

# Marks

# of Discipleship

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

January 5, 2020

## Day 1: Isaiah 60:1

**"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you."**

With each new dawn we have new possibilities. The night is not a fearsome thing on its own. At night because the world around us looks very different than in daytime. so that we can find the night menacing. We feel better when we can see what is around us. In Isaiah's time there were no street lights. The only illumination at night came from the moon and stars. Dawn was a sign that God has not forgotten the people and has given them a new day. God created light so that when we see light we automatically feel closer to God.

**Question:** Do you find more inspiration from a sunrise or sunset?

**Challenge:** Try to see one or more sunrises this week and greet the new day with a prayer of thanksgiving.

**Scripture:** Isaiah 54:1-17

## Day 2: Isaiah 60:2

**See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.**

Isaiah is encouraging the exiles to go back to their homeland. He is telling them that God has not abandoned them but rather has chastened them for past sins. God may be angry for a moment but His love lasts forever (Jeremiah 31:2-4). The Lord chose the people of Israel to shine as a light to the nations. If they go back to their land and live as faithful people then they will be the light of God to the nations

**Question:** If the author is not talking about physical darkness as in night time, what is he talking about?

**Challenge:** Think about why the sunrise is like God's glory shining on you.

**Scripture:** Exodus 24

## Day 3: Isaiah 60:3

**Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.**

All of the various nations of the world will be drawn to Jerusalem because it will shine so brightly that people will want to see the light. When the wise men saw the star they went first to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is to be a city where God's mercy can be experienced, where God's law is followed cheerfully, and where God's presence can be felt by all who live there. Jerusalem, and by extension all of the people of Israel were to be a sign of hope to the world - a sign that God will redeem all of creation from the pain and fear of death.

**Question:** Do you think Jerusalem has lived up to what God wanted?

**Challenge:** Think about a time when you felt the presence of God. What was taking place and can you reproduce that experience?

**Scripture:** Psalm 112

## Day 4: Isaiah 60:4

**"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm."**

Along with the leading persons of the nations coming to Jerusalem, all those who had been forced to leave will also come. The sons and daughters are the children of those who were taken into captivity. Isaiah means that Jerusalem will be once again a place where others find inspiration and hope. Jerusalem is more than a physical city, it is a sign of hope. It is a place where peace, justice and mercy are found. The concepts of justice and peace are fine ideas but without a physical manifestation they do not on their own have the power to instill hope.

**Question:** Do you think the author is speaking figuratively or is this something he is seeing? Why?

**Challenge:** What would for you be a physical manifestation of hope?

**Scripture:** Isaiah 52

## Day 5: Isaiah 60:5

**Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.**

During Solomon's time Jerusalem (even though it was in the hills and inland) was a large trading city. A lot of wealth flowed in and out of the city. Trade is different than tribute. Tribute is brought to appease a ruler or in fear of a powerful ruler. Tribute is designed not only to enrich the one receiving it, but to keep the giver in a state of poverty so they cannot gain power. Trade implies that two parties each receive what the other needs without one impoverishing the other. Nations will once again come to Jerusalem when it uses the wealth it receives for God's work. The same is true in the 21st century. If we use our wealth for selfish reasons and not for God's work, our wealth will pass away.

**Question:** Why do you think the Bible asks that we give 10% of our wealth to God's work?

**Challenge:** You may spend a lot less on yourself than you think. Go ahead and see how much you spend on yourself in a week.

**Scripture:** Isaiah 59:1-22

## Day 6: Isaiah 60:6

**Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.**

Wealth will come to a people to the degree that they will acknowledge God as the giver of all things and in addition use that wealth as God would have it used. In the New Testament, Jesus (in the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25:14-30) tells us that God's wealth will be given to those who will use it, not to those who will hoard it. In another place (Mark 8:36) Jesus said what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul. God will provide us with the wealth we need in both money and ideas if we will use it for God's purposes.

**Question:** Where else have you heard in the Bible of gold and incense being brought as a gift?

**Challenge:** How well are you using the wealth that God has given you in money and time and talent?

**Scripture:** Isaiah 61:1-7

# of Discipleship

January 12, 2020

## Day 1: Matthew 3:11-12

***'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'***

John's baptizing was a call for people to repent. Repentance is a change of mind and a change in behavior. It means "turn around," stop going in the direction you are going because that direction will end in your destruction. John's baptizing was a sign of the coming judgment. The one coming with "fire" brings the judgment itself. Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John's call to worship is not a cheery "good morning," but a cry - "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!"

**Question:** Why does John believe he is not worthy to carry "His" sandals?

**Challenge:** Why do you think we use water in our baptism services?

**Scripture:** Mark 1:1-11

## Day 2: Matthew 3:13

***Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.***

Jesus begins His public ministry by going to see John where he was baptizing at the Jordan River. John will be the one to announce to the world that the Savior has come to call all of humanity to Himself. It is fitting that Jesus would go to see John, for John had been telling people that the time had come for the people to repent, so that they might "see" the messiah. John baptized in the Jordan, near the place where the people of Israel crossed the Jordan, centuries before to enter the Promised Land. They had to go through the Jordan to reach the Promised Land and John is calling them back to the Jordan so that they can once again go to the Promised Land.

**Question:** How old do you think Jesus was when he was baptized?

**Challenge:** In the United Methodist church we baptize in one of three ways: Sprinkling (a small amount of water), Pouring (a larger amount poured on the head), and Immersion (the whole person going under the water). If you were being baptized which one would you want?

**Scripture:** Luke 3:2-23

## Day 3: Matthew 3:14

***John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'***

John recognizes that Jesus does not need to repent and does not need to go into the water. John sees before anyone else that Jesus comes from God. John's question allows Jesus to state that He is following God's will.

**Question:** From what you have been reading in the scripture section above - who needed to be baptized?

**Challenge:** Think back on a baptism service you have been to - what was the most meaningful part?

**Scripture:** John 1:19-37

## Day 4: Matthew 3:15

***But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented.***

Fulfill means to simply perform. Both John and Jesus are linked in carrying out God's plan of salvation for the world. God's plan includes the baptism of Jesus. The Gospel does not get into the motive behind the act, nor what was on the mind of either participant. The key is that they are obedient and carry out God's commands. In this event of baptism, John & Jesus' actions point to their obedience to God's commands.

**Question:** How do you feel about the concept of obedience?

**Challenge:** How do you see yourself being obedient to God's will?

**Scripture:** Acts 2:24-32

## Day 5: Matthew 3:16

***And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.***

The image of the dove is found at some critical moments in the Bible. At Creation the Spirit of God went across the chaotic waters (Genesis 1:2). The dove flew out from the ark across the dangerous water (Genesis 8:8) and brought back an olive branch. In both of these events the dove is a sign of the coming of a new creation. The appearance of the dove in the midst of chaos is the sign that God is creating order out of chaos. The appearance of the dove in Matthew is the sign that the new kingdom has come. Out of the chaos in this world a new creation is emerging.

**Question:** Why a dove?

**Challenge:** When do you think of water as soothing, dangerous, and comforting?

**Scripture:** Romans 6

## Day 6: Matthew 3:17

***And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased.'***

The term "Beloved" is used in Isaiah 42:1 (in Isaiah it is translated *servant*). Matthew has now completed his introduction of Jesus. He has shown his lineage and divine birth in chapters 1 and 2, now he shows the complete picture of Jesus as the Son of God and the suffering servant. Jesus' baptism is a matter of obedience and receiving of the Spirit. It is the same with our baptism. Jesus was declared Son of God when he was baptized. Christians are declared to be God's children in the act of baptism.

**Question:** Why was God pleased with Jesus?

**Challenge:** Do you feel a sense of calling by your baptism? And called to do what?

**Scripture:** Isaiah 42:1-10, Psalm 2:7

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# of Discipleship

January 19, 2020

## Day 1: John 2:1-3

***On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'***

A wedding in those days consisted of a procession in which the bridegroom's friends brought the bride to the groom's house and then the wedding was held. The Mishnah said that a wedding of a maiden should be held on a Wednesday and the festivities could last 7 days. Mary is not asking for Jesus to perform a miracle but informing Him of a desperate situation.

**Question:** Why would Mary mention to Jesus that the wine gave out?

**Challenge:** Nobody knows for sure but can you think of 3-4 reasons why the wine was not sufficient for the guests?

**Scripture:** John 2:1-11

## Day 2: John 2:4

***And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'***

In John's Gospel the term "hour" refers to Jesus' passion (his trial, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension). The strange response by Jesus is probably a comment on how Jesus cannot be held to normal familial responsibilities. Jesus is placing himself beyond natural family relationships even as he demanded his disciples to do the same. He is not showing disrespect or irritation with Mary by referring to her as "woman."

**Question:** Do you think that Jesus was unhappy or annoyed with his mother's question to him about the wine?

**Challenge:** Jesus says "you and me" if "the hour" refers to His passion why does he mention her?

**Scripture:** John 4:46-5:18

## Day 3: John 2:5-7

***His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim.***

The dialogue between Jesus and Mary (vs. 4-7) appears to leave out some parts. It seems like more conversation should take place between the two, for Jesus at first refuses to act but then he responds to Mary's request to become involved. There is nothing in the text that suggests that Mary is expecting a miracle but she is encouraging Jesus to help in some way. Jesus does decide to use the problem to show the first sign that He is the Son of God.

**Question:** Why stone jars and not earthen jars? Pottery would be easier to make.

**Challenge:** Do some calculating to see how many people could have a cup of wine from the water turned into wine. Let's say a 3 oz cup per person and each person gets two cups.

**Scripture:** John 6:1-21

## Day 4: John 2:8

***He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it.***

The first sign has the same purpose as the other six - the revelation about the person of Jesus. The amount of wine in addition to the fact that it used to be water is what is noticed by the reader and by the disciples at the wedding. The amount picks up on one of the consistent images of joy for the final days of the old world and the coming of the new - great abundance of wine. In Amos and Hosea there is a prediction that the earth will yield fruit in such abundance that it can only be a sign of the new age.

**Question:** Why not ask the bridegroom directly to taste the water turned to wine?

**Challenge:** When was the last time you followed an order that you believed came from God?

**Scripture:** Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 14:7, Jeremiah 31:12, Isaiah 25:6-10

## Day 5: John 2:9-10

***When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'***

The emphasis is not on the replacing of the water with wine, nor even on the quality of the wine. The emphasis is not on Mary or her intercession. The primary focus is on Jesus as the one sent by the Father to bring salvation to the world. Jesus is the real Temple and the Spirit he gives replaces the necessity of worshiping in Jerusalem. His doctrine and flesh and blood will give life in a way that Manna could not. Jesus is the water of life that both gives life and replaces the need for rites of purification.

**Question:** Why would someone serve the poor wine first?

**Challenge:** Can you think of one other miracle where Jesus multiplied something? Does that event shed light on this one?

**Scripture:** John 9:1-41

## Day 6: John 2:11

***Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.***

Jesus is revealed in this sign that He is the Son of God. Jesus has replaced all the previous Jewish (and pagan) religious institutions, customs, feasts and Temples. The disciples' belief did not come from just this one event but came because this event brought into focus things Jesus had taught them. I believe it was the tasting of the really good wine that put together for them all that spoke of before they went to Cana. It was an "a-ha!" moment.

**Question:** What did they experience that revealed His glory?

**Challenge:** Think back to a time when something happened that caused you to see the glory of God.

**Scripture:** John 11:1-44

January 26, 2020

## Day 1: Exodus 3:1-3

**Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.**

Moses notices that God is calling. Moses has been prepared (by his life experiences and his willingness) to receive God's summons. The angel never says anything but stands by while God speaks. Moses has spent a number of years learning how to be a husband, father, shepherd, and to work for someone else. He is now ready, after learning all those things, to be a leader of people seeking freedom.

**Question:** Why is God on a mountain?

**Challenge:** Can you look back and recall when you have had an experience of seeing an image of God?

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 3:1-21, Isaiah 6

## Day 2: Exodus 3:4-6

**When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

God spoke to summon Moses now God speaks to alert him that he is on holy ground - ground that is totally filled with the presence of God. In this passage the removal of sandals removes any separation between God and Moses. The voice from the burning bush now identifies who is talking to Moses by stating the history of God's involvement with the people of Abraham. God has been with Moses' family for many generations. Even though there have been a number of years when no one has been receiving God's words still God has remained faithful to his promise to be with the children of Abraham (Genesis 17:6-7).

**Question:** What made the ground holy?

**Challenge:** Think of some reasons why a person would be afraid to look directly at the face of God.

**Scripture:** Joshua 5:13-15, Ruth 4:2-12, Deuteronomy 25:5-10

## Day 3: Exodus 3:7-8

**Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.**

The Lord has seen, has heard, and has known. The Lord has come down is a way of saying that God is now coming to the people and taking a hand in alleviating their suffering. The land of milk and honey is one where both farmers and shepherds can live. Just as in creation God provided the whole world for plants, animals, and people to live, so now God is promising them a land where they can grow and live freely.

**Question:** Why, if God has seen the people suffering, has God not done something sooner?

**Challenge:** The words "a land flowing with milk and honey" were hopeful to those in bondage. What words of hope would you offer to persons in bondage to some affliction today?

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 26:4-14

## Day 4: Exodus 3:9-12

**The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'**

Moses receives the bad news that he is the one to act for God to free the people. Moses has five reasons for not sending him to do this task. He, like us, feels unprepared to do a task in God's name. Even though we know that whatever we do in Jesus' name will succeed still we are concerned that maybe we are not up to the task. Just as Moses snatched the daughters from the shepherds so God will snatch Israel from slavery. Reason 1, "who am I?" God does not answer but simply says I am with you and by implication if God is with us who could be against us.

**Question:** Moses asks God to reconsider sending him. Did Jesus ever ask God to reconsider what God was asking of Him?

**Challenge:** When have you felt not up to a task you needed to do?

**Scripture:** Judges 6:11-24

## Day 5: Exodus 3:13-14

**But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."'**

Reason 2, "who are you?" God says I will be who I will be or I am the one who created life and gave it to all creatures. I am the one who has loved you even when you did not realize or appreciate it. Reason 3 is the fear that he will be rejected just as he was rejected by the two Hebrews he tried to help after he killed the Egyptian. God gives him the strategy to talk to both the Egyptians and Israelites. First talk to the elders. Then confront the King and lastly use the power God gives you to demonstrate God's determination to free the people.

**Question:** Why talk to the elders of the tribes first?

**Challenge:** What is the reason Moses is to give Pharaoh to let the people go and do?

**Scripture:** Exodus 5:1-9

## Day 6: Exodus 4:10-14

**But Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.'**

Reason 4 and 5 have to do with public speaking. Moses says he cannot talk well and God says it's not you talking but me talking through you. Moses says his speech is halting and not good and God (now irritated) tells him that his brother Aaron will speak for him. This marks a change in the way God will communicate; giving the power for doing God's work to more than one person. Up to this point God has worked with one person at a time. From now on there'll be teams of people that have the power to do God's work. This extends all the way to the New Testament when Jesus sent disciples out two by two. In the 21st century when we want to begin a new faith community we send a team of people to begin the work, not just one person.

**Question:** Why does Moses say he is slow of tongue? Do you think he gets nervous or does he have a speech problem?

**Challenge:** What reasons have you given to God for not taking up a task in Jesus' name?

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 4:9-12