

Following Jesus

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

LENTEN READING GUIDE

WHY WE'RE READING THE GOSPEL OF MARK IN LENT

The Gospel of Mark is widely regarded as the earliest of the four gospels, written at a time when the Jesus movement was still fragile—asking fundamental questions about identity, faithfulness, and hope in a world shaped by empire. Mark does not offer a polished or sentimental portrait of Jesus. Instead, it gives us a story that moves quickly, sometimes breathlessly, and often uncomfortably. It is a gospel that refuses easy answers—and that may be exactly why it is such a fitting companion for the season of Lent.

Mark's Jesus is always on the move. He crosses the Sea of Galilee frequently to travel between Jewish and Gentile regions, between familiarity and foreignness, safety and risk. These crossings are not accidental. They reveal a mission that refuses to remain contained within religious, ethnic, or social boundaries. The Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims does not belong to one people or one place. It breaks open wherever suffering, exclusion, and fear are found.

This Kingdom stands in sharp contrast to the kingdoms of the world—especially the Roman Empire that shaped Mark's context and continues to echo in our own. In Mark, Jesus is named king, but he does not rule through domination, violence, or control. He rules through compassion. He touches those deemed untouchable. He listens to those silenced by society. He restores dignity to people whose lives have been reduced to labels: sick, sinful, unclean, foreign. Power, in Mark, looks like love poured out rather than authority imposed.

And yet, those closest to Jesus struggle to understand him. The disciples repeatedly misunderstand his words and actions. Each time Jesus reveals something about who he is, they attempt to force him into their existing expectations of strength, victory, and certainty. Rather than allowing themselves to be reshaped by Jesus' vision of God's reign, his disciples try to reshape Jesus into something more familiar, more manageable.

Mark does not soften this failure to understand Jesus. In fact, he highlights it. Nowhere is that more striking than in the gospel's ending. The women come to the tomb expecting death and encounter resurrection instead. They are told to go and speak—but they run away in fear, and the story ends abruptly, unfinished. What follows verse 8 was added later by others who longed for closure. The original ending of Mark's leaves us without it. That unfinished ending is not a flaw. It is an invitation.

Mark places the final question squarely before us: What will you do with this story? Will we run away in fear, or will we take up the work of discipleship ourselves?

In a world still confused about what it means to follow Jesus—where faith is often reduced to certainty, power, or ideology—Mark calls us back to a different way. A way of trust rather than control. A way of crossing boundaries rather than guarding them. A way of following a suffering, compassionate Messiah whose Kingdom does not look like the empires we know. During Lent, as we walk with Jesus toward the cross, Mark invites us not simply to observe the story, but to enter it—to let it question us, unsettle us, and ultimately reshape our understanding of what it means to be a disciple today.

WHAT WE HOPE TO GAIN FROM THIS JOURNEY

A Deeper, More Honest Understanding of Discipleship

Mark does not present discipleship as perfection, but as persistence. Our hope is that people will see themselves in these stories and discover that faithfulness begins not with certainty, but with the willingness to keep following.

A Renewed Vision of the Kingdom of God

In contrast to the kingdoms of empire, this kingdom is revealed through compassion, healing, and boundary-crossing love. By immersing ourselves in Mark, we are invited to examine where our loyalties lie and to reimagine what life looks like under the reign of a king whose power is expressed through mercy and self-giving love.

A Faith That Can Live with Uncertainty

Mark's unfinished ending resists closure. Lent resists easy answers. One hope of this journey is that we will learn to live with faithful uncertainty—trusting God even when questions remain unanswered. Rather than rushing toward resolution, Mark teaches us how to stay present to fear, doubt, and ambiguity, believing that God is still at work within them.

A Faith Deepened Through Immersion in the Gospel

By immersing ourselves in the Gospel of Mark, our faith will be deepened over time. Mark invites us not simply to study Jesus, but to walk with him. As we return to this story again and again, it shapes our imagination, our compassion, and our courage. In a world filled with voices speaking about Jesus, this journey calls us back to Jesus himself—and to a faith formed by sustained attention to his life and way.

THEMES TO WATCH FOR AS YOU READ

As you read the Gospel of Mark, certain themes appear again and again. You don't need to master them or track them carefully—simply notice when they surface. These recurring patterns help shape Mark's story and invite us more deeply into the journey of discipleship.

The Kingdom of God

Mark opens Jesus' ministry with a bold announcement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). In Mark, the kingdom is not a distant heaven or an abstract idea—it is God's reign breaking into ordinary life through Jesus. Wherever Jesus goes, the kingdom shows up: people are healed, forgiven, fed, and restored. The kingdom confronts powers that harm and dehumanize, and it invites people to turn and trust the good news.

The Disciples' Misunderstanding

One of Mark's most honest themes is how often the disciples do not understand Jesus (Mark 4:13; 8:17–21). They witness miracles, hear teachings, and follow closely—yet they struggle to grasp who Jesus is and what his mission requires. Their confusion, fear, and resistance make room for readers to see themselves in the story, reminding us that faith is often a journey of slow, imperfect understanding.

Sea Crossings and Fear

The sea appears repeatedly in Mark as a place of danger, chaos, and testing (Mark 4:35–41; 6:45–52). Storms arise, the disciples panic, and Jesus reveals authority over forces they

cannot control. Each crossing becomes a moment of revelation, prompting the question, “Who then is this?” (4:41). The sea highlights the tension between fear and trust at the heart of discipleship.

Secrecy and Revelation

In Mark, Jesus frequently tells people not to speak about who he is or what they have seen (Mark 1:34; 8:30). This “messianic secret” builds suspense and points to a deeper truth: Jesus is fully revealed not through power or spectacle, but through suffering and the cross. The clearest confession comes from an unexpected voice at the crucifixion: “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mark 15:39).

Urgency and the Cost of Discipleship

Mark’s Gospel moves quickly, often using the word “immediately” (Mark 1:18, 20). Following Jesus happens with urgency and always involves cost. Jesus calls people to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow (Mark 8:34–35). In Mark, discipleship is not simply believing the right things—it is a way of life shaped by trust, courage, and self-giving love.

4 SIMPLE PRACTICES FOR READING MARK

As you read the Gospel of Mark, you’re encouraged to be attentive. Don’t feel rushed when reaching. These practices are offered as gentle supports to make the most of your reading.

1. Choose a regular time to read your daily scripture.

A consistent rhythm matters more than the amount of time you spend.

2. Begin with silence and a simple prayer.

Before reading, pause for a moment. Take a breath. You might pray: “God, help me hear what I need to hear today.”

3. Read slowly and notice what lingers.

Mark moves quickly, but you don’t have to. Read attentively—aloud if you can. Notice a word, phrase, or moment that unsettles, surprises, or stays with you.

4. Carry one question or insight with you.

You don’t need answers. Write down a thought, a question, or a feeling, and let it accompany you through the day.

A LENTEN COVENANT

Together, we commit to walk through the Gospel of Mark with patience and care, reading slowly and listening deeply for the voice of God. We commit to approach this journey with humility, open to being questioned, challenged, and reshaped by Jesus' vision of the Kingdom. We commit to honor freedom of thought and faithful difference among us, listening generously and trusting that God works through honest conversation. And we commit to follow where the story leads— across boundaries, into compassion, and toward a faith rooted in trust rather than certainty.

A PRAYER OF INTENTION

Faithful God,
as we begin this Lenten journey,
we do so with intention and trust.
We intend to walk slowly with Jesus,
to listen deeply to the Gospel of Mark,
and to allow the story to shape us.
We offer you our questions and our convictions,
our certainty and our uncertainty,
trusting that you meet us in all of it.
Guide us across boundaries we have grown comfortable with,
open us to compassion we may have resisted,
and form us into people who follow with humility and courage.
As we begin, we place this journey in your care,
asking not for easy answers,
but for faithful hearts willing to follow.
Amen.

DAILY GUIDING QUESTIONS

Use these questions to guide your reading and reflection:

What do I notice about Jesus in this passage?

Where do I see resistance, fear, or misunderstanding-- either in the text or in myself?

What invitation toward discipleship might be present in this passage?

YOUR WEEKLY READING GUIDE

Ash Wednesday – The Beginning of the Good News

Mark opens without a birth story or preamble. The gospel begins abruptly, with urgency and clarity: the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has drawn near. Jesus emerges proclaiming repentance and trust, inviting response rather than explanation. Lent begins here—not with answers, but with a call to turn and follow.

- Mark 1:1-15

Week 1 – Called to a Life That Moves

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- Mark 1:16-28
- Mark 1:29-39
- Mark 1:40-45
- Mark 2:1-12
- Mark 2:13-22
- Mark 2:23-28

Week 2– Authority, Resistance, and the Cost of Compassion

As Jesus' authority becomes unmistakable, resistance begins to harden. Family, religious leaders, and even disciples struggle to understand him. Parables replace plain speech, revealing that hearing is not the same as understanding. Fear surfaces—on land and sea—raising the question of whether trust can grow amid uncertainty.

- Mark 3:1-12
- Mark 3:13-19
- Mark 3:20-35
- Mark 4:1-20
- Mark 4:21-34
- Mark 4:35-41

YOUR WEEKLY READING GUIDE

Week 3 – Crossing Boundaries and Awakening Fears

Jesus repeatedly crosses boundaries—geographic, cultural, and religious—and in doing so exposes both longing and fear. Liberation does not always lead to gratitude; healing can provoke rejection. Even the disciples waver between amazement and misunderstanding as the reach of the Kingdom expands beyond familiar limits.

- Mark 5:1-20
- Mark 5:21-43
- Mark 6:1-13
- Mark 6:14-29
- Mark 6:30-44
- Mark 6:45-56

Week 4 – Seeing Clearly Or Not at All

This section sharpens the question of perception. Conflicts over tradition, purity, and signs reveal how easily vision can be clouded. Physical healings mirror spiritual blindness, culminating in Jesus' pointed question: Who do you say that I am? Recognition and resistance collide, and the cost of following comes into focus.

- Mark 7:1-23
- Mark 7:24-37
- Mark 8:1-10
- Mark 8:11-21
- Mark 8:22-26
- Mark 8:27-38

Week 5 – Learning What Following Really Means

As Jesus moves steadily toward Jerusalem, the disciples struggle to let go of their assumptions about greatness, power, and reward. Teachings about service, humility, and sacrifice challenge their expectations—and ours.

- Mark 9:1-13
- Mark 9:14-29
- Mark 9:30-37
- Mark 9:38-50
- Mark 10:1-16
- Mark 10:17-31

YOUR WEEKLY READING GUIDE

Week 6 – On The Way To Jerusalem

The journey intensifies as Jesus enters Jerusalem. Acts of healing and courage along the way give way to confrontation in the city. Authority is questioned, power is exposed, and the tension between God’s Kingdom and human systems becomes unmistakable.

- Mark 10:32-45
- Mark 10:46-52
- Mark 11:1-11
- Mark 11:12-26
- Mark 11:27-33
- Mark 12:1-12

Week 7 – Holy Week: Watching, Waiting, and the Unraveling of Power

Jesus confronts the temple, warns of coming upheaval, and calls his followers to vigilance. These chapters are marked by urgency and uncertainty, inviting readers to stay awake—to notice where trust is placed and what remains when familiar structures begin to fall apart.

- Mark 12:13-44
- Mark 13:1-8
- Mark 13:9-23
- Mark 13:24-37
- Mark 14:1-31
- Mark 14:32-15:39

Easter Sunday – An Empty Tomb and Open Ending

The story ends not with triumph, but with fear and silence. The tomb is empty, the message is given, and the women flee in trembling. Mark leaves the ending unfinished, placing the question squarely before us: what will we do with this story now?

- Mark 15:40-16:8

THE END OF THE STORY (WHICH IS JUST THE BEGINNING)

Mark ends without resolution, because the story of Jesus' life-changing ministry continues. The words of scripture, the responses they prompt, and the questions they beg are now ours to carry. Here are some reflection questions for you to ask yourself now that you have read the Gospel of Mark:

How has my understanding of Jesus changed?

Where did I experience resistance or discomfort?

What kind of disciple am I becoming?

Where is Jesus calling me to follow him?

In addition to this Lenten Reading Guide for the Gospel of Mark, Pastor David has also written a devotional where he shares his personal reflections from a lifetime of reading and preaching through the Gospel of Mark. You can access Pastor David's devotional on your Church Center app or by using this QR Code.



Printed copies are also available each Sunday at the Welcome Desk.



Palm Sunday + Egg Hunt following
Traditional Worship
March 29 | 9:30a + 11a

Maundy Thursday
April 2 | 6:30p

Good Friday
April 3 | 6:30p

easter at
harvard
avenue

8a, 9:30a, & 11a
Same service,
three opportunities