

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading ■ Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

March 3, 2019

Day 1: Acts 3:1-2

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

The Disciples in the very early church at Jerusalem would go each day to the Temple Mount to preach and teach at the time of prayer. In the first century seeing a beggar was an every day happening. Today we do not see many beggars, but we do see a number of homeless persons. We can find ways to help those who are homeless, both by healing in body and spirit.

Question: Have you ever seen a beggar, and given money to one?

Challenge: This week try stopping for a time of prayer in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon.

Scripture: Matthew 8:1-22

Day 2: Acts 3:3-6

When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

The man begging would not have made direct eye contact with a passerby, but just "looked" at them. To make direct eye contact is a gesture of confidence, and a beggar is supposed to be subservient. Peter and John insist that the man look at them, because they refuse to treat him as a thing. They insist that he make a move toward healing as they are about to heal him. Peter and John demonstrate a primary Christian belief - that no matter how low our fortunes go, we are still made in the image of God and worthy of respect.

Question: When has someone asked you for something that you could not give them?

Challenge: If you did not have money, nor the ability to heal, what could you give the lame beggar?

Scripture: Psalm 42

Day 3: Acts 3:7-8

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

In our day the healed beggar would need about three months of therapy before he could dance. When God heals us we are able to dance right away. This is a sign of God's grace. The love of God is so strong that individuals who have experienced it can praise right away. When we come to God confessing our sin, and we invite Christ into our heart we find relief right away.

Question: What is your preferred way to praise God: Song- Dance- Praying –Service – Quiet - What?

Challenge: Think of a time you were sick and then better. Did you dance and sing and praise God? Why or why not?

Scripture: Psalm 96:10-13

Day 4: Acts 3:9-10

When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

The people that saw the beggar dancing about were surprised and amazed, but they were not suspicious. Today too many people are suspicious of someone being healed. Today many do not believe, because to do so would question their world view. In the first century the leaders did not want to believe because it would threaten their position in the society. Today we do not believe because it does not make sense, or cannot be proved.

Question: What is the last thing you saw that filled you with wonder?

Challenge: How would you react if you saw someone healed? Why?

Scripture: Luke 17:11-19

Day 5: Acts 3:12

When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

The way we can tell if someone is healing is if they do not take credit for the act, but give the credit to God. In fact this applies to everyday life. To give credit to God for "my" accomplishments is nothing more than giving credit where credit is due. I am a steward of what God has given to me. My responsibility is to use the gifts wisely and in Jesus name. If I take credit for any good deed or action, then my works are not effective in the long run. When I do a good deed in Jesus name then I acknowledge my part in the good deed. I am humble because I know that God will do a complete good work, and I just play a part.

Question: What was the last surprise you had?

Challenge: Look back over the last few good deeds you have done - were they in God's name? If not, develop a habit of thanking God for the good deed and giving God credit in your prayers.

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

Day 6: Acts 3:15-16

You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see

The key term in this verse is "complete healing." Only God can completely heal, and only if the person is willing to be healed. God (for some reason) will not force healing on a person, but invites the individual to be healed. The name of God was used once a year on the Day of Atonement to ask for forgiveness of sins. The High Priest would go once a year into the Holy of Holy's and use the name of God to have the sins of the people forgiven. Peter is saying that the name of Jesus has the same power.

Question: How would you feel if someone told you that you killed the author of life?

Challenge: Think over the last few weeks and see if there is anything you did for which you need forgiveness. Ask God and if necessary ask the person you have wronged.

Scripture: Genesis 50:15-21

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March 10, 2019

Day 1: Luke 22:14

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.

In other places in the Gospels the term '*the hour*', refers to the time of Jesus' passion. Here it simply means it was time for the meal. His place at the table would have been right next to the host. The host would see to the guests needs, or would order a servant to do so.

Question: What was the shape of the table? Who do you think sat on Jesus' left and right side?

Challenge: Under what circumstances could someone not come to the Lord's table?

Scripture: Numbers 9:1-18

Day 2: Luke 22:15-16

He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'

The meal was a Passover meal. The Passover meal commemorated the release of the people from slavery in Egypt, and was required to be done yearly by all Jews. Jesus is predicting His death by saying both that He will suffer, and that He will not eat again until the kingdom comes. In early Christian usage, Jesus Himself becomes the Passover, "for our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Question: Do you think the disciples really understood that this was Jesus' last meal with them?

Challenge: If you were providing a farewell meal for yourself what would you serve and how would you serve it so your friends would remember it? Assume you are not going to die, but are going away and will not see your friends again.

Scripture: Exodus 12:1-20

Day 3: Luke 22:17 **Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves;**

At the Passover meal four cups were blessed and drank. The cup mentioned in this verse is probably the second cup. The second cup is drank after the account of the Exodus, with its meaning being told. The exact order of the Passover in the first century, (as with the Lord's supper), is not known. The Gospel accounts, and Paul's account of the Lord's supper were written after the meal had been celebrated for a number of years. These accounts were more concerned with the meaning than the form or outline of the meal.

Question: Why do you think wine was used at this meal instead of milk or water?

Challenge: Why do you think we use grape juice today? Grape juice is not mentioned in the Bible.

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-30

Day 4: Luke 22:18

for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

Jesus gives a prediction of His own death. He will not eat or drink of the Passover meal again, until the kingdom of God has come in its fullness.

Question: Try to imagine you do not know about the resurrection. How would you understand Jesus' statement?

Challenge: Someone asks you - what is this kingdom of God? How do you answer?

Day 5: Luke 22:19

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the Passover meal when Jesus gives thanks to God for the bread, the bread is a reminder of the Manna that gave life to the Israelites in the wilderness. The Manna came from God, so too, Jesus comes from God and the giving of His life (his death) now gives hope and life to all who believe. 'In remembrance' means that whenever we do this act (the breaking of the bread and taking of the cup), Jesus is present with us. Jesus' presence with us is the sign to us and the world that Jesus was raised from the dead and a reminder of why He died. He died to reconcile us to God, and He rose to prove that we will rise and be with God and Christ forever.

Question: If Jesus is present with us when we have communion, where is He?

Challenge: How do you give thanks for your Manna from heaven?

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-13

Day 6: Luke 22:20

And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

At the time of the capture of Jerusalem and the exiling of many of the people (587 BCE), Jeremiah heard a word from God and proclaimed it to those in exile. That word was that even though the Israelites broke their part of the covenant God made with them, God was going to make a new covenant with them. It is new, because it replaces the old (which has been negated because one party did not keep their part). It is different because it will be written upon the hearts of the people, not on stone. It will be effective forever because it will not depend upon our work, but God's. The blood, (the life), of Jesus (His death) reconciles us to God and makes us part of the family of God. Our part is to accept this gift. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:9-10).

Question: Why did Jesus have to die? Why could He have not just been taken to heaven without dying?

Challenge: Look up the term *covenant* to see what it means, then read Jeremiah and see how you understand the reading.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34

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March 17, 2019

Day 1: Matthew 26:36

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

In many depictions of the prayer in Gethsemane we see Jesus praying on a rock. These depictions recall the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14). In Judaism this story was understood to be an example of how one is willing to sacrifice for others. Jesus is about to be offered and the one sacrificed is praying upon a rock just as Isaac was laid on a rock altar in preparation for sacrifice. Jesus is giving new meaning to this Jewish tradition and symbol.

Question: Gethsemane is called a garden - what would be a better word for this place?

Challenge: This week try getting up at midnight and spend some time in prayer.

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-14

Day 2: Matthew 26:37-38

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."

Jesus longs for human companionship in the face of death. Jesus is tempted to not follow through on being the sacrifice and He needs the others to "watch" Him and by watching help support Him as He keeps on with His task.

Question: How is asking the others to watch a sign of strength?

Challenge: Recall a time when you were the one to need someone to sit with you and also a time when you were the one sitting with the other. What was the difference between the two in terms of how you felt?

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

Day 3: Matthew 26:39

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

There is a similarity between this prayer and the part in the Lord's Prayer that says "save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil." The prayer in the garden is filled with more urgency and pain yet both acknowledge our human desire to avoid painful situations. We may not want anything bad to happen to us but at the same time we acknowledge that God's will is what is most important. If we believe that God has given us abundant life then ought we not trust, that even if we cannot see it, God has our best interests in mind? I wonder if Jesus' prayer (in the garden) is a logical ending to the line in the Lord's Prayer.

Question: Why use the image of a cup to describe what Jesus was about to do?

Challenge: For the rest of the week end your prayers with the words "not my will but yours."

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Day 4: Matthew 26:40-41

Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

For Peter, James and John to stay awake all night would have been very hard from a practical angle. The Passover meal is a big meal that includes drinking four cups of wine. Their intention was to stay awake and so support Jesus but their bodies just were not up to the task. Our spirits can want and desire to follow Jesus but unless we are connected to Him we will fall asleep. The Disciples experienced the truth of His words in John 15 – You cannot produce fruit unless you abide in me. On our own we cannot stay awake to see what God would have us do as followers of Jesus.

Question: Can you think of another story in the gospels where some are urged to stay awake?

Challenge: When we have the all night prayer vigil after the Good Friday service - sign up for a very late night time slot.

Scripture: Matthew 24:38-48

Day 5: Matthew 26:42-44

Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

Thank God for these words of Jesus. How many times have we wondered if an action that we believe

God wants us to take is really a message from God? Doubt and questioning are healthy. We are to test and see if an action is from God or our own wants. Jesus gives us permission to question and wonder, by His asking God a second time, if he must drink the cup.

Question: In what act of worship is the cup mentioned?

Challenge: Think of a time when you felt God urging you to some action and you wondered if it was really God.

Scripture: Mark 14:26-42

Day 6: Matthew 26:45-46

Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

"Just as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many were made righteous" – Romans 5:19. All of the teaching, preaching and healing lead to the real ministry that Jesus was to accomplish. By His obedience He could undo the act that brought sin into the world. By His obedience He would reconcile the world to God. This act of obedience had to be totally voluntary and out of love. Jesus chooses obedience and here is the point at which He chooses.

Question: Why was Adam's sin disobedience?

Challenge: Can you imagine what would have been Jesus' life if He did not choose to go to the cross?

Scripture: John 18:1-11

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Day 1: Mark 14:53-54

March 24, 2019

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

Mark speaks using the plural (chief priests instead of priest) because the house of Annas controlled the High Priesthood from 6 A.D. until 62 A.D. Annas, Caiaphas and Elazar (all at one time high priests) formed a kind of inner circle within the 70 member Sanhedrin. Caiaphas' (the current high priest) political views on the "Jesus problem" are stated in John 11:50 - "you do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." It is important to note that the average person in Jerusalem at the time did not participate in the trial or the call for Jesus' death - only the leaders and probably just those in the Sadducees party.

Question: Though the account of Peter's denial comes later in the chapter - Why did he think he would not be recognized?

Challenge: It is hard to get into someone else's mind - but can you imagine why Peter followed them after the arrest?

Scripture: Hebrews 9

Day 2: Mark 14:55-56

Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree.

The Sanhedrin could not give out a death sentence without permission from the Roman officials (it was against Roman law to execute someone without their permission). Herod the Great had to obtain Rome's permission to execute his two sons on the charges of treason. Some historians believe that it was not the whole Sanhedrin that was in session but just some of the members and that it was their job to come up with the correct charges to bring to the Roman officials.

Question: Did the witnesses outright lie or did they report half truths or did they not hear correctly?

Challenge: What would be an example of giving false information about Jesus today?

Scripture: Psalm 88

Day 3: Mark 14:57-59

Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands." " But even on this point their testimony did not agree.

Saying you could destroy the Temple and rebuild it was not a capital offense. Jews at the time believed that God would provide a Temple in the last days. The new Temple would not be made by human hands.

Question: Was Jesus being literal about destroying the Temple?

Challenge: Do a little research and see when the Temple was destroyed and how it happened.

Scripture: John 2:13-22

Day 4: Mark 14:60

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer?

What is

it that they testify against you?"

The high priest is hoping for Jesus to condemn himself by answering the high priest's question. Jesus does not want to speak because the witnesses were in such disagreement. They were disagreeing not about what he said, but what it meant. The accusers though were hoping to get one charge that could be used against Him.

Question: Why do you think Jesus was silent?

Challenge: How should a person respond when people lie about them and what they say?

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17 (note verse 16)

Day 5: Mark 14:61

But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

It is interesting that the high priest knew the things that Jesus did (healing, teaching and preaching) were signs of the coming of the Messiah. If they can make the case that Jesus claims to be the Messiah and the Messiah is supposed to be the new King, then Jesus could be charged with treason against the Romans. The high priest is weary of the discussion and calls upon his authority and demands – in the name of God - for Jesus to speak. Jesus is now forced to speak.

Question: Why wait so long to ask Jesus this question that would surely convict Him?

Challenge: Can you think of a way that Jesus could have answered the question without accusing Himself?

Scripture: Psalm 110

Day 6: Mark 14:62-63

Jesus said, "I am; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and "coming with the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death.

Jesus' words "I Am" come from the call of Moses on Mt. Sinai. When Moses asks who has sent him to the people, God answers "I Am." The high priest charges Jesus with blasphemy. This charge in Jewish law did carry a death penalty. However in Roman law Jesus had to be charged with insurrection in order to be guilty of a capital punishment.

Question: Why did the high priest tear his robe?

Challenge: Do a little research and see what blasphemy is.

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-14

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March 30, 2019

Day 1: Matthew 27:15-18 *Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.*

This event at the governor's court highlights the difference between Jesus, the one who saves His people (the true son of the Father), and Jesus Barabbas, "son of the father" who kills and steals from the people. Matthew shows in this scene the difference between the two kingdoms. Jesus is the "righteous one" who did no evil, yet the Jewish leaders will persuade the people to choose a notorious criminal.

Question: What festival is mentioned and what event did it recall? Where in the Bible do we find the story?

Challenge: What could make you almost mad enough to hurt someone who was seriously questioning your religious beliefs?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16:1-6

Day 2: Matthew 27:19

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him."

Dreams were considered divine messages (revelations from the gods). Pilate now knows that Jesus is innocent and so he must find a way to get out of this problem. He has had dealings with the high priest, (Caiaphas was high priest during most of Pilate's governorship), before and each party knew how to manipulate the other. Pilate has no reason to like any of the people he rules but, he does not want to start a riot. Some of his past decisions just about caused riots to occur, (he once took money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct).

Question: Do you think God was talking to Pilate's wife?

Challenge: Think about the ways God has spoken to you outside of the Bible or worship.

Scripture: Genesis 28:12-17, Judges 7:10-20

Day 3: Matthew 27:20

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

The crowds are an uncommitted group. They are at one time friendly and appear to be potential disciples. Yet at another time they call for Jesus to be killed and a criminal to be freed. When human beings make decisions based just on feelings those decisions will be very erratic. If we decide based on what feels good at the moment, we will often make bad choices. In a debate the one who talks with the most passion is not necessarily correct. A person who has a polished way of speaking does not always make the best leader. When an important decision is to be made it ought not to be made on the emotion of the moment.

Question: Who made up the group of elders? Do you think they are just older?

Challenge: Look carefully at commercials and ads this week and see how they are trying to influence you.

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

Day 4: Matthew 27:21-22

The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"

The choice that Pilate gives to the "all" in verse 22 is like the one Joshua gave to the assembled people (Joshua 24:15). Each had to choose who they will serve - the laws of God or their own desires. We are also the "all" referred to in the verse. We have to choose whom we will serve - the forces of death and evil or those of life and hope. Serving and obeying God is not a once in a life time choice. We must each day make up our mind to continue to follow God. The reality is that a choice for life and hope can be hard to make because of the consequences. When we as a nation entered WWII we chose life and hope but it cost a great deal. Choosing to follow God's commands can be difficult in the face of evidence that it will bring no reward.

Question: Where did the crowd get the idea to crucify Jesus? They usually stone someone.

Challenge: This week ask God each day to help you with your attitude so that you are not making a choice like the one above.

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-9

Day 5: Matthew 27:23-24

Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

Pilate wanted to get out of this situation by putting the blame for the execution of Jesus on the crowd and to say he had nothing to do with it. He wants to be sure that he has not gone against the divine warning, (the dream of his wife), and carries out what the crowd wants. He gives them the sentence they are looking for and by the act of hand washing excuses himself of responsibility in the matter.

Question: Do you think Pilate is innocent? If not how much guilt does he deserve?

Challenge: Do you see examples of leaders giving people what they want, not what they need? What are they?

Scripture: Isaiah 44:1-8

Day 6: Matthew 27:25-26

Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

The power of sin to corrupt is seen in this whole episode. Rome represented the ruling body, with power to enforce mercy and life. Sin caused them to use such power to condemn someone to death. The crowd, who are parents and want the best for their children, are seen to call a curse on them. Religious leaders steeped in the scripture only see their interests at stake. Sin has caused all of these different parties to make choices that they would not normally make. Sin in the form of mob mentality pushed the events to an end - the death of Jesus on the cross.

Question: If Jesus was going to be killed, why whip him?

Challenge: Think about Barabbas. What do you imagine he did after being released?

Scripture: Isaiah 53