest at Church of Christ the King, Subang Jaya. He helps out at St Peter’s Church, Kuala Lumpur.*
HOLDING THE OLD AND THE NEW TOGETHER

“No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.” (Mark 2:22)

As we read through Mark’s account of the early ministry of Jesus, have you noticed how urgent everything is? Five times, in the first chapter, Mark uses the phrase ‘and immediately’ as Jesus rushes around, from place to place in Galilee, preaching and healing. People are amazed at his confidence, authority and power, even if the Scribes and Pharisees are scandalised by his eating with ‘tax-collectors and sinners’ and working on the Sabbath. Now, in today’s passage, he is, once again, sitting loose to the traditions of the Law as he and his disciples, doing the Lord’s work, neglect the fast. The disciples of others fast, so are those of Jesus ‘above the law’?

Jesus has a quick answer. The demands of the Kingdom, the new life of love, are urgent and more important than worrying about making sure you conform to demands of the old. To worry about fasting and so maintaining purity, by obedience to the Law, would hinder the urgency of bringing new life to those in need.

Jesus does not say that in so many words. Instead, he gives three illustrations to make them work out their priorities for themselves.

Can the guests fast if they are at a wedding with the bridegroom?

Do you mend an old garment with a new, unshrunk piece of cloth or put new, lively wine into an old shrunk wineskin? Of course not; it would be disastrous.

Elsewhere in the Gospels, facing criticism for working on the Sabbath, he asks his questioners directly “which of you, having an ox or an ass that has fallen into a well will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath?” (Luke 14:5) Similarly, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Priest and the Levite presumably felt they had a good reason, keeping the Law as they did, to ‘walk by the blood-spattered Samaritan’ on the other side.

Jesus is consistent in his forceful teaching that the demands of the Gospel of Love far outweigh the demands of the Law. “You have heard it said” he says, “but I say to you...”
Our lives as Christians are not governed by the rules of the Church in the same way, but there are times when we are faced by similar dilemmas. I remember, once, being stopped on my way to speak at a service, by someone wanting help. In order to really deal with him, I would have been late. I am not proud of my decision to excuse myself to this day!

**Ponder**

Are there times in your life and ministry, when the demands of selfless love necessitate your sitting light to the church’s traditional teaching and practice, or simply follow your natural inclination?

**Promise**

Jesus said, ‘When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth’ (John 16.13).

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, grant that I may, today and every day, not be tied by convention and tradition but be given the courage to act with love and the confidence and to speak the truth, so that you may bring new life and hope into needy hearts and lives, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

---

*Article by the Reverend Canon Tony Barnard, former Canon Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral, England. Tony and his wife Anne, hosted many Malaysian Anglicans when they visited Lichfield during the years of our diocesan companion relationship.*
Day 12 – Mark 3:7-19

CROWDS OR DISCIPLES?

“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed.”
(Mark 3:7)

‘I would like to think of Jesus as … How would you fill that blank? How we relate to Jesus invariably depends on who we think he is. Who do you think he is?

Jesus’ teaching and deeds are so incredible that it is unsurprising that many noticed him. Earlier in the gospel we found people crowding around him for healing (Mark 1:37-39). The same would be true in this passage and beyond. This is understandable. If we saw Jesus as a healer who could take away our infirmities wouldn’t we seek him? Mark, however, gives no indication that the crowds thought of Jesus as anything other than a healer.

Another group followed him with different intentions. They saw him as one who disregarded, perhaps desecrated, cherished tradition. This group, the religious leaders, regarded him with more nefarious intent (Mark 3:6).

Still another group is portrayed, the unclean spirits. They seem to be the only ones who recognise Jesus for who he is. They do the appropriate thing. They fall down before him in homage to the King (v.11).

But there is a fourth group. We find that twelve come to him. Those who would learn from him, stay with him, and believe in him. But what a motley crowd! Two brothers with rather explosive characters (Boarneges), one zealot (Simon) who might have been an anti-Roman terrorist, one traitor who collected high taxation from his own people to give to the Romans (Matthew), and other quite normal, imperfect people – like us. Why do they respond to him rightly? Mark tells us. It is those whom he called (v.13) who came to him. We sometimes talk about having to choose Jesus. While that is true, we see that, in his great mercy, it is Jesus who first chooses us - sinful, imperfect people. And those whom he chooses will come to him. Significantly it is 12 whom he chooses. This number is representative of the 12 tribes that form the nation of Israel, God’s people. These 12 were then to be the foundation of the new people. God’s church, his people. Like them, we praise God for having opened our eyes to
come to Jesus. Like them, we thank God that while we often fail, he works in us to change us to be more Christ-like. This Lent, may we recall the One who demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to die for our sins and called us out of the crowds to be his disciples who believe in him.

**Ponder**

Perhaps we find ourselves amongst the crowds. There are times when we love Jesus as our Saviour and our Lord. But there might also be times when we treat him merely as a provider. Then there are times when we find that his ways don’t always relate to ours and in those times we choose to ignore him. In truth, are we not too different in behaviour from the crowds we read about?

**Promise**

Jesus asked, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 16:15-17)

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you that while we were still your enemies and undeserving of your love, you graciously sent your dear Son to die for us and justify us from our sins. Thank you for enabling us to recognise Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We pray that you will enable us to respond rightly to you and to seek to glorify you with the way that we live.

*Article by the Reverend Nick Loi is the Pastor of Christ Church, Ipoh.*
Day 13 – Mark 3:31-35

**MY BROTHER, SISTER AND MOTHER**

Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35)

In the Asian cultures of Malaysia, respect for parents is very strong. It was also the case in Jewish culture. The fifth commandment – the first to deal with our relationships with people as opposed to the first four which deal with our relationships with and honouring of God – is very clear – “Honour your father and your mother.”

In today’s passage, Jesus is in a house, with a huge number of people who have gathered to listen to his teaching. His family come – they are very concerned at what Jesus is doing and think that he needs help. They thought he had gone mad! His family are outside the house, and can’t get in, because of the crowd. But the crowd hears that they are looking for Jesus, and tell him that his family has arrived – his mother and brothers.

Jesus responds unusually when he is told that his mother and brothers are looking for him. Rather than going to see them, he tells the crowd that everyone who does God’s will is his brother and sister and mother.

This is challenging – Jesus should honour his mother, but his mother is trying to stop his ministry out of love for him. Mark’s gospel doesn’t tell us what happens next – but when Jesus is next at home (Mark 6), he teaches in the synagogue and the locals are offended. Jesus concludes that “a prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household” (Mark 6:4).

The challenge for us is twofold – how can we balance our duties to our family with our service to God? And when our family members are passionate for Jesus, how do we help them rather than hindering them?
Ponder

When should we put family priorities ahead of church priorities? And when should church priorities be placed ahead of family priorities? We need wisdom to order our lives according to God’s will!

Promise

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:35)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to be a member of your family – help me to do your will so that I too can be your brother, sister, mother.

Editor’s Notes: When Jesus was told his family wanted to talk to him, he stated that his family consisted of those who “did the will of God” (vv. 33-35). It was not that Jesus did not love his earthly family but he was simply saying that the highest relationships of life are spiritual and not physical. True family is based upon common experience, interest and goals. Christians have that common experience of having trusted Christ as their Saviour. The common goal of Christians is that of seeking to know Christ better and to bring others to him. The basis for true kinship is not solely a matter of flesh and blood. (Source: https://www.family-times.net/commentary/mark-3-31/)

Article by Mr Edward Clayton, a Lay Reader in All Souls’ International Community Church, Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur. He heads ‘Navigate Together’, a Christian ministry that provides family and youth support to the expatriate communities here. He works as a Partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers’ advisory business.
Day 14 – Mark 4:1-20

THE FOUR TYPES OF SOILS

Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”
(Mark 1:1)

In the parable of the soils, Jesus tells us that the “sower” is one who sows the “word of God”. It might be the Spirit of God, a preacher, a teacher, a missionary, a gospel song, a gospel tract, or a witness. The “seed” is the gospel of grace. It is the good news that Jesus came into this world, died for sinners, rose again from the dead and offers full and free salvation to everyone who will receive him. Some of the “seed” produce fruit and some does not. The problem does not lie in the “seed”. All the seed is good “seed”. Each kernel holds the potential to produce fruit. The problem is not the “seed”; the problem is the “soil”. The “soil” represents the heart or the mind of the person who hears the gospel of grace. Let’s consider the minds that are revealed in this parable:

The Closed Mind (vv.4,15). The “way side” refers to the narrow footpaths that ran beside and through the fields. In Matthew 13:19, we are told that this speaks of the person who hears the gospel but who doesn’t “understand it”. That is, they cannot make the connection between the claims of the gospel and their own life. When the seed is sown, the devil comes “immediately” to snatch away the gospel seed. The “seed” could not penetrate the “soil”. The “seed” could not germinate. There could be no life. There could be no fruit. This is a picture of a lost mind.

The Confused Mind (vv.5-6,16-17). The “stony path” refers to the ground without much earth. This kind of soil speaks of the mind that makes an emotional response to the presentation of the gospel. This is seen in the words ‘receive it with gladness.’ Perhaps, they heard a shallow presentation of the gospel that presents the benefits of salvation but does not share the costs. This person knows nothing about repentance, dying to self, and turning away from the old life. They have a difficult time making a genuine, lasting break with their sins. They shrink away from the radical claims of Christ and the cross.

The Clustered Mind (vv.7,18-19). The “thorny path” refers to thorns in the field. This is a picture of a person who tries to have the benefit of the gospel while still clinging to the old life of sin. Without a conscious break from the old life of sin, this person does
not have a chance of being saved. The seed of the gospel cannot survive to produce fruit in a heart filled with other things. Jesus said it was the cares of the world, the quest for earthly riches, and the lust for the things of this world that spelled disaster for this kind of soil. This kind of person begins well, but soon fades away.

*The Cultivated Mind* (vv.8,20). The “good ground” refers to good soil in the field. This is a picture of the heart that has been ploughed deeply by the Word of God, and tilled by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). It is a picture of a heart that has been worked over and prepared by the grace of God. When the seed of the gospel enters this kind of heart, it germinates, grows up and bears fruit. This soil represents the only soil among the four that pictures a saved heart. You see, when Jesus enters a life through the gospel message, he will make his presence known beyond all doubt. He will cause the believer to begin to bear fruit for the glory of God.

**Ponder**

Examine your confession of faith and be sure you called on Jesus to save you because you were convicted of your sins, and because he was calling you to come to him. Examine your life today and see whether or not your life is producing spiritual fruit to the glory of God.

**Promise**

When God changes a life, he does it forever (2 Corinthians 5:17). What he does in you will last. You may fall, but you will not stay away from his house, his presence, his throne, his Word, his people and you will not stay out of his will.

**Prayer**

Father, thank you for accepting me and changing me so that I can be fruitful and worthy of your praise. Amen.

*Article by Veni Selvam, Lay Reader and Hon. Treasurer at St Katherine’s Church, Kajang. Veni is also the Hon. Treasurer for Council of Churches Malaysia Women’s Work and the Diocesan Golden Circle.*
Day 15 – Mark 4:21-25

LAMP ON A STAND

He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” (Mark 4:21-25)

Two important comments.

Jesus has just explained his Parable of the Sower to his disciples. He has observed that though the crowds will understand the words of the parables, they do not grasp the meaning of the parables and what he is about. During the earthly lifetime of Jesus, the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are only understood if at all by the disciples. In so many ways, Jesus saw things differently from his contemporaries.

But though that is indeed the situation as Jesus teaches in Galilee, things will change. It is of this change that Jesus comments in the verses for today.

The first comment is that the light of the Gospel is not intended to be hidden, for all time. The intention is that the light should shine. What was inexplicable when Jesus first taught it, will become clear as his story unfolds. The light shines. For those who live on the far side of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, things fall into place. Things fall into place for those who seek to follow the Lord Jesus today. The light shines out and people come to believe and as they believe they rejoice in God. So the Gospel is proclaimed. This means for us that the good news is to be shared, both by word and also by authentically Christian lives.

The second is that we need to take care how we listen out for the Lord Jesus. What Jesus has to say is often very challenging. Because it runs counter to the way the world sees things, it is easily dismissed. We need to be attentive, lest we become very superficial, missing the challenge, and refusing the offered good. We are then to pay close and prayerful attention to Jesus, if we are to grasp the mysteries of the Kingdom. The promise is that Jesus does disclose himself to those who seek him. That is
because he is the key who unlocks the wonders of the Kingdom to those who seek him; to those whose lives are increasingly more deeply rooted and grounded in him.

The Kingdom of God is indeed fruitful, bringing to the disciple a restored relationship with God, and also the wonders which follow from the presence and action of the Spirit, in the daily lives of ordinary people making of ordinary situations, extraordinary. There are no limits to the fruit of the Kingdom. Whole nations are changed by faithful prayer.

Ponder

That the first disciples only began to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom as their assumptions about God and religion were challenged. What is the challenge of Jesus to me this day? How can I share the light of Christ this day?

Promise

That once we begin to grasp the mysteries of the Kingdom, provided we remain attentive to Jesus, our understanding will grow more and more. We have a generous God. Whoever has will be given yet more.

Prayer

That we would lead Christ-like lives, so be bearers of the light of Christ to those among whom we live and work. I recall the words of an old hymn, “We've a story to tell to the nations.”

We've a story to tell to the nations, that shall turn their hearts to the right,
A story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and light,
For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, the kingdom of love and light.

Article by the Reverend Canon Richard Kirton, one of the pioneer lecturers of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (1979 – 1981). Canon Kirton is also the Bishop’s Canon Commissary in England.
Day 16 – Mark 4:30-32

THE MUSTARD SEED

“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.” (Mark 4:3-32)

The parable of the Mustard Seed is found in all three Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matthew 13:31 and Luke 13:19), and the mustard seed is featured again in Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6. It’s a simple parable that is often misused and misunderstood.

The preacher’s saying that you need faith to work miracles or to be healed doesn’t sit well with me. I think these Mustard Seed parables are really saying you need to put your faith “in” God and he will work the miracle and healing.

Personally, I find it so frustrating when preachers use the Mustard Seed sayings to focus on the congregation and their lack of faith. This is a parable about what the kingdom of God is like, not what you or I are like.

So the focus of the small seed of faith is not about “how much faith do you have?” or “you need to have more faith!” But the kingdom focus is on the ground into which it is planted: ‘yet when it is planted’ (v.32). A seed on its own can do nothing. It’s all about the soil. The seed when sown into the soil has unlimited potential for growth. Faith on its own has no power. Faith placed “in” God, faith “in” Jesus Christ, faith “in” the soil of the scriptures brings about growth and maturity (as in the outcome of Mark 4; Matthew 13 and Luke. 13), and the uprooting or trees and levelling of mountains (Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6).

What happens when you put your seed of faith “in” God? What happens when, as some translations of v.32 put it, you are “planted in” or “sown in?” The New International Version (NIV) loses something of the powerful effects of putting your faith in God. The NIV simply says “with such big branches” but the verb used here in the Greek is much more forceful, creative and powerful: You will “shoot out or send out great branches.” Here branches can be understood figuratively as “limbs.”
Living in the Kingdom is about a Christlike extending of our arms out wide in an act of embrace and protection. When we extend our arms like this to others, they can “perch” or find a place of rest, a place to settle and call home, quite literally “able to live.” When we extend our arms to others they can find “shade” or protection, comfort, and restoration (cf. Jonah 4:6; and Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4-6). The “birds of the air” in v.32 could be translated as wild, undomesticated birds of the field or forest. Here is a symbol of people who are not yet part of the kingdom, who have not yet found a place to nest. These birds are unbelievers. Part of Christlike growth in the Kingdom of God is for each believer to reach out to unbelievers and offer them the life, rest and comfort of Jesus.

Where do I put my seed of faith? Is my faith “in” God to bring forth my growth and healing?

The promise of Mark 4:32 is that you can find a “perch” and “shade” – a place of life and rest, and a place of protection and comfort.

In 1716 Count Zinzendorf founded “The Order of the Mustard Seed” a Holy Spirit led prayer meeting that lasted for 100 years! Join their prayer to be “true to Christ,” “kind to people,” and “for the gospel to be taken to all nations.”

Article by the Reverend Dr James Harding, Principal of St Paul’s Theological College Malaysia. He is also a Priest at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur.
Day 17 – Mark 4:35-41

**MASTER, THE TEMPEST IS RAGING**

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”
(Mark 4:41)

Some people find it difficult to accept that Jesus is God. They have no problems with him being a good teacher, or miracle worker; but not God. For them, Jesus’ divinity is a great obstacle to faith. How can a God, if he was truly God, die? Or, how can a God who died be worthy of worship? Indeed, at a public event some years ago, one university student renounced her Christian faith because she could not accept Jesus as God.

In our passage for today, Jesus’ disciples are with him in a boat when they find themselves in the midst of a storm - not just any storm, but a great and violent one. The waves were tossing the boat around, even breaking over it and filling it up with water. Fear and distress gripped them, tempered perhaps by the annoyance at the sight of their master and teacher still sleeping comfortably. They wake Jesus. Their claim that he did not care that they were about to perish is best understood as a request for help.

Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Amazingly, the storm cleared and it was completely calm. In the original Greek, it is described as a great calm; a direct opposite to the great storm endangering their lives just moments ago.

Jesus then replied the disciples, essentially telling them that they were afraid because they still did not have faith in him. They need not have been afraid. The disciples were in awe - they feared with great fear, in Greek. They asked each other “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” – A rhetorical question confessing Jesus’ greatness.

For us, the question leads us to pause and consider who Jesus is that even nature submits to his power and authority. The answer, declared at the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark and echoes throughout – Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. He is
fully God and fully human, and thus, is able to lay down his life at the cross, to redeem us from our sins, that we may be reconciled to God.

The Gospel of Mark was written at a time when the early Christians were under persecution and social discrimination. In times of fear and trouble, even when lives are in danger, the assurance that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God brings strength, encouragement and comfort.

**Ponder**

Are we thoroughly convinced that Jesus is the Son of God? Or is there some doubt or difficulty to be cleared? As we journey through the Gospel of Mark this Lent, let us reassure ourselves that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God.

**Promise**

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed to us your Son, Jesus, and that through him you have forgiven us and reconciled us to you. Help us, through your Spirit, to firmly believe Jesus as your Son, that we may proclaim him as such, in word and in deed, to the glory of your name. Amen.

*Article by Mr Daniel Chai, a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee. He worships at St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.*
Day 18 – Matthew 5:38-48

**LET'S BEGIN THE GAME OF LIFE – LOVE ALL**

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

(Matthew 5:44)

The Bible passage for reflection during this Lenten period (Mt 5:38-48) is a segment of Jesus’ hard teachings on human behavior, popularly known as the Sermon on the Mount. The passage sets out a series of commands and instructions (vv.38-47) for righteous living, which are most difficult to put into practice.

In saying so, however, we have missed the true meaning of Jesus’ words. Jesus spoke these words not to frustrate us but to tell us what God is like – full of love and compassion – and to call us to follow his divine example. Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount to explain God’s ideal toward which we should never stop striving although, in this life, none of us will ever reach that ideal all the time. However, the solution to that problem is not to compromise or to lower or vary the standard set in God’s Word but to strive harder until we gradually “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13) or in simpler words, become fully Christ-like. Only then, we would be Spirit-enabled to do Jesus’ commands which now appear to us impossible to do.

Let us understand Christ-likeness more clearly with an example from history. During the American civil war, when hatred had become entrenched between the North and the South, President Abraham Lincoln was criticized for speaking about merciful treatment for the Southern rebels, the confederates. Lincoln’s critics reminded him that the confederates were the enemy and they should be destroyed. Lincoln’s insightful response, “I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends,” does, in many ways, reflect Jesus’ teaching on loving our enemies (v.44).

We sometimes wonder why God insists that we should love our enemies and persecutors (v.44). Two reasons stand out prominently.

First, if our heavenly Father “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (v.46) without any discrimination whatsoever, shouldn’t we also, likewise, love our enemies just as dearly as we love our friends?
Second, by being kind and considerate to those who hate and persecute us, we can secure their repentance and finally win them over for Christ, which is for their eternal good.

Caring for others and loving all are also ways by which we live up to Jesus’ clarion call: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v.48).

We often encounter difficult people in our lives – some on whom we need to set limits. But to give in to the temptation to undermine or hurt them in any way, is not God’s way. Instead, we should pray for them, look out for their best interest and emphasize the positive, while ensuring that we do this always with the right motive - to help, to lift and to heal. Not everyone will respond positively to us but we certainly can expect a more harmonious relationship that will help us to “live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

**Ponder**

Are we willing to ponder and pray about Jesus’ teachings in today’s text? Are we ready to apply them whenever we are wronged at home, at work, at school or in church?

**Promise**

Scripture tells us to go immediately and do all we can to be reconciled with the offended brother (Matthew 5:24-25; 18:34-35) and to go beyond the natural desire to take revenge and to show love to our enemies by meeting their needs (Romans 12:20-21; Matthew 6:15).

**Prayer**

Abba Father, we know it is difficult, even impossible, for us to love others in our own strength. Help us through your Holy Spirit to truly love our enemies, and to use us to bring them to you. Amen.

*Article by Mr Philip Nainan, a Lay Reader at St. Christopher’s Church, Johor Bahru. Philip is a lawyer.*
Day 19 – Mark 6:7-13

THE MISSION

“They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” (Mark 6:12-13)

In our passage today we see Jesus giving his closest disciples, the Twelve, a special mission. This would be a mission without basic resources – no bread, no bag, and no money! A pair of sandals is permitted but only one set of clothes (v.8).

For us today, this would be like going camping without a tent or going on holiday without our wallets. Why the incredible lack of preparations? Jesus knows why – it’s to tell the very people his disciples will minister to. They will be dependent on the hospitality of those they witness to (v.10). Remember Jesus has just been rejected in Nazareth by his own people – he did no mighty works amongst them due to their stubborn unbelief.

Well now, as the disciples are sent out with little supplies, this will further test God’s people Israel. Where the 12 are rejected they are to shake the dust of their feet (v.11) – a sign that God will reject those who reject his Son and so reject those who serve his Son by the gospel. Thankfully we see the disciple’s mission did bear much good fruit – as they warned many to repent, to turn from sin and trust in God’s savior king Jesus. They were able to cast out demons and heal the sick by the power of God’s grace. The lesson for us here is two-fold:

1. These strange instructions concerning missional preparations were first and foremost for the 12, not for us as believers today. Jesus reverses his command prohibiting provisions for gospel work later in Luke 22:35-36. However what we do share in common with the 12 is Jesus’ call to go out and make his gospel known, calling not simply Israel, but men and women of all nations to repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness and life. Does this priority occupy our thoughts, our time, our investments? What is the next step for us in our gospel mission as disciples of Jesus?

2. The 12 were called to minister to Israel who had in part already rejected Jesus as their promised savior and king. As we go out to our world for the sake of the gospel we should pray and hope that many do repent by God’s grace but we must prepare for the possibility of harsh resistance and rejection. This echoes Jesus words on
discipleship later in Mark 8:34 – “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”

May we be those who are found faithful, delighting in Christ and so following his example; he endured the shame for the glory set before him. May we by God’s grace do the same!

**Ponder**

Does the priority of making the gospel known occupy our thoughts, our time, our investments?

**Promise**

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)

**Prayer**

“Lord, take the burden of lifeless, ineffective church outreach off of your shoulders and place it where it belongs - in your strong hands. Only you can do the spiritual work needed to raise up mission participants, to open doors, and to make for bold witnesses.” (Bud Brown, Four Potent Prayers to Invigorate Evangelism)

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

*Article by the Reverend Tim Philips, Associate Pastor of St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.*
Day 20 – Mark 6:14-29

THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. (Mark 6:18-19)

“He lost his head” is a common phrase used to describe when someone loses his temper. We all may have “lost our heads” under certain situations. Another way of saying, it was no more their mind that was in control of their words or actions; it was purely emotional. The head is a vital part of the human body. Any damage to the head can have very far reaching consequences. If you remove both the hands and legs, you can still live but if you decapitated the head from the body, life will end. John the Baptist literally lost his head for using it for the glory of God.

John the Baptist was a man who was very clear of his mission. He lived a very simple life. He was not influenced by the pleasures of the world. He had no craving for influence or power (John 3: 30). He did not mince his words. His messages were not sugar coated. Just because King Herod liked to hear him, he did not dilute his message to please the king. It was very simple, ‘repent or die’ (Luke 3:9). His spirituality was not for sale. Herodias was the wife of King Herod’s brother, Philip (Mark 6:17). Herodias was an unfaithful and adulterous woman. She was one who would use and abuse anyone to get what she wanted. All that she was interested was her personal interest and pleasure at any cost.

In contrast to John the Baptist, there was a chief court official by the name of Zedekiah son of Kenaanah (1 Kings 22:11,24). He preached what the people want to hear and not what God wants us to hear. Today, I am sure there are ‘Zedekiahs’ who would only condone and encourage her adulterous life to protect their own personal interest. For Herodias, John the Baptist was a total nuisance and therefore she decided to get rid of him by requesting his head through her daughter. She succeeded. Today, what the world needs is ‘John the Baptist’ not ‘Zedekiah.’ It is no point blaming the world for all the moral decays when we listen, condone and admire the ‘Zedekiahs’ both within and outside the church and like Herodias’ demand for the ‘head’ of those who remind us of our disobedience to God’s Word to silence their voice.
If you are a clergy reading this, ask yourself, “Are you afraid of losing your head for speaking the truth like John the Baptist?” Don’t be tempted to sell your head for financial gains, positions, fame or for free alcohol. Don’t be like Zedekiah trying to please those in authority and influential people whose life-style does not comply with the Word of God, whether it is same sex marriage or simply appointing those with serious moral issues to leadership role in the church.

If you are a laity, please don’t seek the head of those who speak the Word of God without sugar coating it. They are there because God has sent them to you. When they speak the Word of God, God is giving you a chance to repent and to return to him with a humble and broken heart like King David (Psalm 51). Lent is all about submission and returning to the path of righteousness. If you want the world to be a better place, stop listening to the ‘Zedekiahs’ and start listening to ‘John the Baptist’.

“I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:28)

Lord, as we pilgrim through Lent, enable us to focus on the Cross of Calvary and to submit ourselves to the conviction of God the Holy Spirit. When we are convicted of our sins, give us the strength not to put the blame on others or to go for the ‘head’ of those through whom God the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins. Grant us a humble and broken spirit to truly turn to you and experience the forgiveness of sins we have in Jesus Christ. May our lives truly reflect the holiness of Jesus. Amen.

Article by the Venerable Edward John, Archdeacon of the Southern Archdeaconry. He is also the Vicar of St Christopher’s Church, Johor Bahru.
Day 21 – Mark 6: 30-44

FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people.” (Mark 6:41)

It had been a really tiring day but, nevertheless, it was also a really good day. Jesus had ministered to a huge crowd that followed him. At the sight of them, ‘his heart broke - like sheep with no shepherd they were’ (v.34). Jesus spent long hours teaching and ministering to them. Hearts were warmed, minds were enlightened, and spirits were lifted like never before. I imagine there were also demons cast out and sicknesses cured as the Word (God Incarnate) walked among them. So, it really was a good day.

But now it’s getting late. We were all ministered to spiritually and now it’s time to get back to real life. Where could we find or buy food? We were so caught up with meeting Jesus and listening to him that we didn’t plan for the other practical stuff, like dinner. What should we do now? Back to the harsh reality of life?

Jesus however didn’t seem bothered. He asked that we feed the huge crowd. When we took inventory of what we had, there was only a ridiculously little bit of food. Five loaves and two fish – barely enough for a growing boy, let alone five thousand people. Jesus was not being practical or realistic. Had he been irresponsible in keeping the crowd all day without thinking of their practical needs?

But a miracle happened. The bread and fish multiplied! Not only was everyone fed nicely, there were so much left over to fill numerous baskets!

What happened here? I think Jesus is teaching us that he will provide for us always - as simple as that. Just offer the little, insignificant things you possess to him. Jesus “took” them, “blessed” them, “broke” them and “gave” them to others. Jesus accepts whatever you have to offer him. It’s the heart that counts. In fact, it was a young kid who offered the bread and fish and Jesus “blessed” them. Blessing something or someone means you are grateful of the goodness that God gives to us. You don’t belittle them. You are thankful. Yet the bread and fish needed to be “broken”. It’s like what Jesus said about the wheat of grain that dies in order to produce much (John 12:
24) and also like Christ Jesus’ death on the cross, broken, to make the sacrifice acceptable to God once and for all.

We need to be “broken” in many similar ways. It’s never about how smart or talented we are in order to serve God but how humbled we are by his love and grace towards us that we offer ourselves to serve him. Finally, we “give” ourselves to one another. True Christian spirituality is never about self-indulgance but about donating ourselves to others. That is where we find our deepest joy and fulfilment. A profound mystery but a spiritual reality that can be experienced today.

So, was Jesus a practical man? Oh yes! Spiritual realities are always practical. “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)

**Ponder**

Do I think that being a Christian is just like keeping to the “religious” part of my life? Is there more?

**Promise**

Jesus will never fail nor forsake us. Follow him.

**Prayer**

That I may enter a Christian life that is “given up”, “blessed”, “broken” and “given out”. Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer.


---

*Article by the Reverend Dr Richard Loh, an Anglican priest at St George’s Church, Penang. He works full time as an academic Professor of Medicine in RCSI-UCD Malaysia Campus, Penang and as a practicing Chest Physician.*
Day 22 – Mark 6:45-54

BE TESTED BUT NOT AFRAID

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed. (Mark 6:50-51)

The disciple’s journey of faith is constantly tested. It was no different for those who knew Jesus first when he was among them. Just before this, they stood uncertainly. Before them in the wilderness were five thousand men, not counting their families. Five small luncheon loaves and two fishes to feed that great crowd? Afterwards, they took up 12 baskets of leftovers (Mark 6:30-44). Be tested but not doubting.

But now, though commanded by the Lord himself to cross to the other side, the very wind and sea seem to be against them (vv.45-47). Unlike before (vv.35-41), the boat they are in is not threatened. It is just sheer hard and seemingly unproductive work in obeying the Lord. Have we not felt this way many times ourselves? Commanded to reach out in love, compassion and Christian charity (2 John 1:6)? Struggling against the headwinds of personal laxity and doubt? Buffeted by the crosswinds of dissatisfaction and seemingly incessant demands? Tossed about by the internal and external turbulence that threatened to stop us in our tracks? Yet this is precisely the journey of faith. The path of discipleship is one of daily testing (Luke 9:23; 14:27). Be tested but faithful.

For the Lord is faithful. From the mountain above their painful progress he sees them. He comes to them striding the sea (v.48); a first hint that he is God (Job 9:8; 38:16; Psalm 77:19; Isaiah 43:16)? Similarly as we struggle, Jesus knows. He sees our human weakness, our pain, our need. Trust him for he is the Lord who goes with and before us who will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6,8; Joshua 1:5; Psalm 37:25; 2 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 13:5). But it is so easy to be distracted, to doubt and mistake the imaginary for the truth. Like these first disciples who cry out in fear and terror as at the sight of a ghost, even when he seems to be passing them by (v.49) - a second hint of his divine identity? (Exodus 33:19,22; 34:6) For us too, sometimes it is truly hard to discern the good Lord even as he walks by our side. Be tested but confident.
The Lord reassures them: “Eγό eimi – it is I” (Exodus 3:14). No hint this time. He is the God of goodness, grace, faithfulness, love and mercy. He steps into the boat (v.51a) and their struggle ceases. Still, for these first disciples the testing continues (vv.51b-52). That personal victory over hardened hearts comes later. Then even unto death they will proclaim that the true Son of God came and died to save sinners. So it is with us. Stand victorious in Jesus. Be tested but not afraid.

Ponder

How may we encourage each other to stand firm as disciples?

Promise

“How may we encourage each other to stand firm as disciples?”

“Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.” (Mark 6:50)

Prayer

Father, teach me to remain certain and committed, always trusting in your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ in whom we pray. Amen.

Article by the Reverend Gordon Kong, Priest at St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur. Gordon assists in the Liturgical services and oversees the Nepali ministry of the Cathedral.
Day 23 – Mark 7:14–23

CLEAN AND UNEFFECTIVE

Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’
(Mark 7:14–23)

Often we give importance to what we see on the outside. We admire those who are beautiful and reject those who are not so good looking. We neglect people’s inner qualities. Children are told by caring parents to keep themselves clean when they go to school or play with their friends. This is because of fear that their precious children may get ill in an unclean situation.

Likewise our Lord Jesus who gave himself for us and made us his own is concerned about us and set rules which have eternal values. He had to explain to his disciples what he meant when he said what comes out of a man makes him ‘unclean’ and not what goes in. The disciples were only familiar with the Dietary Laws (Leviticus 11) which the Pharisees had emphasised that if followed will keep them ‘clean’ and acceptable in God’s sight. The Jews had all along believed the Pharisees teachings on diet. Jesus shocked them by saying that what a man eats ‘doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body’ (v.19a). It was the first time they were hearing that not eating certain food will not help them to find favour with the Lord. The Lord went further to explain to them in v.20, ‘What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean.’ Here, what Jesus meant was an evil action begins with an evil thought. It is men’s evil thoughts that lead to actions like sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (v.v.21-22). Jesus then concluded that it is these evil actions that make a man ‘unclean.’

As God’s people we are called to keep ourselves ‘clean’ or pure by following Paul’s advice in Philippians 4: 8 and think about what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. These will enable us to please Jesus. Thus we are made aware we are not ‘clean’ because of outward acts but we become ‘clean’ on the inside as Christ through the Holy Spirit renews our minds and transforms us into his image. As followers of Jesus, let us spend time with him through the reading his Word and praying as he keeps us ‘clean’ for him.
Ponder

Ever wondered what you can do to please God? “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” said Jesus. (John 14:15)

Promise

Walk closely with Jesus and through the help of the Holy Spirit you will see the transformation in your life.

Prayer

Here am I Lord! I want you to do a deep work in my life. Amen.

Editor’s Notes: Jesus explains that it is not the food that we eat that makes us unclean (ritual defilement), but the thoughts and feelings of our hearts (Matthew 5:28). This is strong language in the context of a culture that prizes Jewish food laws. The Torah goes into great detail regarding clean and unclean foods, and Jewish people distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbours by observance of these food laws. Jesus points us in a radically different direction. He tells us that “evil things come from within”—from the human heart—and implies that we have a responsibility to nurture holy things rather than evil things in our hearts. This is an important word for us to hear today. We live in a culture that honours that which comes from within the human heart—that gives us permission to act on our feelings instead of bringing them under control. Our culture celebrates freedom and personal choice, and fiercely resists any constraint that Christ or common sense would place on behaviour. The result is that we live in a world characterized by “adulteries, sexual sins, murders, thefts, coveting, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness”. (Source: https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/mark-71-23/)

Article by Nesam Ebenezer, Lay Pastor at St. Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya. She is also the Chairperson of St. Paul’s Day Training Centre, a ministry to people with learning difficulties.
Day 24 – Mark 7:24-30

GREAT FAITH

“Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. (Mark 7:28-30)

Jesus came to the region of Tyre and Sidon, 40 miles from Capernaum, so that he might have some privacy. But a concerned mother discovered him and sought help. When Mark wrote this Gospel (65-70 A.D.), the church included many Gentiles. By then, the church had gone through considerable struggles to determine its right relationship with the Gentiles. This passage reflects that struggle in its earliest moments.

There were many obstacles in the woman’s way. Her nationality was against her, a Greek, Syrophoenician Gentile (as compared to a Jew), in a society dominated by men; Satan was against her, for a demon had taken control of her daughter’s life; the disciples were against her – they wanted Jesus to send her away; and, for a short while it looked as though Jesus was also against her! Yet she triumphed because of her great faith. Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish minister, who suffered greatly for Christ, once wrote: “It is faith’s work to claim and challenge loving-kindnesses out of all the roughest strokes of God”. That is exactly how this Gentile mother did, and we have much to learn from her faith.

When she first asked him for help, Jesus did not even answer her! Encouraged by his silence, the disciples urged him to send her away. When Jesus did speak, it was not to the woman but to the disciples (Matthew 15:24). But this did not prevent her. We may be shocked at Jesus’ response ‘... for it is not appropriate to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs’ (v.27). This is one of the most troubling verses in the New Testament. The mother is asking for healing, not for herself but for her daughter. It must be difficult for a Gentile woman to ask a Jewish man for help. It is just overwhelming. Some scholars try to soften Jesus’ words by suggesting that it is a well-known proverb. R. T. France says that Jesus was just functioning as a devil’s advocate. Jesus knows people’s hearts and responds accordingly. He does so to give her the opportunity to press her case.
“Lord” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs”. The woman answers well, acknowledging the special place of the Jews. Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter”. Jesus does not accompany her to her house. He does not touch the child. He does not issue a healing command. He simply reports a healing that has already taken place. Arriving at her home, she finds the demon gone and the child well.

This woman serves as a model of a parent who loves her child enough to be active in the life of the child. She could have found excuses for not going to Jesus, but she went. She could have allowed herself to be discouraged, but she persisted. She, like many mothers, will not accept defeat in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Ponder

There are two ways parents can go wrong – one, is to become a “helicopter” parent, hovering too closely or the other to be laissez faire, failing to provide guidance and support. The church needs to call parents to take an active role in guiding their children or we get troubled children.

Promise

People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (Mark 7:37)

Prayer

Lord, may we learn to be a people of great faith, to persist despite the circumstances, to surrender despite our need for control, to be courageous in the face of seeming defeat; and always trusting you with our humble supplications.

Article by Mr Jaccob Thomas, a member of Peace Community Church, Bukit Jalil and a Board Member of St Paul’s Theological College Malaysia.
Day 25 – Mark 7:31-37

**EPHPATHA, BE OPENED**

He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” which means, “Be opened!” (Mark 7:34)

This particular incident of Jesus healing a deaf and mute man is recorded only in the Gospel of Mark. The Bible tells us that he had tremendous support from his support group. This man experienced open ears, an open heart and a time of open praise.

*Open Ears*: It is important for us to understand that this man could not hear Jesus. He needed help with life.

One of the greatest aspects of this story is that it shows us how much we need one another and we need to be looking out for one another physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. This man’s friends begged Jesus to heal him. Their love, respect and care for him is inspirational.

Jesus understood that this man did not want to be the center of attention. So, Jesus took him away from the multitude to spend quality time with him.

Verse 33 tells us that Jesus slipped his fingers into that man's ears. He spit on his fingers and touched the man's tongue. Then looking up into heaven, Jesus sighed and said, “Ephphatha” (ef-fä-thä) (the Aramaic word that means — “Be opened”!). Immediately, the man's ears were open and he was able to speak.

*Open Heart*: Jesus lets this man know that he understands what he needs by way of touching his ears and his tongue. Jesus sighs as a way of letting the man know he feels his suffering and pain. Jesus wants the man to know that his needs have touched his own heart. It is a wonderful story of love, gentleness, compassion, healing and wholeness.

There were actually two major healings going on in this story. Ephphatha not only meant "be opened" but it also contained the idea of "connect". Ephphatha meant the opening up of something so that there could be a connect-relationship. This man needed to be able to hear, connect and speak to his heavenly Father and other men.
Open Praise: Mark lets us know that every time someone is truly touched by Jesus, they cannot keep it quiet. They just have to praise the Lord. They just have to share the Good News.

They praised the Lord not just for this man's healing but because they saw right before their eyes that God's Kingdom was breaking forth. The words of the Prophet Isaiah were coming to pass right before their eyes.

Ponder

We may not be able to speak well or to hear everyone around us but we can be a prayer warrior for the lost and the unchurched. When given the opportunity, we can share Jesus' love and power of transformation.

Promise

In Isaiah 35:5-6, when the Messiah arrives, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped……the mute tongue shout for joy". The Kingdom of Heaven was breaking in and God's plan to rescue and redeem mankind was underway.

Prayer

Lord, help us find those who are spiritually deaf and cannot speak. Help us have open ears to receive your words. Help us to be a Church full of people who are praising him, living for him and doing our best to bring others to him. Amen.

Article by the Reverend Dr. James Low Seang Gip, a Dermatologist in private practice and a Priest at Good Shepherd Church, Johor Bahru.
Day 26 - Mark 8:11-13

A SIGH FOR A SIGN

“Why does this generation ask for a sign?
Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.”
(Mark 8:12)

If it wasn’t so depressing it would have been comical. Jesus has fed a 4,000 strong crowd with a kids packed lunch, and not just given them a mouthful, they are fed till they are satisfied - and there’s even seven baskets of leftovers.

At which point the religious leaders come to him and ask him for a sign.

It’s akin to walking up to Usain Bolt, whilst he’s on the Olympic Winners Podium, as he’s being handed the gold medal and saying: “Hey, prove you can walk.”

Jesus has already given them way more of a sign than they could even have imagined asking for, and yet they missed it. Why? Because they had their own agenda, their own vision for what God’s kingdom should look like and how it should be brought about. Their vision was a kingdom that benefited Jews who strictly observed the law. Jesus has a wider vision in mind: ‘the people ate and were satisfied...’

This is a vision for everyone that leaves them satisfied, with enough left-over to feed other people too! What a wonderful image of what Jesus wants us to receive from him.

The Pharisees had everything they needed yet they missed it.

But before we laugh at them we have to remember we have more.

We have seen Jesus’ death and resurrection: and experienced it in our lives.

We have his word: more freely and readily available than ever before in the history of the world.

And we have his Holy Spirit living within us.

We have all the signs we need. The question is, “Have we stopped to consider them and what they mean, long enough to be able to receive them?”
A friend once wrote in a letter to Henri Nouwen: “They... have chewed on the Gospels without being fed.”

The Pharisees request for a sign is a sign in itself - specifically a warning sign to us to make sure that we take note of the signs! Slow down, consider, and receive what he has done for us.

Jesus’ reaction to the request for a sign is to offer up a sigh. This is the moment in Mark’s Gospel where the two rival visions of the Kingdom are now set on a collision course that climaxes in the cross.

What’s Jesus response? He gets in a boat and takes his disciples away with him; which is the invitation to us this Lent – To get away with him!

**Ponder**

Where does my vision of the Kingdom of God differ from Jesus’?

**Promise**

Jesus wants to get away with you:

“He left them (the Pharisees), got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.” (v.13)

**Prayer**

Jesus, I am distracted by so many things, my inner desires and monologue often crowd out your voice. Lead me to the quite place, help me to go with you to the other side, help me to gaze again at the sign of your love for us: the cross.

*Article by the Reverend Dan Millest, Associate Vicar, Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang and Director of Formation, St Paul’s Theological College Malaysia.*
Day 27 – Mark 8:14-21

DO YOU STILL NOT SEE AND UNDERSTAND?

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?” (Mark 8:14-21)

The yeast of the Pharisees and that of the Herod refers to the symbol of evil. Both groups seek grandeur and power through earthly positioning. Jesus clarified for his disciples that there is a greater goal of seeking his Kingdom, which is detached from the earthly kingdom of the Pharisees and Herod. They witnessed the healing, deliverance and authoritative teaching of Christ, yet their hearts are hardened.

He then asked a question to his disciples that points them to the true value of the kingdom of God, which is to believe and follow Jesus as their Messiah. He highlighted to them the experience of the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000.

In these scripture passages, a miracle did indeed take place. From their active participation in these two incidents, one would have thought that they would not doubt that Jesus will still feed them. They saw and experience for themselves something that is truly out of the ordinary. Nevertheless, the disciples were still filled with doubt. The disciples were challenged by Jesus with the question, “Do you still not see or understand?” (v.17) and then again “Do you still not understand?” (v.21).

Jesus then pointed out to the disciples the two separate incidents where he had performed a similar miracle. And both of these miracles have got to do with food. One miracle led to the feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and another miracle led them to feeding 4,000 with seven loaves of bread. Then, there was also a significant amount of leftovers. There was more than enough food for everybody.
Nevertheless, the disciples did not quite get it. They were consistent in this one issue – their unbelief. This is the key matter that they did not understand, the need to believe Jesus and that he would do what he said he would do.

The yeast of the Pharisees and that of the Herod refers to the same issue – the refusal to take Jesus at his Word. They saw the healing, deliverance and authoritative teachings. Yet their hearts were hardened and they refused to believe.

Jesus chided them in three different ways - their failure to see and respond accordingly, their hardened hearts and refusal to believe and, finally, their lack of understanding of what he was able to do and what others could not do.

As we reflect on this incident, may we be drawn to again put our trust in the Christ who has always walked with us.

**Ponder**

Do we trust God only for our spiritual needs or for our physical, emotional, financial and psychological needs too?

**Promise**

He is God who has spoken through his Son, Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

**Prayer**

Gracious Father, help me today to trust you for that one area of my life that I need to submit to you. Amen.


*Article by the Reverend Tan Meng Poo, Pastor of Hosanna Anglican Church, Johor Bahru. A lawyer by training, he is the Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific and Country Director, Malaysia, Our Daily Bread Ministries.*
Day 28 – Mark 8:27-30

**WHO DO PEOPLE SAY I AM?**

On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” (Mark 8:27-29)

Most people in the world have good things to say about Jesus. Many will agree that he was good, holy and a great teacher. A popular musical called him “Jesus Christ Superstar!” Mahatma Gandhi was impressed by Jesus and based his non-violence on “turning the other cheek”. Even Muslims acknowledge him to be a prophet of God.

At the time of Jesus, the Jews were expecting a Messiah to save them from the Romans. Many had heard how Jesus spoke with authority. They had witnessed his amazing miracles including feeding the four thousand and healing the blind. Many Jews, including his disciples, were wondering who Jesus really was.

Yet, in Caesarea Philippi, a city with many pagan idols, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say I am?” They replied that some had said he was John the Baptist or Elijah, both fore-runners of the Messiah. Or at least he was a prophet.

Then Jesus asked a more direct question to the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

Christians today have to answer this question too. If Jesus were to ask us today, “Who do you say I am?” What would we reply? It is easy to say that he is the Christ but our answer must be more than a verbal reply.

If Jesus is the Christ, he is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messiah who has come to set us free. If he is the Christ, he is the Saviour of our sins. If he is the Christ, then he is also our Lord. We must follow his example and obey his teachings. If he is the Son of God, he is divine to whom we must give our worship.

At that time, the disciples were asked to keep it a secret but only until all things said about Jesus would be fulfilled. Jesus was crucified, had resurrected and had ascended into heaven. It is no longer a secret. The disciples witnessed and believed and went around spreading the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Similarly, we have the
privilege and responsibility to tell others that Jesus is not just a good man, a great teacher or just a prophet. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God!

**Ponder**

What are the implications if we really believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? What should we do?

**Promise**

On Peter's declaration, Jesus promised he would “build his church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18)

**Prayer**

My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like you. All of my days, I want to praise the wonders of your mighty love.

*(Lyrics by D Zschech)*

*Editor’s Notes: “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 29). In the Greek, the “you” is emphatic—“Who do YOU say that I am?” “You are the Christos.” Mark began this Gospel by saying, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ (Christou), the Son of God” (1:1)—thus establishing Jesus as both Christ and Son of God. Now in a parallel statement, Peter says, “You are the Christos,” which means “anointed.” The Jews anoint three classes of people: priests, prophets and kings. Jesus is all three. Shortly before Jesus’ death, the high priest will ask, “Are you the Christos, the Son of the Blessed?” and Jesus will answer, “I am” (14:61-62). At the conclusion of Jesus’ journey, the centurion will restate that Jesus is God’s Son. (Source: https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/mark-827-38/)*
Day 29 – Mark 9:2-8

**HIS CLOTHES BECAME DAZZLING WHITE**

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” (Mark 9:2-3)

Anticipation rises as you near the peak of a mountain, as you rise up away from and above the busy world, enveloped in the silence and barrenness of the rocky landscape. Sometimes it is only to find it is covered in cloud and mist and no view, but this high mountain was no empty remote place. It was a place of encounter and revelation for the disciples. What they came to perceive about Jesus, totally overwhelmed them.

In the Transfiguration story, Jesus takes his three closest disciples to share in some personal time together. The Feast of this mysterious event is traditionally observed on 6th August during the Trinity season, and remembered on the last Sunday of Epiphany. It is another epiphany event, as the glory of Jesus is revealed to this intimate group.

In the context of the gospel narrative, Jesus is increasingly determined to go up to Jerusalem to fulfil his ‘departure’ or exodus deliverance, as Luke records the conversation between Jesus, Elijah and Moses. In this mountain-top encounter, his glory is partially revealed even before his suffering on the cross.

There on the deliberately chosen high mountain, a place away from it all, the radiant glory of Jesus - in dazzling white clothes - simply cannot be contained, as it shines through his humanity. No wonder we treasure a mountain-top experience and want to preserve it as Peter did, feeling he should say something, wanting to honour the three great figures, and savour the moment by building three shelters. Life is often humdrum, repetitive and ordinary, but suddenly a hill walk becomes an unexpected divine encounter that baffles the understanding and touches us permanently.

Moses and Elijah, representative of all that God had said and done through the Law and the Prophets, are gathered with Jesus. But it is Jesus who is the far greater priest and prophet than Moses or Elijah, who is to be listened to now, as he is affirmed as the beloved Son of God, the culmination of all God’s promises.
On their own again, their eyes having been opened, and their feet on the ground, what are the disciples to do with this amazing experience? Curiously perhaps, Jesus tells them on the way down the mountain – don’t tell anyone until later. They would not fully understand this vision until after the cross and until after they had seen what ‘risen from the dead’ means. It may not be easy to explain a deeply significant spiritual experience where we glimpse something of the glory of God, but we go on pondering it in our hearts until understanding comes.

Briefly, the transfiguration surely points to the revelation of the glory of Christ that would take place at the cross and resurrection. It also encourages us to ask God to open our eyes to see his glory around us in the ordinary everyday things of life. And to remember that one day we shall share in that glory when we shall be made like Jesus, to the glory of God the Father. And what an amazing prospect that is!

**Ponder**

‘The glory of God is a human life fully lived.’ Irenaeus (c.130 – c.202AD)

**Promise**

And a voice came from the cloud, “This is my beloved Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:7)

**Prayer**

“Lord, glorify Thy Name in all the earth.”

*Article by the Rev David Cox, head of the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Platform and Spiritual Director of Wellspring Retreat House, Rawang. David was Vicar of All Saints’ Church, Taiping (1983-1988 and 2013-2015).*
Day 30 – Mark 9:14-29

ROBBED OF SPEECH

“Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” (Mark 9:17-19)

It is said that one of the distinctive abilities that sets humanity apart from all of creation is our ability to use language and words. We use words to represent ourselves, convey our needs, share emotions, mobilise movements and tell stories; the ability to speak is one of the most ancient gifts given to humanity. Indeed entire empires have risen and fallen on words.

At the creation of the world, God’s divine, creative ability to speak entire realities into being was displayed, as he spoke the world into existence (Genesis 1). Then, when God created humanity (Genesis 1:26), he made us in his likeness – imprinted with the same creative spirit, filled with the capacity to use words to fulfil our purpose on earth.

As we read Mark’s account of the possessed boy, made mute by a ‘deaf and mute spirit’ (Mark 9:25), we see a picture of the corruption of God’s gifts to humanity – as his ability to speak and to live his childhood is robbed by the enemy. So dire is the boy’s state that his heartbroken father cries for pity, asking Jesus ‘to do anything … if you can’ (Mark 9:22) – but of course, the irony of asking this of the Creator of life isn’t lost to the gospel writer. Jesus replies, ‘everything is possible for one who believes’ (Mark 9:23), because ‘with God, all things are possible’ (Matthew 19:26).

Then, Jesus models an object lesson masterfully: he demonstrates the power of his words as he commands the evil spirit out of the boy (Mark 9:25). As the disciples debrief with him later on, Jesus explains that this kind of spirit could be driven out ‘only by prayer’ (Mark 9:29). Here, Jesus reverses the curse of the enemy and speaks life into the boy, demonstrating to the disciples that with our words, we can exercise spiritual authority and communicate with our Father, who moves powerfully in response to our prayers.
There are people in the world today who are voiceless – whose ability to represent themselves, to connect with others and to live their full lives has been taken from them. Jesus is not deaf and absent to the needs of the voiceless – he delivers the boy from his muteness through his authority as the Creator God. And because all authority has been given to him, we receive the same power and authority by which to live out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-19.

Words have power. Especially if they are spoken by the Word himself, who became flesh and who made all things (John 1:1-3). As we respond to his call to be the light to the world, we can remember that ‘the light shines in the darkness’ – in the places of oppression, of forced silence, or robbed gifts and stolen joys, or spiritual battle – ‘and the darkness has not overcome it.’

**Ponder**

Jesus said, “This kind can only come out by prayer” (v.29), referring to the evil spirit he cast out of the boy. Are there spiritual battles that we are trying to fight on our own authority – when all that is needed is faith placed in God who will fight the battle for us?

**Promise**

Jesus said, “Everything is possible for one who believes.” (Mark 9:23).

**Prayer**

Lord, like the father of the boy, we say, “I believe, help me overcome my unbelief” in moments when we forget that the battle belongs to the Lord. We thank you that you will have the final word over death and sin, and we look forward to that day of ultimate victory. Amen.

*Article by Abel Cheah, the service pastor for the Five, the evening service of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang. He is also the Chief Operating Officer of Alpha Asia Pacific.*
WHO IS THE GREATEST?

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:35-37)

At some stage in our lives we have all been caught out saying or thinking things that deep down we know are inappropriate or wrong. When caught out we either work at trying to justify ourselves or keep quiet hoping it will all go away.

Peter, James and John had been with Jesus when he was transfigured on the Mountain and had reported everything of what happened to the other disciples. Clearly the Kingdom of God that Jesus was talking about had power and authority, and was coming soon! So while on the narrow winding path they were all walking along on the way to Capernaum, the topic of discussion was who would be the greatest among them in the new kingdom. As human beings we are preoccupied from birth to death with my rights and my position in the pecking order.

When they were together in a house in Capernaum Jesus asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?’ No one answered! They knew that they had been caught out! Jesus sits down. This indicated that he was about to teach. “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (v.36). This is a radical statement, at odds with our culture.

The Kingdom of God is about serving not being served! To drive the point home, Jesus takes a child in his arms and says, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (v.37).

In the ancient world, a child had no position at all; they were on the bottom of the ladder. So to receive (serve) a child means to humble oneself. The expectation was always that the role of the child was to serve you.
Greatness in the Kingdom of God is not all about you!! But about you serving and placing others ahead of you.

Just pause a moment and reflect on what Jesus is saying. When we welcome (serve) our brothers and sisters we not only welcome them, but our Heavenly Father. Our lives are to be gifts for others. Such a lifestyle is not easy.

The disciples continued to struggle with this. The night before Jesus died, in the Upper Room, no one took up the servant role of washing others feet. It was Jesus who removed his outer garment, poured water into a basin, then slowly moved around the circle washing each of the disciples feet. Jesus said - “now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you....Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:14-15,17)

Ponder

What does it mean in daily life to serve rather than be served?

Promise

“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:17)

Prayer

Loving Father, you know how our first thoughts are most often all about me! May your Holy Spirit continue to work your work of grace in our lives so that we reflect who we claim to be, children of the living God who want to be last and the servant of all. Amen.

Article by the Right Reverend Peter Tasker, the Archbishop of Sydney’s Bishop for International Relations. Bishop Tasker was once the Vicar of St George’s Church, Penang.
THROWN INTO HELL

“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.” (Mark 9:43-47)

Better to enter life maimed, crippled and one-eyed? It seems strange and contradictory to hear this said by the very same Saviour who spent much of his ministry healing the crippled, maimed and restoring sight to the blind. Why then did Jesus speak these words?

The emphasis of this text is on our willingness to cut and pluck and the extreme measures required for evil to be removed from our lives.

Hurtful Corrections. There are things and aspects of our lives that if we were to be seen without them tomorrow, we would seem “crippled”, “maimed” or “blinded” to those who know us well. These are the “hands”, “feet” and “eyes” that we must be willing to consciously get rid of as they stand in the way of us and Christ. What stands to be ruthlessly purged is known only by you. A sickening obsession, a worrisome habit, a destructive addiction, a wilful, sinful relationship?

Much is easier said than done yet with reflection to Christ’s temptation in Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus won over temptation through the living Word. “God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

We do have a high priest who was tempted and tested yet remained unblemished, without sin. He helps us to live out of sin. Sin may be habitual, the remnants of its happenings in our life, much too far gone but today we are called to remember that Lent is a time for us to revisit and re-establish our walk with God.

Our journey may seem all too bleak and dark, yet taking it one day at a time, saying no, the tempter will flee. The tempter has limits, nothing beyond the strengthening from
Christ. But first, we must be willing to live without – “maimed”, “crippled” and “blind”; to cut and pluck out at any cost, by any road.

**Ponder**

Am I willing to be “maimed”, “crippled” and “blinded” for Christ? What must I “cut and pluck out” in my life?

**Promise**

“It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.” (Mark 9:43)

**Prayer**

Lord, help me to outlive my sin and live a life worthy of you. Amen.

*Editor’s Notes: “The amputation of our hands and feet, and the digging out of our eyes, when they cause us to stumble, that we should deny ourselves such use of our senses and members as may lead us into sin. Thus the hand and the eye are to be turned away from those alluring objects which raise in us lust and ambition. The foot must be restrained from carrying us into evil company, unlawful diversions, and forbidden pleasures.” (Benson Commentary)*

“It is better for thee to enter into life maimed: not that there will be any such thing, as upon the resurrection, going into heaven without a limb; for the words are to be understood, not literally, but figuratively; and the sense is, it is better to part with everything here, that is detrimental to a man’s doing, or enjoying, what is spiritually good, and enter into eternal life.” (Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible)

*Article by the Venerable Charles Fraser Devadason, Archdeacon of Lower Central Archdeaconry. He is also the Vicar of St Aidan’s Church, Bahau, Negri Sembilan.*
Day 33 – Mark 9:38-41

**WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST US IS FOR US**

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “…for whoever is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9:38–40)

1. The Background: Some disciples tried to drive out an evil spirit from a mute boy but had failed. The father of the boy then turned to Jesus who rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. Later, the disciples had an argument among themselves about who was the greatest among them (Mark 9: 33 – 37).

2. The Problem of Exclusivity: The disciples felt their power came from their unique status of being specially chosen and trained by Jesus (v.38). They thought that if they could not drive out demons, nobody else could. They displayed the sinful human characteristics of exclusivity, arrogance, pride and “competitiveness” in God’s work. Today, some of these same characteristics manifest in our churches especially when we view other denominations, positions in Church, length or record of service, or the type of ministry we do. We need to overcome these human tendencies and develop loving, godly, humble, servant-like qualities in God’s work and ministry.

3. The Need for Reference and Reporting: In verse 38 (like v.28 too) it was good that the disciples reported the incident to Jesus, who was their reference point. In our service to God and in our responses to incidents and situations in God’s work, it is important for us to have guidelines, reference points and some procedure of reporting. We all need to be guided and overseen in doing God’s work, as our personal methods, inclinations and responses may not always be the most helpful or edifying.

4. The Spiritual and Pastoral Response: In verse 39, Jesus chided his disciples for their misguided response. The man who drove out the demon in this passage did so “in the name of Jesus”, implying that he was a believer and had a living faith in Jesus, even though he was not one of the chosen disciples. Jesus then guided and gave them a new perspective of the incident and taught them the correct response for it.

5. The Spiritual Principle: In verse 40, the phrase “Whoever is not against us is for us” needs to be interpreted as “whoever believes in Jesus, exercises faith in Jesus
and acts in the name of Jesus (like what the man in this passage did), can be considered a follower of Jesus like the disciples”. This is corroborated by the verse “He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters” (Mathew 12: 30). The spiritual principle here is that one cannot do the work of Jesus without being a believer in Jesus, exercising faith in Jesus and acting in the name of Jesus.

6. The Potential Heresy: “Whoever is not against us is for us” cannot be loosely interpreted that “as long as people are not against Jesus and his followers, then they are for Jesus and his followers”. That could make many people of other religions, or of no particular religion, Christians too. It would contradict the purpose of Jesus’ life, teachings and work on earth, especially his death and resurrection. It would also be interpreting the phrase out of the context of this passage and without cross-referencing Scripture.

7. The Spiritual Teaching: In verse 41, Jesus gives a further teaching that applies to everyone: whoever serves the Lord - in whatever way and in whatever capacity- will receive his or her reward in full, from the Lord.

**Ponder**

Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” (v.35)

**Promise**

“For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” (v.41)

**Prayer**

“Teach us. O Lord, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Ignatius of Loyola)

*Article by Rev Tom Cherian, Vicar of St John’s Anglican Church, Ipoh.*
Day 34 – Mark 10:1-12

MARRIAGE: A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

“From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 10:6-9)

Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem…to the cross. It was nevertheless a path filled with proclamation, teaching, and healing concerning the kingdom of God.

Faced with a specific question by the Pharisees that would both test his credibility and expose their own depravity, Jesus addressed the overarching intent of God’s righteous laws over people’s sinfulness. The question concerned the ‘given right’ of a Jewish husband to separate from his spouse. It was an established practice in the community (although the grounds for doing so varied). Whilst some may be prompted to consider the fairness of such a provision (especially on the part of the wife), the question, “Is it lawful…” was intentionally targeted at Jesus; a man who in the eyes of the teachers of the law was at best, an unconventional preacher/healer but at worst, a law-breaking maverick increasingly seen as a threat to first century Judaism.

Jesus rightly asked them to state the command of Moses on the matter (thereby acknowledging its place in Jewish life). However, their response drew a damning rebuke due to their emphasis on the permissiveness (allowed – v.4) of divorce as provided for by Moses through the law. This was almost akin to a legal ‘loophole’ when a man wanted (i.e. his choice/right) to cease being in a marriage although a certificate of divorce would have at least safe-guarded the dignity and temporary sustenance of the divorced woman who was then able to remarry. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

Jesus however denounced this as a legal provision that was enacted because of their hardened hearts. Such readiness to consider the option of divorce ridiculed the very ‘DNA’ of marriage as ordained by God from the beginning of creation (vv.6-9) thereby predating even the Mosaic Law.

Their deep-rooted waywardness was confronted in no uncertain terms. The Pharisees were scrutinising the ‘letter’ of the law but failed to integrate ‘the spirit’ of God’s law.
This was further affirmed by Jesus when his own disciples sought clarification privately: Regardless of gender (man or woman), the sanctity of oneness in marriage as ordained by God is a principle that must be prioritised in spite of later provisions for divorce (of which adultery can be one of its ‘fruits’).

It is possible to demonstrate rigorous attention to the provisions of the law and yet betray the overarching character and principles of God which in this passage, concerns the oneness of marriage.

In Christ Jesus however, our hearts are transformed from that of waywardness to that of purity and fidelity through the work of the Holy Spirit as we grow in the knowledge and love of his Word.

**Ponder**

In the past, when could you have betrayed the principles of God in the name of being more religious (knowingly/unknowingly)?

**Promise**

Confess and repent of a religious practice that you have used as a “loophole” to fulfil your own selfish desires (e.g. saying the confessional prayer without a commitment to repentance).

**Prayer**

Righteous Father, let me delight in your laws with reverence. May the life-giving way of Jesus Christ, your Son be my guide. May your Holy Spirit transform me into his likeness, day by day. Amen.

*Article by Rev Paul Lau, a locally ordained Priest based at All Saints’ Church, Cheras. His passion in ministry includes expository preaching and the expression of the Gospel message through artistic means.*
TRUSTING JESUS LIKE CHILDREN

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16)

This incident, where children are brought to Jesus, is a favorite for Sunday School teachers. We know from Luke’s gospel that these children are infants (Luke 18:13). But to the disciples, Jesus has more important things to do than holding babies. After all, he is on a journey to Jerusalem to usher in the Kingdom of God. No doubt the disciples are shocked when their intervention arouses Jesus’ anger. Jesus is indignant and insists “let the children come to me, do not hinder them” (14). He takes the children into his arms and blesses them (v.16).

The incident teaches us of God’s love for children. Jesus is indeed in the midst of the greatest mission of all – to save people from sin and usher them into his Kingdom. But Jesus wants to make it plain – that Kingdom is for all - including children - “for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (v.14). Thus, any Christian who lacks a love for children and a desire for them to come to Christ, shares the attitude of the disciples, and would arouse his anger. We too must be convinced that the gospel is for all – including children. It’s worth reflecting what difference that should make to our priorities in parenting and our involvement in children’s ministry.

Yet, Jesus reveals a greater significance to this incident. In verse 15, Jesus emphatically declares “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it”. Jesus does not mean we must be innocent like a child. Anyone who has had children knows they are not. Rather, Jesus is insisting that to enter God’s kingdom we must come to him in total dependence and trust. Children are dependent on their parents for everything. They cannot eat, drink, bath, or do anything without the help of their parents. Likewise, unless we come to Jesus utterly dependent, we cannot enter God’s Kingdom.
Mark intends for us to compare this incident to what precedes and follows. In the preceding story, we meet the self-righteous, hard-hearted Pharisees who test Jesus. In the following story, we encounter a rich young man, seeking to earn eternal life through his works. Both groups are unwilling to become like little children and both groups miss out on the Kingdom. Rather it is the disciples, who have left everything to follow Jesus (v.28), who receive the promise of eternal life (vv.30-31). They have become like little children.

Here is the key lesson: Entering God’s kingdom is not about being good or religious. It’s not something we can earn through our church attendance, or our giving, or our ministry. The only way to enter God’s kingdom is to come to Jesus like a child, helpless and dependent and say “I know I am sinner. I know I have nothing to offer. But I trust in your death. And I leave everything to follow you. Please help me.” Then and only then will you receive the blessing of eternal life.

Ponder
Are you still trusting in yourself for salvation, or have you recognised your need to depend totally on Jesus?

Promise
Jesus promises that all who come to him in humble trust have a place in his kingdom.

Prayer
Pray that we would share Jesus’ heart to see children come to him, and that we may learn from children how we ought to come to Christ ourselves.

Article by the Reverend Tim Nicholls, Priest at St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur. Tim is the Ministry Director of Equip Gospel Ministries, and a committee member of the Diocesan Children’s Ministry.
Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:21-22)

The young man in today’s passage was rich with possessions, and kept all of God’s commandments. But he knew, somehow, that he was lacking something; he recognised a need for eternal life. He asked Jesus what he could do to inherit it.

Jesus very frankly told him what to do: be willing to live without the security of his possessions, and to completely trust and follow him. The young man left in sorrow unwilling to give everything up to follow Jesus.

This incident takes place as Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem – a journey we know ends in his crucifixion. Similar to this young man, Jesus kept all of his Father’s commandments perfectly. But unlike him, Jesus gave up his life on the cross.

In Romans 5:12–21, we read that sin came into the world through Adam and through this, death too. But Jesus’ death, in his righteousness and perfect obedience, took the penalty of sin in our place. Where we would have stood condemned for our sin, we can now stand in righteousness, justified before God our Father, because he has raised Jesus from the dead.

As we think about the rich young man in today’s passage, let’s consider also of ourselves: Do we trust in our career, status, property, investments, and the like for a secure future for us and those under our care? Do we rely on ourselves - our service, deeds, and intention - for gaining merit before God, especially during this Lenten season?

Jesus calls us to trust and follow him. He gave us his all that we might have forgiveness of sin, and reconciliation to God our Father. In his resurrection, we have assurance of resurrection to eternal life with him in heaven.

Jesus calls us, too, to give up our possessions: Will we stop trusting in them for our security and comfort, but instead use them in good stewardship and service to God?
Unlike the rich young man, we do not need to worry about what our future would be like, nor do we need to work to gain a sure standing before God; we have the promise of eternal life through trusting in Jesus alone. For this, we are joyful for our treasure in heaven is secure.

Ponder

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling,  
Naked, come to thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.  

(From the hymn 'Rock of Ages' by Augustus M. Toplady)

Promise

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”  
(2 Corinthians 8:9)

Prayer

Thank God that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have forgiveness of sin and assurance of eternal life. Ask God to help us to treasure this truth more than our possessions, and to be willing to give it all up as we follow Jesus.

Article by Mrs Melissa Raj, the Chairperson of the Diocesan Youth Council. Melissa worships at St Mary’s Cathedral – SMACC, Kuala Lumpur.
THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”
(Mark 10:25)

Following the refusal of the pious rich man in giving up his material possession and following him (Mark 10:17-22), Jesus reminded the disciples that wealth could be a hindrance to discipleship. To make his point clear, Jesus alluded metaphorically to the impossibility of a camel going through the eye of the needle. Shocked at what was said, the disciples discussed among themselves who could possibly be saved if the radical demands to follow Jesus required one to give up so much. Subsequently, Peter, on behalf of disciples, reminded Jesus that all of them had given up everything to follow him. How could the disciples, who were fishermen, forget the boats and nets they had left behind by the shores of the Sea of Galilee when they first heard Jesus calling them to follow him? I am not surprised that the disciples were wondering if all their sacrifices had really been worthwhile and appreciated by Jesus.

The way Peter and the disciples responded to Jesus mirrors some of us today. At times, I also wonder about how much I had given up to follow Jesus and to serve him. I would be thinking if I had never left my real estate profession, I would certainly be better off materially today. To be sure, all of us who follow Jesus ultimately make some sacrifices, big and small. Some give up material possession, relationships, and career plans while others face persecution and hardships. While there is nothing inherently wrong in remembering our sacrifices, we are often tempted to look back and recount the cost of our discipleship.

There is a danger here. To think of our discipleship solely in terms of its costs and sacrifices is to think of it wrongly. We often forget to count the joy and the blessings that God showers upon us when we follow him. More importantly, we have our sins forgiven and relationship restored with God. We can now enjoy the abundant life that Jesus promises and have the assurance of eternal life. That is why Jesus reassured his disciples that all their sacrifices were not in vain and they would be richly awarded not only in this life but in the world to come. The rich man might be first in this world,
but the disciples, and all of us, who had given up all to follow Jesus would be first in the world to come, where the rich man who could only count the costs and sacrifices to follow Jesus would be last.

**Ponder**

Instead of recollecting what we have given up in order to follow Jesus, let us pause for a moment to count our blessings. What are some of our rewards in following Jesus? As we list them, let us give thanks to God for all the riches of heaven that he has showered upon us.

**Promise**

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

**Prayer**

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen. (Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)
Day 38 – Mark 10:35-45

**NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE**

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)

What would have been in the minds of the sons of Zebedee when they asked Jesus on the road to Jerusalem as to who would be greatest in the God’s kingdom? An indicator of what preoccupied their minds and motivated them was in the question they asked Jesus. It is obvious that they had yet to apply in their minds what Jesus had taught them earlier that “if anyone would be first he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Their question which appears embarrassing to us now was over greatness and glory and their share of it – yet as we also walk daily with Christ and identify ourselves as people who wear his name as our badge as Christians – we need to understand the mind of Christ while Jesus himself followed the roadmap to Jerusalem. That roadmap was according to what his Father had willed for him. At the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus would surrender himself totally to the will of his Father so that God’s purposes can be fulfilled through him (Mark 14:36).

Obviously James and John, like many of us, had not understood this and looked upon Jesus more of a role model of power, authority and success rather than as a role model of a suffering servant who knew that he would be betrayed, tortured and put to death through the connivance of people who were afraid of losing their vested interests. James and John, up till that point, appear to be still driven by the desire to seek personal fulfilment of glory by association with a glorified Christ rather than being inspired by the servant hood of Christ.

Jesus gently suggests and prepares them by “reformatting” their minds by way of questions to the aftermath of his impending crucifixion (which at that point in time was still beyond the knowledge of James and John) that they should be prepared to endure the sufferings that he will soon undergo and identify themselves with his horrible death on the cross if they are to be worthy of any place with the Lord in his Kingdom. We who have the benefit of knowledge of the facts of Jesus’ ministry from his birth to death on the cross, resurrection and ascension to heaven where he alone sits at the right hand of God the Father need to affirm that Jesus alone has been accorded that position
of glory through his obedient and faithful ministry on earth as a suffering servant which led to his death on the cross.

Our position and status at every step of our lives at any time is defined by way of identification with that suffering servant model of Jesus Christ and not through wealth social status or human endowed honorifics.

**Ponder**

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. (Mark 10:36)

**Promise**

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:15)

**Prayer**

During this time in Lent, let us inquire within our hearts and seek the help of the Holy Spirit to sanctify our intentions and thoughts concerning the present and the future and let us pray that God will constantly remind us that we are called to serve and not to be served. Let us also pray that God will help us imitate Jesus Christ in our daily lives as a suffering servant to all and not as a people who are entitled to be served based on our perceived social status, honorifics or wealth.

*Article by Mr G Nanda Goban, Chairman of the Diocesan Men’s Council and a Bishop's Nominee to the Diocesan Synod. He worships and serves as a Lay Reader at St Mary’s Cathedral.*
Day 39 – Mark 10:46-52

WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” (Mark 10:46-49)

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

(John Newton)

The words of this well-known hymn were written by John Newton, a slave trader turned Anglican clergyman. This hymn which was birthed from his personal conversion to Christianity tells of how Newton gained spiritual sight. What does this have to do with today’s reading? Let’s find out!

Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, where he had earlier predicted that he would be killed and in three days would rise again (Mark 8:31, 9:30-32, 10:32-34,45). As they passed through Jericho and were about to leave, Jesus is verbally accosted by blind Bartimaeus who was sitting at the roadside of the city begging (vv.46-47).

“Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me!” he cried.

Undeterred by many who rebuked him, telling him to be silent, this blind man shouted even more, desperate for Jesus’ attention (v.48). When Jesus finally called Bartimaeus to him, the beggar threw his cloak aside, sprang to his feet with great eagerness and came to Jesus. His answer to Jesus’ question, “What do you want me to do for you?” was straightforward; he wanted to see (vv.49-51).

Blind Bartimaeus’ faith was displayed in his recognition of Jesus as the Son of David, the Messiah, God’s anointed one. Sure enough, Jesus restored his sight. What did
Bartimaeus do after that? Well, the story ends with him following Jesus along the way (v.52).

While the healing of blind Bartimaeus displays Jesus' authority as the Christ (Mark 1:1), this story should turn one's mind to a far greater restoration that Jesus came to bring, that of spiritual sight. In the Scriptures, “blindness” is used as a metaphor to describe the hopeless state of sinful humanity who fail to recognize God as the rightful ruler and are hostile against him, and who are perishing. (Isaiah 59:10, Matthew 15:14, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4). But just as it was foretold in the Old Testament that God would one day give spiritual sight to his people (Isaiah 35:5), these promises have been fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 4:16-19), whose death for sins and glorious resurrection has enabled us to see God, and to be reconciled to him! God who called light out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Our rightful response should be like that of Bartimaeus – to follow the one who has given us sight!

By God’s amazing grace, we who were once blind now see!

Ponder

Are you thankful for the spiritual sight God has given you in Christ Jesus?

Promise

When Jesus returns, we as God’s people will see God face to face.

Prayer

Lord, help me to declare your praises, for you have called me out of darkness into your marvellous light.

Article by Marianne Liaw Sook Huei, a youth ministry worker with Scripture Union Peninsular Malaysia. She is a member of St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.
THE FIRST REVOLUTIONARY PALM SUNDAY: WHO IS THIS MAN?

"Who is this man?"
(Matthew 21:10)

The disciples realized Jesus was finally allowing himself to be called King. Now they would take their rightful places in the new kingdom’s cabinet with power and authority. For Judas Iscariot, becoming the Minister of Finance was possibly his dream come true towards becoming rich, powerful and influential!

The pilgrims gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover in Jerusalem were ecstatic. Palm branches had become a nationalistic symbol since the rededication of the Temple in 164 B.C. At last, deliverance from Roman military and economic oppression seemed possible. The anger of the indignant chief priests and the teachers of the law (the political, social and economic forces of Jesus’ time) grew stronger with every miracle. Children calling Jesus the "Son of David" made matters worse. The usage of that Jewish phrase was a highly emotive, socio-politically and economically charged label.

Jesus knew all along that Palm Sunday wouldn't be a day of victory from Roman oppression. In fact, he would be crushed and defeated by the lethal military and religious forces of Rome and Jerusalem. He knew he was headed for the cross where his new kingdom would be victorious over injustice, poverty, wealth inequality, pride, and worldly ambition.

The Roman rulers were ruthless thieves of land and wealth. They turned hard-working labourers into economic slaves. Despite the horrors of Roman rule, the atmosphere surrounding Christ was that of meekness, obedience, peace and selflessness. If there is any time in the year when followers of Jesus should protest against the evils of our society, it is during holy week beginning with Palm Sunday. An Earth-Shaking Challenge! Our tradition of celebrating Palm Sunday as a triumphal entry should be reviewed. There needs to be voices of protest against the abuse of power and injustice in all its forms.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus revealed an alternate way of being political. A political ruler’s entry into a city was of great importance in the ancient world. Roman rulers would enter a city on a powerful war horse to show their domination. Jesus rode on a colt – a young
donkey that had never seen war. The cloaks and branches were meant “to connect Jesus to the kingship of Israel.” The term “Son of David” was also a clear messianic reference that hoped for a new political ruler, but just what kind of king was Jesus?

As he rode into the city, Jesus was declaring that the reign of God, in stark contrast to the reign of Rome and every other political system that seeks triumphant victory, through violence and persecution. The Gospel of Jesus subverts such oppressive politics because the Gospel is the politics of humility, service, forgiveness, and a nonviolent love that embraces all people, especially those we call our enemies. Jesus called it, “The Kingdom of God,” a political way of life based not on triumphant violence, but rather humble service. The politics of Jesus makes sure everyone has daily bread, forgives debt and sin, avoids the temptation to commit evil, and calls us into a life of forgiveness, love and peace. Tragically, we tend to live by the politics of Rome and Jerusalem, rather than the politics of Jesus.

**Ponder**

“The Church is the Church only when it exists for others . . . not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

**Promise**

“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthew 21:11)

**Prayer**

Abba, we know it is risky; we know that the politics of Jesus led him to Good Friday, where he suffered and died. And yet he stayed true to the Kingdom of God, speaking words of forgiveness even as he was murdered, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Assist us to reject the politics of Rome and Jerusalem and embrace the socio-political and economics of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Amen.

*Article by the Bishop Dr Jason Selvaraj, Area Bishop of the Southern Peninsula.*
Day 41 – Mark 12:28-34

**LOVE – THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself.”
(Mark 12:30-31)

“Do everything in love.”
(1 Corinthians 16:14)

The Bible has a lot to say about “love” and the verses in today’s passage are some of the most well known in Scripture. They are, I believe, some of the hardest to fulfil.

When asked by one of the scribes to choose which of all the commandments is the most important, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The passage begins with the words of the Shema, the centrepiece of Jewish prayer services to this day – “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one”. Verse 5 then commands us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Then Jesus adds this command from Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbour as yourself”.

These are often referred to as the “Two Greatest Commandments” but I want to suggest that there is a third commandment, hidden in Jesus’ words.

Firstly, love God. We love God, because God loved us first. We are his precious children, created by him, known by him, understood by him, forgiven by him, redeemed by him … the list goes on. God knows every deed, every action, every thought – and still he loves us. What else can we do, but to love him in return?

Secondly, love your neighbour. “Who is my neighbour?” asked the lawyer, and Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan. “Who is my neighbour?” we ask again today. Here are a few suggestions – those who are older than me and younger than me, those who are richer than me and poorer than me, those whose skin colour is lighter than mine and darker than mine, those who believe differently than me and worship differently from me, those who like me and those who don’t, those I like and those I don’t … the list goes on. These are all our neighbours and we are commanded to love each and every one of them.
Thirdly, love ourselves – perhaps the hardest of the three. If we are called to “love our neighbour as our self”, then first we need to learn how to love ourselves.

Low self-esteem is a significant problem in developed countries. The world is obsessed with image and, sadly, many people don’t like what they see in the mirror. The media feeds this insecurity with adverts for products designed to change us – to make us look younger, our skin look whiter, our hair look shinier, help it grow back, make us more curvy or less curvy … the list goes on.

Eating disorders among the young are on the increase. Suicide is the second leading cause of death globally among people between 15-29 years of age, and mental health problems among adults in Malaysia have trebled in the last twenty years.

**Ponder**

How can I help those who struggle with loving themselves in a healthy way? Or those who have a negative self-image? Do I spend too much time worrying about my own image? What can we, as a church, do to challenge this obsession with image?

**Promise**

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29.11)

**Prayer**

Father God, help me to love you with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind and with all my strength. Please take away my prejudice and intolerance of those who are different from me and teach me how to love myself. Amen.

*Article by the Reverend Jacqueline Rodwell, an ordained Priest in the Church of England, currently living in Malaysia. She assists at All Souls’ International Community Church, Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur.*
Day 42 – Mark 13:32-37

THE UNKNOWN DAY AND HOUR

Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, “Be on the alert.” (Mark 13:35-37)

When we make a road trip we tend to use navigation apps such as Google Maps or Waze for our convenience. One interesting aspect of these apps are that they are able to give you an almost accurate “Estimated Time of Arrival” (ETA), based on well calculated algorithms and data sources. We are thus able to plan ahead for our journey. Jesus’ disciples were also looking for the “ETA” - the “when and what” (Mark 13:1-4). Jesus responded by explaining the signs for the end of the age in Mark 13:5-31 and concludes in Mark 13:32-37, which is the main passage for our reflection.

Our Lord reminded his disciples to be aware of the temptation to determine the “day or hour.” Today, we live in a time where information is at our fingertips and the urge is to be “all knowing”. There are many throughout history who have attempted to predict the timing for the end time events. In 1806, a hen in Leeds was claimed to have begun laying eggs on which the phrase "Christ is coming" was written which convinced believers then that the end times was near. This was later proven to be a hoax and is a reminder of the possibility for deception so as not to be misled from the real truth.

Jesus reminds us to be alert as we prepare for the end times and the return of Christ. In verses 33, 34 & 37 – the reminder to ‘be alert’ is repeated again and again. This requires vigilance on the part of the believers like a ‘doorkeeper’. As I was writing this meditation, I came across an app called “Jesus Second Coming Alert” which is an extension app to Google Chrome. I do wonder if we would ever need such apps to remain alert. It is important to remain “wide awake” and not “fall asleep” in our Christian walk as we wait.

Jesus exhorted his disciples to be focused on the task (v. 34). He illustrates about a man who leaves his house under the care of his servants before he goes on a journey. As he leaves, each one is assigned with a task and expected to do their duties and responsibilities well. As Christians, we need to know the task that has been entrusted to us. We are entrusted to preach the Gospel to all people for the extension of God’s
kingdom on earth (Mark 16:15). Somehow we may have lost our focus today as Christians and as God's Church. We need to rediscover the task and to remain focused as we live in the end times and await the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

**Ponder**

Why are there ignorance and complacency in our lives as Christians when we consider the end times and the return of Christ?

**Promise**

“What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (Mark 13:37)

**Prayer**

Father, help us to be aware and not to be deceived as we live in the end times. Grant us the grace to be alert as watchmen and to remain vigilant. Give us strength to focus on the task entrusted to us. In Jesus name. Amen.

*Editor’s Notes: “I say unto all, Watch - This command was proper, not only for those who were expecting the calamities that were soon to come upon the Jews, but for all who are soon to die and to go to the judgment. We know not the time of our death. We know not how soon we shall be called to the judgment. The Son of man may come at any moment, and we should therefore be ready. If we are his friends; if we have been renewed and pardoned; if we have repented of our sins, and have believed on him and are leading a holy life, we “are” ready. If not, we are unprepared, and soon - probably while we are not expecting it - the cold hand of death will be laid on us, and we shall be hurried to the place where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Oh how important it is to be ready, and to escape the awful sufferings of an eternal hell!” (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Whole Bible)*

*Article by the Reverend Jesvinder Singh, Vicar of St. James’ Church, Kuala Lumpur and Priest-in-Charge of St. Matthew’s Church, Selayang.*
Day 43 – Mark 14:3-9

GIVE SACRIFICIALLY AND SELFLESSLY

“She has done a beautiful thing to me.”
(Mark 14:6)

The incident of the breaking of the alabaster jar took place the night before Jesus’ triumphal entry to Jerusalem. He had gone to a party hosted by Simon, the leper, to enjoy the food and final conversations with his friends before going to Jerusalem to be tried and crucified.

As Jesus was reclining at the table along with his disciples something unusual happened. An unnamed woman came into the presence of the Lord, bringing with her a costly and precious gift, an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. Silently she broke the alabaster box of ointment and anointed the head of Jesus. She had spared no expense. Three hundred denarii (or USD25) worth of spikenard, literally a year’s wages for the average person, was poured over Jesus’ head. Her act of loving service and worship filled the house with the aroma of the ointment.

Here was a woman whose worship of Jesus was at a great cost. It cost her not only the expensive jar of perfume but it cost her the higher price of facing the scorn and rejection of the self-righteous Pharisees and the other dinner guests. But she was willing to risk her reputation, not caring what others thought of her. Her desire to see and worship Jesus was greater than her fear of these guests.

While the disciples looked on and judged the woman’s behaviour as reckless, inappropriate, and wasteful, Jesus made two clear statements honouring her:

“She has done a beautiful thing to me.”
“She has done what she could.”

The woman’s focus was on Christ. Hers was an act of worship towards him and she did all she could to worship Christ by her actions. Hers was true worship and Jesus accepted her worship.
“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.”

The woman’s sacrifice teaches us what true worship is. Worship must be sacrificial and selfless. She did not hold back anything. It was all that she had. There was no reluctance on her part to give to Jesus. For her, it was worship but for others it was a waste. But she did not bother what others said. She kept on worshipping God.

Did you worship God sacrificially today, not holding anything back from him?

Did you worship God forgetting yourself and what others think of your worship?

**Ponder**

Freely you have received, freely give.

**Promise**

“He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also, with him freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

**Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, teach us to give you first place in our heart and service. You freely gave your beloved Son to us, help us therefore to gratefully seek to serve you. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.*

*Article by Ms Esther Richards, Editor of the Diocesan Anglican Messenger. She is also currently involved in coordinating the Community Bible Study in St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.*
THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. (Mark 14:22-23)

Leonardo da Vinci by his famous painting has forever impressed upon on our minds the last supper of our Lord. The scene that he depicts is that moment when Jesus announces his impending betrayal. The disciples look at one another with great shock, all, that is, except Judas, who refuses to look Jesus in the face and clutches his money to his breast.

The Passover festival, of course, had been done for centuries before Jesus came on the scene. It commemorated that time when the Jews were in bondage in Egypt. Moses warned Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh hardened his heart. So, God sent death over the land of Egypt, but miraculously this death passed over the homes of the Jewish people. If not for this divine intervention and the Exodus, the Jews would probably still be slaves in Egypt. Therefore, the Passover is a celebration of freedom and liberation for God’s people.

The Passover meal (or Seder) itself was a symbolic one reminding the Jews of the sufferings of their forefathers and the power of God’s deliverance. The foods that were eaten figuratively reminded the Jews of their captivity in Egypt. Apple sauce was eaten to remind them of brick mortar and the fact that they were forced to make bricks with no straw. A bitter herb is eaten to remind them of the bitterness of their captivity. It was this symbolic Seder Meal that the disciples were partaking of that night in the upper room.

At the conclusion of that meal, Jesus added two more symbols. He took a loaf and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying:

Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me. Then he took a cup with wine. He drank from it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness
of sin." Thus, was born the celebration of the Lord's Supper, out of the experience of an ancient Jewish custom.

Today begins the *Triduum Sacrum*, the sacred three days, of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. As great a mystery as the Eucharist is, it is still only one aspect of a greater mystery - the mystery of love. Love is the mystery which is manifest again and again in the course of these days: in the mandate of the New Commandment\(^1\), in the self-effacement of feet washing and, most especially, on the Cross of Calvary, where our sins were atoned for.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

**Ponder**

“For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:7-8, ESV)

**Promise**

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

**Prayer**

Dear Father, thank you for your immeasurable love for me manifested through the life and death of your precious Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

\(^1\) "Maundy" comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, or commandment, reflecting Jesus' words, "I give you a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34)

*Article by the Reverend Dr Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St Barnabas’ Church, Klang.*
Day 45 – Mark 15:6-41

**THEY CRUCIFIED HIM**

“It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.”

(Mark 15:25)

In our passage today, we see many things that don’t seem right.

Barabbas was guilty and deserved to die. Yet innocent Jesus was sentenced to death instead (vv.6-15).

Jesus deserved to be honoured as God’s promised King. But instead he was shamed by the mocking of the soldiers (vv.16-20), the passers-by (v.29), the religious leaders (vv.31-32) and even the rebels who were crucified with him (v.32b) – as if he were an imposter.

Jesus was actually the Lord of all the universe. And yet he was so weak that he couldn’t even carry his own cross (v.21).

And finally, in the darkness that covered the land as a sign of God’s judgement, he himself cried out in a loud voice “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”(v.34) Surely he was the one man who did not deserve to be forsaken by God.

Yet in all these things, God was in control and working for our good, and his glory.

For here we see Jesus suffering the effects of sin in this world like we all do. He experienced shameful injustice like so many of us do. He faced shame and scorn like many of us do. He experienced physical weakness like many of us do. He knows and identifies with his people.

But ultimately, Jesus was forsaken by the Father as he bore the penalty of our sin on our behalf. He suffered on the cross under God’s just wrath so that our sin could be punished while we could still be forgiven. He died forsaken so that we can be accepted. He was condemned in our place so we can be justified.

And because of what he has done we can now enter into God’s presence. The curtain in the temple, which symbolised the barrier between us and God, was torn in two from top to bottom (v.38). Because of the death of Jesus, those who trust him can be reconciled to God now and finally enter into his glory in the end.
Yet even this is not the end of the story. The one who was forsaken would soon be restored. The one who was mocked as ‘King’ would soon be vindicated as the true King. The one who was so weak would ascend as Lord. The one who was the victim of injustice would be the Judge of the world. He would be exalted because first he suffered. For God was using even the terrible events we read about today for the good of his Son and his ultimate glory.

**Ponder**

So as we ponder the Cross today, and wonder at the love that God shows us there, let us echo the words of the centurion ‘Surely this was the Son of God’ (v.39). And in doing so, let us bow in worship of our King who loved us and died for us. And let us trust him in all the ups and downs of life, knowing that God works all things for the good of those who love him.

**Promise**

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you that in your love, you gave your Son Jesus Christ to suffer with us and die for us.

Please help us to always trust in him and his death alone for our salvation.

And please help us to always trust you, in all our circumstances that you are working for our good, to the glory of your name. Amen.

*Article by the Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur and a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee.*
Mark only mentions Joseph of Arimathea as the one who buried Jesus, but from other sources, he was assisted by Nicodemus, the one who came to Jesus at night. We know that these two men buried Jesus and that they also anointed and wrapped his body in a linen cloth for burial. John reports that they used between 43-45 kg of spices to anoint the body of Jesus. (It depends on which translation you read as to how much the weight of the spices was, but the point is that it was a large amount.)

In verse 43b which says, “and Joseph picked up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.” It was certainly not easy for Joseph to have the courage to meet Pilate in the midst of all the tensions and the apprehension of the day.

God had to give these two men wisdom as to the fact that Jesus was to die on Passover and they must have got together and planned it out. During the Passover celebration probably many of the shops would have been closed so they must have bought the things needed to prepare the body of Jesus beforehand.

Why was all this so important? For one thing, it was to fulfill Scripture, and for another thing it was to prove that Jesus would indeed be raised from the dead. This would also prove that Jesus was dead for if his body was covered with the linen wrappings along with the great amount of spices that were used on that day, then there is no way he was still alive when he was buried. When Jesus rose from the dead the wrappings were still on the slab that his body lay for three days.
The phrase “and he (Joseph) picked up courage” is the verse that is striking. Courage is something that had to be gathered up by Joseph in order to do what he believed was the right thing to do. There are times I don’t have the courage to do what God requires of me and it will be helpful to be reminded that Joseph had to gather the courage to do what was needed to be done for the glory of God.

**Ponder**

In verse 43b that says, “and Joseph picked up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.”

“Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” (Lao Tzu)

“Great acts are made up of small deeds.” (Lao Tzu)

**Promise**

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” (Psalm 16:9-10)

**Prayer**

God help my unbelief, so that I may have the courage to do what is needed for your glory.

Article by Bishop Dato’ Charles Samuel, Area Bishop of the Northern Peninsula of the Diocese of West Malaysia. He is also the Vicar of St George’s Church, Penang.
RESURRECTION, COMMISSION AND ASCENSION

“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”
(Mark 16:8)

“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”
(Mark 16:20)

After 2000 years, the concept of Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension still bewilders many. I believe the biggest factor is fear. Some fear that this is fraud. Others fear commitment and responsibility, if it is true. The often-asked question is, “How can dead people rise again?!” Such people believe science confirms that there is no such thing as resurrection, let alone ascension. Yet many still believe that the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ are real events, despite the lack of scientific proof or identical events occurring today because their fears are alleviated by faith and trust and they become bold and confident.

In my teenage years, before I knew Jesus Christ, I was often full of fear. I feared the unknown, feared uncertainty, feared calamity, feared the loss of loved ones and had many other irrational fears. These fears caused me many sleepless nights and even insomnia. This fear led to worry, anger and unexplainable bouts of idiosyncratic and nonsensical behaviour. After I believed and genuinely accepted the resurrected Christ into my heart, all my fears strangely disappeared and I slept soundly!

Many years later, when I sensed God’s Commissioning Call, I was initially reluctant to respond. This reluctance brought along a sense of renewed fear – the fear of giving up my career, parental objections, losing my ambition and the uncertainty of God’s purpose for my future. After entering ministry, there were other fears such as, not knowing where I would be posted, the call to village ministries, speaking to others about Christ, praying in public, preaching the Gospel, visiting terminally ill patients, doing funerals, etc. However, having walked with Jesus for these many years, in faith, in trust and in obedience, my fears have greatly reduced. It has become easier to live out my faith with boldness and with dependence on God’s faithfulness.
After his Resurrection, the disciples of Jesus also gained a greater confidence and went everywhere preaching the Gospel boldly. Their fears were transformed into courage by the visible and physical reappearance of our Lord. They spent more time with the Lord Jesus and were filled with the Holy Spirit for a greater mission.

**Ponder**

The effect of Easter is not the event but the person, Jesus Christ. The power of Easter is not the outward knowledge but the inner experience of the Holy Spirit. The joy of Easter is not the celebration but the fact of God who ‘so loved the world’. If God is sovereign and his rule is complete, wise, righteous and good, why would you fear?

**Promise**

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.” (Mark 16:6)

**Prayer**

Almighty God, you have given your Holy Spirit to the Church to lead us into all truth: bless with the Spirit’s grace and presence the members of this your family; keep us steadfast in faith and united in love, that we may manifest your glory and prepare the way of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Article by the Most Reverend Datuk Ng Moon Hing, Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia and former Archbishop of the Province of South-east Asia.*
Appendix 1 – Mark 3:20-30

HOW CAN SATAN DRIVE OUT SATAN?

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.”
(Mark 3:24)

In today’s scripture reading, the scribes accused Jesus of being possessed by the devil for his work of deliverance. He retorts, “How can Satan drive out Satan?” Jesus uses the parable of the impossibility of a divided house to prove his point, “How could I scheme against myself, opposing evil when I am part of the evil plot?” It is like shooting your own foot. It just does not make sense. But what is the real motive of their objection?

If you want a group to do something, there are two ways you can use to mobilize them. Either you present a common objective for them to embrace or you find a common enemy to hate. If you cannot find an enemy, create one. The demon is a very handy fall guy. So, you weaponized your primordial fear by “demonizing” what you disliked, disagreed and feared. We see this especially in politics and social relationship with words like “satan” and “devil” to describe another group. It is classic Machiavellian and it is very effective. Here, we find Jesus’ opposition coming from two very close but different sources – soft rebuke from internal family circle and outright accusation from external religious authority. The scribes were probably hoping to mobilise some sort of immediate mob justice.

Disagreement and conflict are an inescapable part of any living community. Especially in church context, difference in theological orientation, ecclesiastical practice and personal spirituality are to be expected. There is always the temptation to name calling whenever we find others who do not see eye to eye to what we believe to be the only way of expressing spiritual truth and belief. Most probably, we would use words like unbiblical, unscriptural, unspiritual, unchristian, ungodly or even heretical, etc. The nuclear option is to brand those who are of “different” orientation as being the handiwork of the devil. Surely, we must have come across fundamentalist Christian groups who described certain denominations as “anti-Christ”. I had my fair share of being comically “upgraded” to a fallen disciple and referred to as “Reverend Judas”! I still wonder what transpired in certain minds when darkened with obsessive thoughts. These are value loaded words of finality. It is saying, “you better agree with me, if not,
then you are against God!” This also has the effect of making one’s world view the measuring yardstick to determine the so called “gospel truth”. Do not be surprised that your most hard working fault finder could be closer than you thought. Maybe, we ourselves are the most diligent trouble shooter of others!

**Ponder**

Better to have a noble enemy than a false friend.

**Promise**

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

**Prayer**

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

*Article by the Reverend Joshua Ong, Vicar of St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.*
Appendix 2: Collects (Holy Week & Easter)

Palm Sunday
Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Maundy Thursday
God our Father, you have invited us to share in the supper which your Son gave to his Church to proclaim his death until he comes: may he nourish us by his presence, and unite us in his love; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Good Friday
Almighty Father, look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross; who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Easter Eve
Grant, Lord, that we who are baptized into the death of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ may continually put to death our evil desires and be buried with him; and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection; through his merits, who died and was buried and rose again for us, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Easter Day
Lord of all life and power, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him: grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ, may reign with him in glory; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity.

Note: Collect for Ash Wednesday is printed on page 7.