

**TYNEMOUTH DEANERY
LENT COURSE 2021**

**JESUS:
LOVE IN ACTION**



**5 passages from Mark's Gospel
to reflect & pray during Lent 2021**

written by The Area Dean

SESSION 1

Touching the leper

INTRODUCTION

At St Paul's Church this Lent, we will join the Deanery in the Lent course prepared by our Area Dean. Thank you very much to the Revd Tim Mayfield for putting it together.

This year we are reading Mark's Gospel every Sunday. Mark's Gospel is also called 'the action gospel'. This Lent course is based on 5 passages from Mark. We will reflect and pray with all parishes in the deanery on how we can put into practice Jesus' Love in action, in our specific context.

We will be reading and reflecting on these passages in a time of pandemic: how might these episodes speak to us now?

God's church is preparing to play its part in the post-Covid recovery. What clues might we find here for our best courses of action?

PRAY

Light a candle...

...hold a time of silence...

...then pray:

Jesus,

the love of God in action:

open my ears to your word,

my heart to your prompting,

and my eyes to the needs of the world.

In your name,

Amen.

BACKGROUND

- This episode comes towards the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, as remembered for us in Mark's Gospel. It brings

together two things which were central in that ministry – the priority of prayer, and Jesus’ power to heal the sick.

- In the time of Jesus, leprosy was understood to be highly contagious. So there are guidelines in the Old Testament for those with this dreaded skin disease. They were to live apart from society, and ring a bell to warn off any who came too close. As such, when Jesus reaches out his hand to touch this man, it might be the first physical contact they have had with another human being for a long time. The parallels with the social isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic are striking.
- After the healing miracle, Jesus sternly warns the man not to tell anyone. Jesus doesn’t want to be seen principally as a miracle-worker, because his call is quite costly: ‘take up your cross and follow me’.
- When someone recovered from leprosy, they could be declared ‘clean’, and allowed back into the life of the community. A priest had the authority to do this. The person healed of their leprosy would present two pigeons. One would be sacrificed, but the other released to fly free – a powerful picture of release from stigma.

READING and DIGESTING

- Read the passage, nice and slowly, and keep silence afterwards.
- Find a phrase or a word that you want to linger with.
- Read the passage once more, again keeping silence and finding a word or phrase to linger with.
- Read it nice and slowly one last time.

Mark 1.35-45

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and

his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’

³⁸ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ ³⁹ So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’

⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ ‘See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.’ ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

REFLECT

- How is Jesus ‘God’s love in action’ in the events described here?
- How important do you think prayer was for Jesus? How might we learn from his example?
- Jesus is always concerned for ‘the outcast’. Who do we think are the people treated, or seeing themselves, as ‘outcast’ in our own society?
- How does this episode speak to us at this point in the pandemic?

INTO ACTION

What clues might we find in this session about how disciples of Jesus might contribute to the post-Covid recovery?

SILENCE

...keep a moment of silence while you let everything in this session sink in and settle down.

PRAY

Jesus,
the love of God in action:
may your word take root in my life.
Make me alive to your prompting,
and quick to respond to the needs of the world.
In your name,
Amen.

SESSION 2 **Healing a paralysed man**

PRAY

Light a candle...
...hold a time of silence...
...then pray:

Jesus,
the love of God in action:
open my ears to your word,
my heart to your prompting,
and my eyes to the needs of the world.
In your name,
Amen.

BACKGROUND

- 'The law' is very important to a practising Jew. For example, Psalm 119 repeatedly celebrates the joy of having received these guidelines for living. As often in religion, however, 'the law' could shrink to dry externals. The 'teachers of the law' we encounter here have the job of applying 'the law' to everyday living. But they have become so entangled in the detail that they cannot see the significance of Jesus' healing miracle.
- A typical Palestinian house would be shaped like a cube. A set of outside stairs would lead onto a flat roof. The roof was made of wooden beams, with sticks laid at right angles to the beams. Then mud would be rolled over the sticks and allowed to dry. This is how 'the four friends' are able to climb up onto the roof and dig through it to get their paralysed friend to Jesus.
- Capernaum is a fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. A recently-excavated fishing boat from the time of Jesus underlines just how poor this community would have been. The boat is made of an assortment of different bits of wood precariously nailed together.
- 'Son of Man' is a phrase Jesus often uses to speak about himself.
- There is a lovely balance in this episode between 'inner healing' [the man's need of forgiveness] and 'outer healing' [the man's need to be able to walk]. The two comes together in a fine example of 'Shalom' – a Hebrew word which speaks about our 'wholeness'. We need to avoid any suggestion, however, that the reason the paralysed man couldn't walk was because of some sin he had committed. Jesus always rejected such an idea.

READING and DIGESTING

- Read the passage, nice and slowly, and keep silence afterwards.
- Find a phrase or a word that you want to linger with.

- Read the passage once more, again keeping silence and finding a word or phrase to linger with.
- Read it nice and slowly one last time.

Mark 2.1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’

⁶Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

⁸Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things? ⁹Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up, take your mat and walk”? ¹⁰But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the man, ¹¹‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ ¹²He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’

REFLECT

- How is Jesus ‘God’s love in action’ in the events described here?

- Have some quiet thinking time. Who are the friends who are carrying you through this pandemic? Give thanks for them, maybe speaking their Christian name out loud.
- Why do you think Jesus offered the paralysed man forgiveness first, rather than helping him to walk first? What impact do you think it has on us when we can't forgive ourselves?
- How does this episode speak to us at this point in the pandemic?

INTO ACTION

What clues might we find in this session about how disciples of Jesus might contribute to the post-Covid recovery?

SILENCE

... keep a moment of silence while you let everything in this session sink in and settle down.

PRAY

Jesus,
the love of God in action:
may your word take root in my life.
Make me alive to your prompting,
and quick to respond to the needs of the world.
In your name,
Amen.

SESSION 3

A dead girl and a sick woman

PRAY

Light a candle...	Jesus,
...hold a time of silence...	the love of God in action:
...then pray:	open my ears to your word,
	my heart to your prompting,
	and my eyes to the needs of the world.
	In your name,
	Amen.

BACKGROUND

- 'The synagogue leader' was 'the lay official responsible for the supervision of the synagogue building and the arrangements for the services [a bit like a churchwarden] but the phrase was sometimes used as an honorary title for distinguished members of the synagogue'.
- People, like the nameless woman we encounter in this episode, who were 'subject to bleeding' were seen as 'unclean' and not allowed to take their full place in society [Leviticus 15.25-30].
- Jesus probably wore the everyday clothing worn by Palestinian men. First, there was a loincloth, and over this a long cotton shirt or tunic. A light cotton headdress protected the face and neck from the hot sun. In cold weather a cloak woven from goat's or camel's hair was needed. It is this cloak that the woman with the flow of blood' reached out to touch.
- The four gospels are written in Greek. But Jesus spoke 'Aramaic', a version of Hebrew. It's fascinating when we find fragments of Jesus own language in the gospels. When he says *Talitha koum* that's Jesus' own language for 'little girl, get up'.

READING and DIGESTING

- Read the passage, nice and slowly, and keep silence afterwards.
- Find a phrase or a word that you want to linger with.
- Read the passage once more, again keeping silence and finding a word or phrase to linger with.
- Read it nice and slowly one last time.

Mark 5.21-43

²¹ When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered round him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with him, 'My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.' ²⁴ So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed round him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

³⁰ At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned round in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'

³¹ 'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?"'

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. 'Your daughter is dead,' they said. 'Why bother the teacher anymore?'

³⁶ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.'

³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.' ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, '*Talitha koum!*' (which means 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

REFLECT

- How is Jesus 'God's love in action' in the events described here?
- With which of the characters [Jesus, Jairus, the nameless woman, Peter, other] do you most identify? Why?
- 'Daughter, your faith has healed you'. What do you think is the role of faith in facing the current global health crisis?
- How does this episode speak to us at this point in the pandemic?

INTO ACTION

What clues might we find in this session about how disciples of Jesus might contribute to the post-Covid recovery?

SILENCE

... keep a moment of silence while you let everything in this session sink in and settle down.

PRAY

Jesus,
the love of God in action:
may your word take root in my life.
Make me alive to your prompting,
and quick to respond to the needs of the world.
In your name,
Amen.

SESSION 4

Healing two blind men

PRAY

Light a candle...
...hold a time of silence...
...then pray:

Jesus,
the love of God in action:
open my ears to your word,
my heart to your prompting,
and my eyes to the needs of the world.
In your name,
Amen.

BACKGROUND

- In both of the episodes we are going to read, look out for the interplay of 'spiritual sight' and 'physical blindness'. Sometimes people who can see are blind, when people who are blind can see what really matters.
- In our second session, we saw how Jesus referred to himself as 'Son of Man'. Here, Jesus will be addressed as 'Son of David'. King David was seen as one of the greatest rulers God's people ever had. And the Bible goes out of its way to show Jesus as descended, humanly speaking, from his line.
- See the miracles as signs of Jesus' *love* for us, rather than of his *power*. Note that rather than blast into Bartimaeus' life, Jesus asks him 'what do you want me to do for you?' Even though Bartimaeus is blind, Jesus doesn't necessarily assume he wants to be able to see again.

READING and DIGESTING

- Read the passage, nice and slowly, and keep silence afterwards.
- Find a phrase or a word that you want to linger with.
- Read the passage once more, again keeping silence and finding a word or phrase to linger with.
- Read it nice and slowly one last time.

Mark 8.22-26

²²They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?'

²⁴He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.'

²⁵ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Don't even go into the village.'

Mark 10.46-52

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means 'son of Timaeus'), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.'

So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.'

⁵² 'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

REFLECT

- How is Jesus 'God's love in action' in the events described here?
- Some people [like Jesus] are trying to make things better; other people [like those in the crowd who tell Bartimaeus to be quiet] are trying to hold this process back. How might this be relevant to the Covid situation?

- In both of these episodes, there is a role for *persistence*. How do you feel about the Covid-19 pandemic going on far longer than anticipated?
- In our second episode, there's a contrast between 'going' and 'following'. Why do you think Bartimaeus 'followed' Jesus when Jesus told him to 'go'?
- How do these episodes speak to us at this point in the pandemic?

INTO ACTION

What clues might we find in this session about how disciples of Jesus might contribute to the post-Covid recovery?

SILENCE

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PRAY

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may your word take root in my life.
Make me alive to your prompting,
and quick to respond to the needs of the world.
In your name,
Amen.

SESSION 5

Up the mountain [vision]; down the mountain [engagement]

PRAY

Light a candle...	Jesus,
...hold a time of silence...	the love of God in action:
...then pray:	open my ears to your word, my heart to your prompting, and my eyes to the needs of the world.
	In your name, Amen.

BACKGROUND

- In this episode, 'Elijah' stands for 'the law' – all those pages and pages of commandments in the Old Testament.
- In this episode, 'Moses' stands for 'the prophets' – those entrusted by God with speaking out His message. Jesus sometimes refers to the whole Old Testament as 'the law and the prophets'
- On the mountain-top, Peter offers to build 'three shelters'. The Jews of Jesus' day had a celebration called 'The Festival of Booths'. People built shelters and lived in them for a while to remember the homeless wandering of the people in the desert, on their way to the Promised Land.
- When the voice speaks from the cloud, listen out for echoes of Jesus' baptism.

READING and DIGESTING

- Read the passage, nice and slowly, and keep silence afterwards.

- Find a phrase or a word that you want to linger with.
- Read the passage once more, again keeping silence and finding a word or phrase to linger with.
- Read it nice and slowly one last time.

Mark 9.2-27 (*abridged*)

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, and there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant.

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ 'What are you arguing with them about?' he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.'

¹⁹ 'You unbelieving generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.'

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has he been like this?' 'From childhood,' he answered. ²² 'It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.'

²³ "'If you can"?' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who believes.'

²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. 'You deaf and mute spirit,' he said, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, 'He's dead.' ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

REFLECT

- How is Jesus 'God's love in action' in the events described here?
- This pair of episodes first of all takes us to the wonderful mountain-top, and then back with a bump into the messy nitty-gritty of life. How can we best treasure our good experiences so that they strengthen us for the nitty-gritty?
- The boy's father says: 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief'. It's totally normal to have doubts. What's happened to you recently that would help you overcome your unbelief?
- How does this pair of episodes speak to us at this point in the pandemic?

INTO ACTION

What clues might we find in this session about how disciples of Jesus might contribute to the post-Covid recovery?

SILENCE

... keep a moment of silence while you let everything in this session sink in and settle down.

PRAY

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