

# Marks of Discipleship

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

March 1, 2020

## Day 1: John 3:16

***'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'***

The message of Genesis is that God created all life. The message of John 1 is that God created a way for us to have eternal life. We have a physical world and a spiritual one and God gave us both. John 3:16 is a summary of the why of God's redemptive work, and the how of His redemptive work. It is a statement of how much value God places on humans. God gave the greatest, most precious gift that could be given – His Son.

**Question:** What does "eternal" mean?

**Challenge:** What is most valuable to you that you would be willing to give away and why would you give it away?

**Scripture:** John 1:1-14

## Day 2: John 3:17

***'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'***

This verse is a constant reminder that Jesus' preaching was not to frighten people or to inflict an inordinate amount of guilt on people. Jesus invited individuals to have a closer relationship with God. We must not lose sight of the invitational aspect of Jesus' ministry. God came to us in Jesus and invites us to be with Him.

**Question:** What would it mean if God condemned the world?

**Challenge:** Write a paragraph about how the world is saved through Jesus.

**Scripture:** John 10:7-10

## Day 3: Mark 15:25-30

***It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.***

The taunting comes in three phases: 1) The Romans saying he is King of the Jews and has two bandits for royal advisors. 2) The passersby repeat the false charge and say in effect, "ha-ha, you are not so mighty after all." 3) The Sanhedrin join in the taunting by challenging Jesus to save Himself by claiming that they would believe if He just got down from the cross.

**Question:** Which of the three taunts would bother you the most?

**Challenge:** Do a little research to see how a person died from crucifixion.

**Scripture:** John 19:13-42

## Day 4: Mark 15:33-34

***When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'***

Jesus was dying on the cross for six hours. The place of the Skull - Golgotha - was at a cross roads leading into Jerusalem. All those who came into the city from the north or west could see what was going on. At this point we need to hear Jesus' words literally. He was totally abandoned and alone so that we would never be alone. We are not alone because Jesus has bridged the gap between us and God.

**Question:** Why does Mark tell us the time all these events took place?

**Challenge:** Look up the account of the crucifixion in John to see the other things Jesus said. Which one(s) are the most touching to you?

**Scripture:** Acts 2:22-47

## Day 5: Mark 15:38-39

***And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'***

The tearing of the Temple curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple symbolizes both the destruction of the Temple and the elimination of the separation between God and humanity. No longer is it just the High Priest that can come into the presence of God but, in Jesus' name, anyone can approach God. The Centurion represents what will be true - that the whole world will recognize that Jesus is the Son of God.

**Question:** Can you think of some reasons why the Centurion would make such a statement?

**Challenge:** Is there a place in a modern church that could be called the most sacred place and why?

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 2:3-13

## Day 6: Romans 5:6-8

***For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 'Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.' But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.***

The ungodly are those who totally lacked the capacity for good; these are the ones for whom Christ died. The very best that human love can do is stated in verse 7. Verse 8 shows that there is a limit to what our love will give but God's love is so limitless that Christ came and died for us even though we were sinners. Even though we acted as if God did not matter God came to us and died so that we might live.

**Question:** What do you think "weak" means in verse 6?

**Challenge:** This is very personal and will take some time to think about but - what (or who) would you die for?

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1-21

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# of Discipleship

March 8, 2020

## Day One: II Timothy 3.14-15

14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus

Timothy is encouraged to recall what he learned from both his grandmother and his mother (I Tim1.5). He has known the sacred writings (the Old Testament) from his early childhood because he witnessed them acted out in his daily life. As Christians embody the Gospel the young learn. While many cannot recall some early doctrine or belief that was taught in Sunday school they can recall the teacher.

**Question:** From whom have you learned most about the Christian Beliefs?

**Challenge:** What three things would like a younger believer to know about the faith?

**Scripture:** I Timothy 4.1-16

## Day Two: II Timothy 3.16-17

16All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

The scriptures mentioned, are the writings of the Old Testament. The emphasis in Timothy is on the usefulness of the scripture not the inspiration or how it got here. The scripture provides guidance for us to know how to live faithfully and how to know we are God's children. The Scripture provided guidance to the end that we would be equipped for service. The end of our commitment to Christ as Lord is service in His name.

**Question:** How do you think the scriptures are inspired by God or how does God inspire persons to write?

**Challenge:** Think about what Biblical stories you like the most and read them (have at least 4).

## Day Three: II Timothy 4.1-2a

4In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2proclaim the message;

The authority to proclaim the message is Jesus Christ. The command to proclaim the message is the (soon coming) Kingdom of God. The message is the whole story of the Passion. The early Christian message was the events surrounding the trial, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Many of the first generation Christians either saw or knew someone who did see Jesus after the Resurrection. Timothy represents the second generation who has heard and experienced not directly but through others who have. He is part of the groups that Jesus talked about in John when He said blessed are those who have not seen and believed Jn. 20.29.

**Question:** How is the writer in the presence of God?

**Challenge:** Write five things that you believe about the Christian faith and five reasons why you believe them.

**Scripture:** I Corinthians 1.18-31

## Day Four: II Timothy 4.2b

be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

The message here is don't give up and don't expect that hundreds will respond. It may take some time so use all your skills to communicate what you believe and why, and do so clearly. Patience is called for in teaching because the students might be resistive to the teaching for a number of reasons. Your faithful living out of your beliefs will bring more to believe than all your talking.

**Question:** Why don't people respond the Christian message?

**Challenge:** How do you judge when the message is being delivered effectively or not?

**Scripture:** John 13.13-23

## Day Five: II Timothy 4.3

3For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires,

Be persistent because we are too often given to listen to those who we agree with or who serve our interests. Timothy is being told not to make the message of the Gospel (Death and Resurrection of Jesus) fit into the culture but allow the message of the Gospel transform the culture.

**Question:** Can you think of an example of Jesus being fit into the culture .

**Challenge:** When have you listened to and believed a political figure because they were saying what you wanted to hear?

**Scripture:** I Timothy 1.1-7

## Day Six: II Timothy 4.4

4and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

The myths were the attempt to explain how we are related to the world and the divine beings that are above it.

The Divine beings were for the most part malevolent or playful with humanity. They could be won over to your side by proper worship and sacrifice. The Christian teaching explained how the world was created, why and how sin is a reality and how the creator has devised a plan of redemption for this creation. Our God is benevolent and cares deeply about humanity.

**Question:** When you think of where God is located —where do you imagine it is?

**Challenge:** Why do you think God created the world? How do you know that sin is a reality?

**Scripture:** John 3:16-17

# of Discipleship

March 15, 2020

## Day 1: James 2:1

***My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?***

James asks a good question and as you will see by reading the rest of the section it is asked in relation to public gatherings. It is not just in the worship context but in any public meeting of the community. James is asking if we are to make our judgments about people based on something other than our belief that Jesus is Lord. There is nothing wrong with having a favorite but favoritism is using your power to act on behalf of your favorite. It is rigging the race so that your favorite will win.

**Question:** What is your favorite team and why?

**Challenge:** If you knew who would make the best next president and had the power to make sure they got elected (however you would have to manipulate the voting), would you do it? Why or why not?

**Scripture:** Romans 2:1-16

## Day 2: James 2:2-4

***Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?***

In matters of clothing what we wear and when we wear it is important. If I have a \$300 outfit I should not wear it to clean out the manure from the hog house. If I am going to a wedding I want to be clean to honor the families of the bride and groom. Clean is different than how nice an outfit one might have. I knew someone (30 years ago this happened) that did not want to come to a wedding because he said he did not have a sport coat. It took some talking to convince him that a coat was not required nor would not having one put him in a bad light with everybody else. What we wear on the outside of our bodies is supposed to say something about the inside of ourselves.

**Question:** If you were to go to a wedding where do you think the seat of honor would be?

**Challenge:** Try this week to change how your dress. If you are more formal then be casual. If you are more casual then try more formal and see how it feels.

**Scripture:** Leviticus 19:11-18

## Day 3: James 2:5

***Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?***

I heard someone once say that we define rich as anyone that has more money or property than we do. I think they were right, we tend to see others as being rich, not ourselves. Then we will have the tendency to point out that there are others less well off than ourselves. We want to be in the middle and do not like the title rich or poor. What really gets folks is when someone who is either really rich or poor talks like they are the opposite. Rich or poor are more a state of mind than a reality of money. As James uses the term poor he means that those people depend on God more than something else. They live by their daily bread.

**Question:** Do you agree that rich and poor are a state of mind?

**Challenge:** Define Poor.

**Scripture:** Acts 10:34-43

## Day 4: James 2:6

***But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?***

James points out a problem with having a lot of money - it is never enough. I know someone who received \$100,000 from an inheritance. All of the money was in various stocks. This person was not well off so this money was a real gift. I saw him agonize over the down turn in the stock market and it was driving him crazy. He kept talking about how much he was losing each day. He had lost sight that he had very little in the first place. If the inheritance would have been a few hundred he would have been grateful for a long time. But because the amount was so much it seemed like he lost something instead of gaining something.

**Question:** Have you ever been sued? What happened?

**Challenge:** Define Rich.

**Scripture:** Exodus 23:1-9

## Day 5: James 2:7

***Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?***

It was the rich who would take someone to court to gain their land. The rich were powerful and could manipulate the laws to benefit themselves. They would then use the legal system to steal the land from a poor less powerful person. It was the use of power that ran counter to Jesus' message. Power is to be used to create life, not steal.

**Question:** Why do you think rich people get special treatment?

**Challenge:** Can you think of an example in recent history where someone in power used that power to steal something from another?

**Scripture:** Ephesians 6:1-9

## Day 6: James 2:8 -10

***If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.***

The "royal law" is one that comes from the King. In this case the King is God and His Son Jesus Christ. By the time of James' writing the church encompassed a variety of peoples. The concept of neighbor was being expanded beyond family and clan. As both rich or poor came to Christ they both were together in the same worship and gatherings. They were in the same room so when they came together in the name of Christ, they were equal. This concept of equality in Christ was a novel idea and one that was hard for the society to grasp and carry out. In the early church if one was elected a Bishop that person gave up all of their wealth and property to the church. So if you were rich, being elected a Bishop could be interesting.

**Question:** If you violate a traffic law should you get a warning (and if so, how many?) or a ticket? What do you think?

**Challenge:** Try to define "neighbor."

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 5:17-25

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## of Discipleship

March 22, 2020

### Day 1: I Corinthians 13:1

***If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.***

We tend to associate the ability to speak persuasively and quick thinking with leadership. We tend to believe that presenting an opinion with great passion means that opinion is correct. In Paul's view the person's ability to be a leader is related to their ability to love. Love (God's love) has the power to give life. It is what created the world and all that is in it. We can also give life as we become a means through which God can love the world. In the Christian church leadership is in our ability to love.

**Question:** What do you think the phrase "tongues of angels" means?

**Challenge:** Look at the gifts of the Spirit in the scripture below and see which ones are the most critical for our world today.

**Scripture:** I Corinthians 12:27-31

### Day 2: I Corinthians 13:2-3

***And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.***

When Steve Jobs left as CEO of Apple many wondered who would come up with the new ideas for technology. We are in a very fast paced world where individuals are hoping to find the next big thing and get in on it early enough to make a lot of money. If someone could really tell the future they would be worth billions. If Bill Gates gave away all his wealth in hopes it would secure him a place in history for all time he would be disappointed. The only investment we can make that will stand till the end of time is by sharing love with someone in the next generation. We invest in people.

**Question:** Can you imagine what the prophetic powers were?

**Challenge:** Thinking of the verse above, how do you go about judging who is a leader in the church?

**Scripture:** I John 1

### Day 3: I Corinthians 13:4-6

***Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.***

Love is more than a feeling; it does feel good but not always. Love is a force of energy that can bring forth life. As was said above, out of love God created the world and out of love God sent his Son to give His life for the world. The love of God transforms us. The list of things that describe and exemplify love that Paul mentions here are the things that too many in the Corinthian congregations were lacking. Love does not insult or make fun of others. It listens and celebrates the successes others have.

**Question:** What would be a good working definition of "rude"?

**Challenge:** Can you think of a time when you rejoiced in something going wrong in someone else's life? Or a decision they made that went bad and you thought "I told you so"?

**Scripture:** I John 2

### Day 4: I Corinthians 13:7-8

***It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.***

God's love is for the long haul. Love has a tenacity in the present because of its absolute confidence in the future. Love never fails nor does it ever run out. When we compare the ability to read the future in the present, to speak with great eloquence and know the great secrets of life, to the love Christ demonstrated on the cross, all the other things are nothing. All of the world may come to an end but love will not.

**Question:** Do we run out of love?

**Challenge:** Can you think of something else that endures as long as or longer than love?

**Scripture:** I John 3

### Day 5: I Corinthians 13:9-10

***For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.***

The final end of this age has not yet come but the new age has begun. Spiritual gifts enable the Church to manifest (make known) the Gospel - the good news that God is redeeming the creation in Christ Jesus. When God's final work of redemption, in Christ, is reached then there will be no need for spiritual gifts. When the sun rises we have no need of lesser lights (Karl Barth).

**Question:** Why is knowledge power? Is there a time when not knowing is better than knowing?

**Challenge:** Think of the spiritual gifts. Come up with a list that fits today using 'life giving' as a definition of spiritual.

**Scripture:** I John 4

### Day 6: I Corinthians 13:11-13

***When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.***

The closing verse does not have to do with childishness or growing up. It has to do with present and future. Paul is saying that the behavior for one part of life is correct for that time. When the new age comes then those gifts will not be needed. Love is forever but the gifts are temporary and correct for the time of the church. When the Kingdom comes in fullness there will be no need for faith or hope. Love on the other hand is eternal and will be at the center of the Kingdom. If love will last then we ought to pursue it with vigor, instead of the other gifts.

**Question:** In the Kingdom of God why do we not need hope or faith?

**Challenge:** Can you look at your life and design a plan to improve your ability to love?

**Scripture:** I Corinthians 13

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# of Discipleship

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March 29, 2020

## 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 were an uncommitted group. They were 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 and obey. 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 little or 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. Pilate also 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, are seen to call a curse on their children. 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