

FROM THE DESK OF DR. HARRIS:

This is a time where many are looking for comfort, for peace and for strength to endure the ordeal we are all undergoing. Each of us have various issues that can cause us anxiety and worry. In times of crisis, though, the approach in the scriptures is to challenge us to go deeper in evaluating our our commitments and priorities, some meaningful self-examination, and a search for alignment with the height, depth and riches of God's glory revealed in the man from Nazareth.

This may seem counter-intuitive. Why challenge us when we are already challenged by circumstances and situations beyond us? Because getting ourselves challenged spiritually is how we may find a deeper kind of strength and a more enduring kind of comfort and peace. Words of comfort and peace on their own may become meaningless platitudes all too quickly.

And so, beginning today, we will be providing you with daily reading, commentary, questions for self-examination and a prayer through the gospel of Mark. We are journeying with Jesus who calls us to follow as he called those first followers. Let's see where the journey takes us. Whatever we put into something we get out of something. The invitation for you is to put yourself into it... enjoy...

Mark 1: 1-11

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight" ',

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Mark 1: 1-5 Commentary:

According to the gospel, John the Baptist was called to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. What did this preparation involve? A message, a message that demanded a response: repent for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism embodied the physical sign of cleansing which was analogous to the spiritual cleansing effected by repentance. How did the people respond to John's message? Many went out to see and hear John in the Judean wilderness, and they came forward to be baptized in the river Jordan, 'confessing their sins.'

Questions: In what way do you prepare for the coming of God into your life? Do you have things to confess and repent of? Are there things in your life that obstruct God's movement to you and within you?

Prayer: Lord God, I want you to have a greater presence in my life. I confess that either willfully or out of ignorance, there are things about me that keep you at a distance.... Help me to be cleansed and ready within so that you will be more welcome. Amen.

Mark 1: 6-11 Commentary:

John's clothing and lifestyle reflect his spirit in relation to him who is coming (Jesus), and that is, humility. He redirects any focus from himself onto the one who 'will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' Jesus, however, also recognizes the importance of what John is doing. He chooses to come out, to manifest himself publicly, during his baptism by John. The voice from heaven is important in the gospel. It is a public testimony that Jesus is not just a peasant carpenter's son from Nazareth, but the beloved Son of God. It also establishes Jesus' authority. Those present and those reading the gospel are called to listen and surrender to Jesus. His words and actions will challenge us and make demands on us. But if we take them seriously and follow through, they promise liberation and fullness at the deepest level of our spirits.

Questions: As you begin your spiritual journey through this gospel, are you prepared to surrender to Jesus' authority? What about in the different areas of your life?

Prayer: Lord God, inspire me to surrender to your authority even when it is demanding of me. Please illuminate me as to your will in particular areas of my life and in the different relationships in my life. Give me the courage and strength to take a step forward. Amen.