

Marks of Discipleship

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Reading ■ Giving Time, Talents &
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March 4, 2018

Day 1: Matthew 5:3

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Poor does refer to literal poverty and the sense of one's own need. "Poor in spirit" is a characterization of the true people of God. The true people of God know that they do not control their own lives but are dependent upon God. Though poverty is not ignored by Matthew the emphasis is not economics but the identity of the people of God.

Question: What reason can you think of for Jesus to go up to a hill to give His talk?

Challenge: Create a "Depend On" chart. This can be a chart that grows. List the things you need in life and put down if you get these needs from self? Others? God?

Scripture: Isaiah 30:18-26, 32:16-20

Day 2: Matthew 5:4-5

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

Those that mourn are they that lament that God's Kingdom is not fully experienced by all the people. The sense of the verse is that they who mourn (truly feel bad that God is not experienced by all) will find comfort because God allows them to participate in the Kingdom now even if it is just partially. Meekness or gentleness is not a formula for success or reward. Love and humility, not power and pride, are the foundation upon which God's Kingdom is built. The inheritance of the earth refers to the giving of the land to the children of Israel. The Land was the means by which they would find life. In this context inheritance means that they will have a key place in God's Kingdom.

Question: What is your impression of the term "meek" used in this verse?

Challenge: Think of someone this week who is having trouble hoping in general. Try to help them experience the hope you have.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-11

Day 3: Matthew 5:6-7

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.'

Righteousness is a state that a person finds themselves in when the judge has declared them innocent. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are longing for the coming of the Kingdom. They hunger and thirst because they have tasted of God's love and want more, not just for themselves, but for all people. Mercy is a sign that God is present. We all want to be treated mercifully because we know that if we only received justice it would not be an act of God.

Question: Are they "blessed" because they are filled or because they hunger and thirst?

Challenge: If one aspect of mercy is forgiving someone when they are guilty, have you ever shown mercy?

Scripture: Hosea 6:1-6, Matthew 18:23-33

Day 4: Matthew 5:8-9

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Purity of heart is a single-minded devotion to God. It is devotion that is undivided and moving in tune with the plan God has for the redemption of the world. Augustus' rule was sometimes called the Pax Romani or the peace of Rome. There was peace in the region but it came as a result of conquest and was kept in place through fear. Jesus is proposing that "peacemakers" bring about peace through reconciliation, not fear or conquest.

Question: When you first read "pure in heart" what did you think it meant?

Challenge: What is the relationship between reconciliation and forgiveness?

Scripture: Psalm 86:11, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Psalm 138:1-6

Day 5: Matthew 5:10-12

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

Blessed means privileged, in a fortunate circumstance. The people of God are in fortunate circumstances because they will be vindicated in the Kingdom of God. In Jesus' resurrection He showed the future of all believers. They would receive a new body and live with God and all God's children in eternity. They are fortunate even in the face of persecutions. This is not a martyr complex but a simple statement of the joy that comes from knowing, by experience, the love of God.

Question: Can you identify any of the prophets Jesus is talking about?

Challenge: Where are Christians persecuted for Jesus' sake?

Scripture: Romans 4:23-5:8

Day 6: Matthew 5:13

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.'

In the Bible salt connotes loyalty and covenant; it was seasoning, used for purification and a sign of relationship. Salt loses its saltiness by becoming impure. If it becomes mixed with other elements it loses its function and usefulness. The disciples (and all who call themselves Christian) are warned that they too will become useless if they deny their mission. God's will, will be done, and if the ones God has first chosen do not act as God wants then others will be found to serve God. The function of light is not to be seen but to allow other things to be seen clearly. An act of love can be seen and stands out in the midst of an environment of hate and death. We are not the ones to be seen but the ones to illuminate things around us so that what is real can be seen.

Question: Matthew uses the term "earth" instead of world. Do you think he means to say something different by using earth instead of world?

Challenge: Look up the Bible references below. Write down what salt was used for and what it meant.

Scripture: Leviticus 2:12-13, Ezekiel 43:24, Ezra 4:14, Numbers 19:19, II Kings 2:19-22, Job 6:6, Colossians 4:5

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March 11, 2018

Day 1: Mark 4:35

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'

Jesus has finished a series of parables that pointed to a bountiful harvest that stemmed from a next-to-invisible beginning. Jesus has been inviting the crowd not only to hear, but to follow and bear fruit, because to be a disciple is to bear fruit. Jesus has decided to take His mission to the other side of Lake Galilee, which is primarily non-Jewish.

Question: What do you think the boat looked like and do you think that all twelve were with Him?

Challenge: See if you can figure out the distance from Capernaum to the other side of the Lake.

Scripture: Mark 4:1-34

Day 2: Mark 4:36

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

This event in Mark 4:35-41 takes place just after Jesus has been sharing some parables about the Kingdom of God and how in the Kingdom of God the values are different. Values of the Kingdom (mercy, justice, forgiveness, love) outweigh the society's values of payback, power, pride and greed. There will be many who believe but fewer who believe and follow. Jesus took the disciples out on the lake as a test to help them see that they needed some work in the faith area.

Question: What is the hardest test you ever had to take? How did you do?

Challenge: If Jesus was going to test your faith, what would be a good test?

Scripture: Psalm 88

Day 3: Mark 4:37-38

A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'

The storms on the lake can be very dangerous but at least four of the disciples were professional fishermen so they must have had extensive experience with the lake and its storms. In fact, they would have had experience with the storms at night as they fished mostly at night. The last phrase in the verse is ironic, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing"? Jesus came into the world to rescue the perishing from sin and death, and they wonder if He does not care about their lives.

Question: What would be your question to Jesus in this situation?

Challenge: Can you think of a time when "a great gale" arose in your life? Looking back, how did your faith help you weather the storm?

Scripture: Joshua 3

Day 4: Mark 4:39

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ' ceased, and there was a dead calm.

He calmly gets up and calms the sea, not for dramatic effect but because He wanted to teach them something and the storm kept them from hearing. Jesus wants us to hear and believe the Good News that God loves us and has made a way for us to be reconciled to Him. But there are storms that get in the way of our hearing. When we share with someone why we believe and why we have hope many times that person cannot hear because the storms of their life are too loud and scary. We may have to help calm the storms before we can tell of God's love.

Question: Why do you think Jesus does not tell them to calm down before He calmed the storm?

Challenge: Think of a time you made a decision or move out of panic - how did it work out?

Scripture: Exodus 14:10-31

Day 5: Mark 4:40

He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'

In Romans 8:37-39 (*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*), Paul states we will never be separated from the love of God. Both in life and in death we are one in Christ. In fact, when the storms of life are raging Jesus stands by us even more closely than in the safe harbor.

Question: What do you think - if we have faith can we be afraid? If so, then what does Jesus mean when He calls them afraid?

Challenge: When have you felt separated from God?

Scripture: Hebrews 11

Day 6: Mark 4:41

And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Jesus has been showing (in the first 7 chapters) that He has power over illness, demons and now over nature itself. The one who was at creation is the one who can command creation. Note that Jesus does not do any of these amazing things to be noticed or to gain fame. He needs the followers to know that He is the Son of God and He is the correct one to follow to find life more abundant and eternal.

Question: What do you think - is this the first time they wondered who Jesus was?

Challenge: What was it that proved to you that Jesus is the one to follow?

Scripture: Matthew 14:19-23

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March 18, 2018

Day 1: Mark 5.1-2

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. After the dramatic crossing of the Sea of Galilee the disciples are treated to another example of Jesus' power. He is going from one example of dealing with chaos to another. The entire event of the healing of the young man with demons is an example of how Jesus brings order out of chaos. Jesus does bring order and meaning to our lives; however chaos is very powerful and will constantly be looking for ways to disrupt our life. Jesus, in Mark 5: 19 & 20, gives us a way to deal with chaos, and to help keep order in our life.

Question: What do you think the area of the tombs looked like?

Challenge: Have you told your friends and family how much Jesus has done for you and how God has been merciful to you?

Scripture: Mark 5:21-34

Day 2: Mark 5.3-5

3He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; 4for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. How alienated must this person be if he prefers the company of dead people to living ones? The effect of the unclean spirits on this young man was to disconnect him from his community and from all human contact. He is living the non-human life of a rabid animal.

Question: In modern terms what do you think was this boy's problem?

Challenge: Think about this and be honest without being judgmental. What makes you uncomfortable being around people who are homeless, have addiction problems, mental or physically disabled?

Scripture: Mark 6

Day 3: Mark 5.6-8

6When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 7and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' 8For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' 9Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' 10He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Kneeling before him, the spirits first approach Jesus as a suppliant. The spirits then attempt to invoke God's name to drive Jesus away. Jesus now gains control over the evil spirits by demanding the name of the spirit. The name of the spirit gives us an explanation of why this young man is in such bad shape. He is controlled by not one spirit but by a multitude so that no effort on his part could ever dislodge the spirits control over the young man. The name 'Legion' brings to mind the number of spirits possessing the young man. A Roman legion had about 6,000 men but the term was also used to describe a battalion (2,048 men), which is closer to the number of pigs referred to later in the account.

Question: How did the unclean spirits know Jesus' identity, when those around Him did not?

Challenge: How do people recognize you as a follower of Jesus?

Scripture: Mark 7

Day 4: Mark 5.11-12

11Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; 12and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' 13So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herds, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

In Jewish thinking the sea is the unknown and it can go from calm to dangerous in a moment. Because of its unknown quality and its volatile nature it is used as an image of chaos. Jesus used the forces of chaos to deal with the forces of evil. The spirits ask not to be cast out of the country so; Jesus casts them into the swine. The swine run to the sea and are destroyed. In Revelation there is another lake called the Lake of Fire into which are cast all the demonic powers and even death itself. Jesus is not only healing but showing that God will not only destroy evil but is only God that can destroy the evil forces of the world and death.

Question: Why are there so many pigs so near Jewish territory?

Challenge: The region Jesus went to was called the Decapolis. What does that term mean?

Scripture: Mark 8

Day 5: : Mark 5.14-17

14 The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. 15They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the demon; and they were afraid. 16Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

The response of the towns people (no doubt the owners of the pigs) is to be afraid of Jesus. His healing is costing way too much. They noticed the boy in his right mind and clothed but they only saw the cost not the healthy person. One of the questions the story forces us to think about is-- what is the worth of a person?

Question: Why were they afraid to have Jesus stay in their neighborhood?

Challenge: What would scare people today if we became too Christian?

Scripture: Mark 5:35-43

Day 6: Mark 5.18-20

18As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' 20And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

The mission of the United Methodist Church is "making faithful disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation for the world". Jesus made a faithful disciple of the young man with the unclean spirits now he is sent home to transform his world through his personal testimony of being touched by the love of God. When we tell (and show) the effects of God's love it will amaze those around us.

Question: There could be a lot of reasons why Jesus told the young man to go home. If you were telling the story and someone asked you why what answer would you give?

Challenge: How are you expressing your appreciation for Jesus calming the storm of your life (giving you salvation) and in what way are you following Him.

Scripture: Acts 8.26-40- Philip was one of the first Deacons. He followed Jesus' call to go & preach.

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March 25, 2018

Day 1: Mark 11:1-2

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Beth phage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.

The Mount of Olives is a short distance from the entrance to the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem. Bethany is on the west side of the hill called the Mount of Olives. Beth phage is a very small village (really a collection of houses) a Sabbath's day journey (the distance a person was allowed to walk on the Sabbath) to the temple court. It is about a mile walk in total. It is Jesus' intention to dramatize who He is. He was preparing a living parable.

Question: Have you ever been in a parade? Would you rather be in one or watch one?

Challenge: Take a walk this week of at least a mile. Do this each day and while you walk think about your life to date.

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

Day 2: Mark 11:3

'If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."

The reason they were willing to give up the colt so quickly is found in the statement "the Lord" has need of it. This is not Jesus' first trip to this area. In fact He has been here a number of times. He is well known by the people in the villages on the Mount of Olives. They knew He was Lord so the title the disciples used told the person with the colt that God was calling them to give up something valuable for the kingdom. We never know when God will call upon us to give up something important for the kingdom.

Question: How do you like horseback riding?

Challenge: When have you felt "someone" saying to you, the Lord has need of it?

Scripture: John 12:9-19

Day 3: Mark 11:4-6

They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

This sounds like a repeat of the verse above. The difference is that in verse 3 Jesus is telling what the disciples can expect, but in verse 4 the disciples are experiencing the truth of what Jesus told them. We have heard the good news of God's love but until we accept it and experience that sense of forgiveness that comes from God, it is just information. It does not become personal until we experience it. This is why we must help people experience the love of God, that love we have already experienced. We cannot preach the word until we have believed it ourselves.

Question: What are the three most valuable things that you have?

Challenge: What would it mean for you to give your best or most valuable things you have to God?

Scripture: Zachariah 9:9-10, Isaiah 2:1-4, Micah 4:1-3

Day 4: Mark 11:7-8

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.

Jesus picks a colt to make His entry because he wanted to place emphasis on the fact that His kingdom is of a different nature. He comes not as a conquering hero on a war horse, but as the king of peace. He brings a kingdom that has hope for humanity and comes from God. Spreading cloaks and waving branches was a way to honor someone.

Question: Today, how do we show respect for someone in a parade?

Challenge: If God will bring about the kingdom when God wants to, why should we work to bring it about?

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:10-18

Day 5: Mark 11:9

Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'

One of the things the crowd did for Jesus was to acknowledge Him as Lord. In effect they were saying that He was the greatest. This kind of affirmation was needed by Jesus so he could go through the days to come. In the days to come some of the same people would call for his death. For now the crowd recognized Jesus as the King and was willing to proclaim it for all to hear.

Question: What good news have you shared this week?

Challenge: List five things about yourself that are outstanding.

Scripture: Mark 14:1-31

Day 6: Mark 11:10

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

The hope of the people in Judah at this time was that God would now establish the new kingdom on earth. They believed that God loved them and they believed that God, would finally bring them back from exile. They did not know exactly how this would happen and they especially did not know when. They knew it would be soon but they did not know how soon. There were plenty of opinions as to how and when and what they should do to prepare. All of these opinions contributed to the leaders not recognizing Jesus as the one they waited for and the time of redemption was now. Palm Sunday was a brief time when both Jesus and the crowd experienced and expressed the joy of God's promise fulfilled. They hailed and acknowledged Jesus as Lord.

Question: How do you think the crowd knew to hail Jesus as king?

Challenge: Easter is coming in two days. Write down how you have experienced the resurrection.

Scripture: Mark 14:32-72