

40 Days through Mark's Good News

Week Six

Throughout Leap of Faith, we will walk together through the entire story of the ministry of Jesus, at least as it is told by Mark. Mark is one of the early followers of Jesus. He may or may not have known Jesus himself, but he was probably a traveling companion of the apostle Simon Peter. Simon Peter never wrote a history of Jesus himself, but John Mark collected and wrote down Simon Peter's story. I'm sure that as you read you'll see that Peter's perspective comes out strongly, and that it's a really valuable perspective to have. Mark's gospel (which means 'good news') was the first one written, about 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Incidentally, it's also the shortest. That means that, when we read it over 40 days, each day's passage should be of a quite manageable size. The size does vary a bit, as I've sectioned it in such a way as to make good sense of the stories, rather than just dividing it into equal-sized bits.

Each day's guide is broken into three sections:

1. **The story for the day.** For your convenience, we've included the text of the story in the *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996). As I've worked on this guide, I've found this translation to be in fresh, modern language that has really helped me to do what I most want to do: enter into the story myself. As you read the passage, try to read it from the perspective of the disciples and the other people who interact with Jesus. Really get inside the story. What is it like to go through this experience with Jesus?
2. **Points of Interest.** This section briefly explores aspects of the day's story that might be especially interesting or potentially confusing. It offers some historical notes and references that might help to interpret the story, frames some of the issues or questions addressed, and gives suggestions of ways to look at the story and what it might mean for us.
3. **Taking it home.** In this section, I offer some suggestions for how the day's reading might apply to you, to your six, and to our church.

March 24

Mark 14:53 to 72—Jesus and Peter on trial

⁵³Jesus was led to the high priest's home where the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law had gathered. ⁵⁴Meanwhile, Peter followed far behind and then slipped inside the gates of the high priest's courtyard. For a while he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire. ⁵⁵Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would testify against Jesus, so they could put him to death. But their efforts were in vain. ⁵⁶Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other. ⁵⁷Finally, some men stood up to testify against him with this lie: ⁵⁸"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'" ⁵⁹But even then they didn't get their stories straight! ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before the others and asked Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" ⁶¹Jesus made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?" ⁶²Jesus said, "I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven." ⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses? ⁶⁴You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" And they all condemned him to death. ⁶⁵Then some of them began to spit at him, and they blindfolded him and hit his face with their fists. "Who hit you that time, you prophet?" they jeered. And even the guards were hitting him as they led him away. ⁶⁶Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. One of the servant girls who worked for the high priest ⁶⁷noticed Peter warming himself at the fire. She looked at him closely and then said, "You were one of those with Jesus, the Nazarene." ⁶⁸Peter denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, and he went out into the entryway. Just then, a rooster crowed ⁶⁹The servant girl saw him standing there and began telling the others, "That man is

definitely one of them!" ⁷⁰Peter denied it again. A little later some other bystanders began saying to Peter, "You must be one of them because you are from Galilee." ⁷¹Peter said, "I swear by God, I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷²And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and cried.

Points of Interest:

- 'to the high priest's home'—As you might imagine, criminal trials were not usually held in the middle of the night. They were also not held in the high priest's home, but in the temple. The high council is indeed the proper authority to judge such a case, but having the trial at night and in the priest's home clearly shows that they have something to hide.
- 'many false witnesses'—Falsely testifying is breaking one of the 10 Commandments. They are breaking one of the commandments, by falsely testifying, so that they can break another, by killing a man. Moses says in Deuteronomy 19:16-19 that if a witness is proven false on cross-examination, the witness should be considered guilty of the crime of which he has accused the defendant. These witnesses fall apart even in front of a friendly cross-examination in a kangaroo court, but the council merely moves on to the next false witness.
- 'Jesus made no reply'—The high priest asks him to answer 'these charges,' but no coherent charges have even been made. All he has heard are a series of contradictions and lies. No reply is the most appropriate reply to no charges. Jesus is also fulfilling prophecy here. In one of the most famous prophecies about the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah says, 'He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth' (Isaiah 53:7).
- 'I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven'—When Jesus finally had a charge to which he could respond, he doesn't hesitate to answer. Jesus doesn't simply answer 'yes or no.' He answers, 'Yes, Yes, resoundingly Yes.' By saying, 'I am,' he is not simply answering their question, he is also making an oblique, but clearly recognizable, claim to divinity: when Moses asks God what his name is, God replies, "Tell them that I AM sent you" (Exodus 3:14). His further words about sitting at the right hand of God and returning on the clouds are references to Messianic prophecies in Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14 (Jesus quotes these verses earlier in ch. 12:36 and ch. 13:26). With these references, he is telling the priest two things:
 1. He is in fact the Messiah;
 2. and there will come a time when Jesus will be the judge.
- 'tore his clothing'—a sign of repentance or mourning, and the usual response to hearing a great blasphemy.
- 'they all condemned him to death'—They condemn him to death for speaking the truth. The claim itself is enough for them to kill him. They never even bother to assess whether or not it is true.
- 'Who hit you that time, you prophet?'—They mock his claims to prophesy by asking him to discern who hit him. Ironically, by doing so, they are actually fulfilling one of his prophecies: in chapter 10, he said, 'When we get to Jerusalem, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. ³⁴ They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again.' They think they are mocking a false prophet, but all they are doing is proving him true.
- 'I swear by God, I don't know this man'—While Jesus is on trial in front of the high priest inside, Peter is on trial in front of a serving girl outside. Jesus speaks the truth even though he knows they will kill him for it. Peter lies in order to save his life. In fact, Peter breaks two of the 10 commandments in order to dissociate himself from Jesus: he bears false witness, and he takes the Lord's name in vain. Earlier this evening, Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you.' By the end of the night, he has completely reversed it: 'Even if I have to deny, I will not die with you.' Jesus had spent the night in preparation for

his trial in prayer; Peter fell asleep. Peter had enough guts on his own power to sneak into the courtyard of the high priest, but his courage failed when it came to the real test: he needed the Holy Spirit to give him the right words here.

Taking it Home:

- *For you:* Peter breaks down and cries, because he recognizes that he is not able to do what he wants to do. It is not that Peter was lying earlier in the evening: he did really want to die with Jesus rather than betray him. But by the end of the night, he has gotten in over his head. When Peter hears the rooster crow, he has a flashing insight into his own utter failure to follow Jesus. Have you ever had a heartbreaking recognition of your failure to follow Jesus? At this moment, Peter probably thinks he has lost Jesus forever. The good news is Jesus' words, which don't fade away even when heaven and earth do, last beyond our failures. He has told Peter, 'I will make you fish for people.' He has told Peter that he knows Peter will deny him, but he will still be waiting for him. Jesus is not done with Peter yet; he will in the end make Peter into the disciple Peter really wants to be. Jesus is also not done with you, despite your failures. He has words for you, plans for you, and promises for you. Bring your failures before Jesus, and turn back to him even in the midst of him. He will give you the power to follow him and find life.
- *For your six:* In many ways, Jesus is still on trial. All sorts of false claims are made about Jesus, and by the power of the evil one these false accusations are still heard and believed despite their contradictions and flaws. People claim that Jesus never claimed to be God (a claim this passage faces head-on). They claim that he was just a good teacher. They claim that he never rose from the dead. And many more. Ask the Holy Spirit to give your six the insight to see through these false claims.
- *For our church:* Like Peter, our church has grand aspirations to follow Jesus. Like Peter, we are far too weak to do it ourselves. Ask God to preserve us by his power and in his mercy from complete failure. Pray that we will always have the strength to turn back when we fall away.

March 25

Mark 15: 1 to 20—Jesus before the Romans

¹Very early in the morning the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law--the entire high council--met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. ²Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say." ³Then the leading priests accused him of many crimes, ⁴and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to say something? What about all these charges against you?" ⁵But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise. ⁶Now it was the governor's custom to release one prisoner each year at Passover time--anyone the people requested. ⁷One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, convicted along with others for murder during an insurrection. ⁸The mob began to crowd in toward Pilate, asking him to release a prisoner as usual. ⁹"Should I give you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked. ¹⁰(For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) ¹¹But at this point the leading priests stirred up the mob to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. ¹²"But if I release Barabbas," Pilate asked them, "what should I do with this man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴"Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the crowd only roared the louder, "Crucify him!" ¹⁵So Pilate, anxious to please the crowd, released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him. ¹⁶The soldiers took him into their headquarters and called out the entire battalion. ¹⁷They dressed him in a purple robe and made a crown of long, sharp thorns and put it on his head. ¹⁸Then they saluted, yelling, "Hail! King of the Jews!" ¹⁹And they beat him on the head with a stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. ²⁰When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

Points of Interest:

- ‘met to discuss their next step’—having already condemned him at night, they now discuss how to implement their plan in the clear light of day. One of the big things they have to decide is how to accomplish Jesus’ death. The Jewish council doesn’t have jurisdiction to execute someone; only the Romans can give out the death penalty. But their judgment against Jesus, that he has committed blasphemy in the Jewish religion, isn’t exactly the kind of thing Rome is concerned about. They could flout Roman authority and kill him anyway, but then the Romans could depose them or even kill them. So, instead they decided to change the charges to something that the Romans would be interested in: that Jesus is an insurrectionist, setting himself as a king outside of Roman authority.
- ‘For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy’—Pilate is no fool. He recognizes that Jesus is not a political agitator. However, the priests have managed to gather a mob friendly to their cause. In fear of the crowd, Pilate gives permission to execute Jesus nonetheless. This representative of the mighty Roman empire is no more a leader with true authority than the priests are. He too makes his decisions out of fear of the people he is supposed to be governing.
- ‘to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus’—This exchange of Jesus for Barabbas is full of irony. First of all, the priests are pretending to be doing Rome a favor by handing Jesus over to them for insurrection; then, they turn and demand the release of a true political insurrectionist, Barabbas. The second level of irony comes from Barabbas’ name, which means, ‘Father’s Son’ in Aramaic. Mark is writing to a Greek-speaking audience, who wouldn’t have known this any more than English-speakers would; but he left us hints within his story so that even non-Aramaic speakers would understand the significance. In the entire story of Mark, there are two words spoken in Aramaic and then translated into Greek: in 10:46 (March 28th), we learn that the blind man’s name is Bartimaeus, or the son of Timaeus; in the prayer in the garden, (14:36, April 6th), Jesus says, ‘Abba, Father.’ All we need to do is put ‘bar’ and ‘abba’ together to get ‘son of father.’ So, when the priests and mob demand Barabbas be released instead of Jesus, they are choosing which Son of the Father they want. The Messiah they want is Barabbas, the murderous political revolutionary, not Jesus, who offered life and the Kingdom of God.

There is further significance to Barabbas’ name. On the one hand, we can associate Barabbas and Jesus as two possible ‘Sons of the Father,’ alternate pictures of the Messiah. On the other hand, Barabbas is an everyman, a father’s son. He represents all of us, who are father’s sons or daughters. Jesus dies on the cross on which Barabbas was intended to die; in other words, he dies in place of every father’s child. He experiences the death that is intended for us.

- ‘turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him’—another element of Jesus’ prophecy about his future comes true. His death is happening just as he said it would. This accuracy should give us confidence that he will also rise again, just as he said.
- ‘Hail, King of the Jews’—while the temple guards mocked Jesus as a prophet, the Romans mock him as a king.

Taking it Home:

- *For you:* Jesus died on the cross of everyman, a father’s child. He took on suffering that was intended for us. Spend a few moments today praising Jesus for his willingness to die for the ransom of many, including you (10:46, March 28th).
- *For your six:* Pilate refuses to act according to the truth he knew about Jesus for fear of the crowds. He doesn’t want to cause any trouble with the people around him. Is fear of what other people will say or do getting in the way of your six seeing and acting on the truth about Jesus? Pray that God would protect them from fear of others as they decide how they will respond to Jesus.
- *For our church:* Jesus doesn’t engage in a tit-for-tat argument with the priests. He doesn’t respond defensively to their accusations and charges. We may very well face false accusations and charges as we try to bring the Kingdom of God to North Brooklyn, New York

City, and the world. Ask the Holy Spirit to give us the grace not to defensively sink to the level of our accusers.

March 26

Mark 15: 21-47

²¹A man named Simon, who was from Cyrene was coming in from the country just then, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus.) ²²And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means Skull Hill). ²³They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it. ²⁴Then they nailed him to the cross. They gambled for his clothes, throwing dice to decide who would get them. ²⁵It was nine o'clock in the morning when the crucifixion took place. ²⁶A signboard was fastened to the cross above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "The King of the Jews." ²⁷Two criminals were crucified with him, their crosses on either side of his. ²⁹And the people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You can destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, can you? ³⁰Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!" ³¹The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! ³²Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the two criminals who were being crucified with Jesus ridiculed him. ³³At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ³⁴Then, at that time Jesus called out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. ³⁶One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a stick so he could drink. "Leave him alone. Let's see whether Elijah will come and take him down!" he said. ³⁷Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" ⁴⁰Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. ⁴¹They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for him while he was in Galilee. Then they and many other women had come with him to Jerusalem. ⁴²This all happened on Friday, the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath. As evening approached, ⁴³an honored member of the high council, Joseph from Arimathea (who was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come), gathered his courage and went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴Pilate couldn't believe that Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman military officer in charge and asked him. ⁴⁵The officer confirmed the fact, and Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. ⁴⁶Joseph bought a long sheet of linen cloth, and taking Jesus' body down from the cross, he wrapped it in the cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone in front of the entrance. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where Jesus' body was laid.

Points of Interest:

- 'father of Alexander and Rufus'—apparently the children of this man became well-known followers of Jesus; they were known to Mark and to the people to whom he was writing.
- 'wine drugged with myrrh'—a painkiller. Jesus refuses to have his senses dulled to the suffering. IN the prayer at the garden, Jesus asks the Father to 'take this cup of suffering away.' But he submits himself to the Father's will. Here, on the cross, he decides to take on the full suffering. As the prophet Isaiah says, 'You have drunk the cup of terror, tipping out its last drops' (51: 17).
- 'save yourself and come down from the cross'—They assume Jesus is not coming down from the cross because he can't save himself. Actually, if he were to try to save his life by coming down from the cross he would lose it: everyone who saves his life will lose it, but everyone who loses his life for Jesus' sake and the sake of the good news will find true life (8:35, March 22nd). Jesus is staying on the cross because it is the way to true life, for him and for everyone else.
- 'Two criminals were crucified with him, their crosses on either side of his'—James and John had asked Jesus if they could be on his right and left in his glory, and Jesus told them that they didn't know what they were asking. This moment is Jesus' glory, and it is two criminals,

not two disciples, who are on his right and left. Even though they are not ready to be with Jesus in his suffering and glory now, both James and John will be by the end of their lives; Jesus has promised them both the persecution and the glory.

- ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’—Jesus is truly crying out deeply in his suffering. In his body, he does not want to die. However, this cry of anguish is simultaneously a deep affirmation of Jesus’ faith in his father. This question is the first line of Psalm 22. During Jesus’ day, the psalms were known by the first line, rather than by numbers; so, Jesus is referencing the entire psalm. It’s a psalm that speaks of terrible suffering, astounding similar to what Jesus is undergoing: including mockery by everyone who passes, being very thirsty, wounded hands and feet, and gambling for the clothes of the suffering one. It may be worth reading the psalm to hear how profoundly this psalm describes Jesus’ pain. Yet, the psalm doesn’t end at the suffering. The psalmist goes on to say, ‘Snatch me from the lions’ jaws, and from the horns of these wild oxen. Then I will declare the wonder of your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among all your people.’ There is a full expectation of rescue from the terrible suffering, and a prediction of joy, not just for the sufferer but for future generations: ‘Let all mortals—those born to die—bow down in his presence. Future generations will also serve him. Our children will hear about the wonders of the Lord. His righteous acts will be told to those yet unborn. They will hear about everything he has done.’ It’s as if Psalm 22 was written precisely to be Jesus’ guide and comfort on the cross. It describes his unbearable suffering, his unshakeable faith in God’s coming rescue, and his anticipation of the glorious future that will be attained by this suffering.
- ‘Truly, this was the Son of God’—in his death, Jesus fulfills his own prophecies and those of the Old Testament prophets and psalmists concerning the Messiah. Yet almost none of the Jews recognizes him. A gentile soldier, however, clearly sees who Jesus is in the moment of his death.
- ‘They had been followers of Jesus’—all of the apostles have run away, and when they do it clears the stage a bit and we are able to see that a whole group of women have also been Jesus’ disciples. These women remain even when the men have run away.
- ‘an honored member of the high council, Joseph from Arimathea (who was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come’—apparently not all of the council approved of Jesus’ death. Maybe they were left out of the secret night trial, or maybe they are the ones who pointed out the contradictory testimony, but to no avail.

Taking it Home:

- *For you:* Meditate for a moment on psalm 22. It is easy for us to pretend our suffering isn’t there, to try to avoid it, or to fall into despair. Jesus took a psalm 22 attitude toward his suffering; he felt its terror, but he trusted in God’s rescue and redemption. Ask Jesus to give you the ability to imitate him in his suffering.
- *For your six:* The soldier who is crucifying Jesus has a moment of sudden clarity: he sees that Jesus is the Son of God. Pray that your six will have such a moment of clear insight.
- *For our church:* At this climactic moment in Jesus’ life, all of a sudden his woman disciples come to the forefront. The woman with perfume and the widow are exalted as examples of faith and devotion, and when all of the men have run away the women remain with Jesus at the cross. It’s a pity that in the history of the church, these faithful, devoted, and courageous women have so often been ignored, and women who follow in their footsteps have been suppressed. Pray for our church, that it would be a place where women are consistently called to the front and their gifts, strengths, and contributions are acknowledged and affirmed.

March 27

Mark 16: 1-8—The resurrection of Jesus

¹The next evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary the mother of James went out and purchased burial spices to put on Jesus' body. ²Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they came to the tomb. ³On the way they were discussing who would roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. ⁴But when they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone-- a very large one--had already been rolled aside. ⁵So they entered the tomb, and there on the right sat a young man clothed in a white robe. The women were startled, ⁶but the angel said, "Do not be so surprised. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He isn't here! He has been raised from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. ⁷Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died!" ⁸The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, saying nothing to anyone because they were too frightened to talk.

Points of Interest:

- 'burial spices to put on Jesus' body'—Usually, of course, the spices are added to the body at the time of burial. Because of the coming of the Sabbath and the holiday, they didn't have time to add the spices at the time of Jesus' death; so they go to finish when the Sabbath is over. Jesus predicted that the perfume poured on him by the woman in ch. 14 (April 4th) would be the only anointing he would get, and it proves to be true.
- 'including Peter'—Peter might think he was disqualified from being a disciple by his denial; so Jesus includes him specifically in the message he leaves with the angel.
- 'just as he told you before he died'—Jesus' followers must have thought that something had gone terribly wrong when he died. The angel here points out that everything has happened exactly according to plan. He has both died and risen again, just as he told them.
- 'the women fled from the tomb'—Here is where the faith of the women gets stretched. The women have the same choice that the men did when they were in the boat in the midst of the storm (4:40, March 12th): are they going to have faith in Jesus' words and power, or are they going to be overcome by fear? Initially, fear takes the upper hand. The angel tells them not to be surprised and to give the message to the disciples, but they respond with bewilderment and saying nothing. In some ways, Jesus puts the fate of the church into the hands of these women. They are the only ones who know of Jesus' resurrection: are they going to believe it and spread the news to others? Are the apostles ever going to know that Jesus is waiting to re-connect with them in Galilee? Whether or not the story of the good news continues depends on the faith of these women.

Taking it Home:

- *For you:* Interestingly, in many of our ancient manuscripts of Mark's Good News, the story ends here, like a cliff-hanger. What will the women do? Will they overcome their fear and tell the story, so that the good news of the Kingdom can be spread? Now that they know the truth, will they tell it to others or will it get swallowed by their fear. The implication for the reader is clear: now that you have heard the story, what will you do? Will you tell others so that the story of the Kingdom of God coming can continue, or will it get stuck with you? You have now read Mark's entire story about Jesus. It's all about the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection bring the Kingdom of God near to everyone who hears. The big question for you is, Who are you going to tell?
- *For your six:* The women are left trembling and bewildered over the resurrection. The idea that Jesus was actually, physically risen from the dead is—understandably—difficult for them to swallow. Perhaps your six are willing to understand the resurrection as a metaphor of new life, but they can't accept the reality of a literal resurrection. Ask that the Holy Spirit would give them the faith to believe in the resurrection. Without it, they will never really be able to entrust their lives to Jesus.
- *For our church:* Pray for our Easter service, and indeed all of our services. Ask that God would make us messengers of joy like this angel, giving us the chance to tell many people that Jesus is risen again and is waiting for them. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring many people to our services to hear this good news.

March 28

Mark 16: 9-20—Jesus' final instructions

⁹It was early on Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead, and the first person who saw him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and found the disciples, who were grieving and weeping. ¹¹But when she told them that Jesus was alive and she had seen him, they didn't believe her. ¹²Afterward he appeared to two who were walking from Jerusalem into the country, but they didn't recognize him at first because he had changed his appearance. ¹³When they realized who he was, they rushed back to tell the others, but no one believed them. ¹⁴Still later he appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their unbelief--their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. ¹⁵And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere. ¹⁶Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned. ¹⁷These signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak new languages. ¹⁸They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick and heal them." ¹⁹When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. ²⁰And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked with them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.

Points of Interest:

- As was mentioned in yesterday's 'For you' section, many ancient manuscripts of Mark's good news end with yesterday's passage. Other ancient manuscripts end with what is called the 'shorter ending': 'Then they reported all these instructions briefly to Peter and his companions. Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unending message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen.' Still other manuscripts end with today's passage, the longer ending, which is today's passage. Most scholars think that the shorter ending and longer ending are epilogues added shortly after Mark's original story to give people a bit of how the story turns out, i.e. how the story got to them. Even though they are not original to Mark, these things have been left as part of his story because they fill out the story and because everything said in the longer version is verified in the other gospels or Acts.
- 'she told them Jesus was alive'—as we all might have guessed, by the fact that we have heard the story, Mary, after her initial shock, does gain the faith to tell the disciples. Unfortunately, the men do not believe her. The disciples are again behaving like bad soil: they don't believe what they are told, and they don't remember his words. For this, they gain a rebuke from Jesus later; but in his mercy he continues to appear to them until they believe.
- 'to everyone, everywhere'—This is not a message that should be given only to the Jews, there is plenty of good news to go around to the whole world.
- 'They will be able to handle snakes'—some sects have taken this verse to mean they ought to handle poisonous snakes intentionally as a sign to people that they are followers. It doesn't seem to me that this is what Jesus has in mind. Rather, he is saying that Jesus his rising from the dead gives his disciples power over death: things that should have the ability to kill them no longer will. He is not telling them to seek out poison, but that they are impervious to poison if they happen to drink it. There are stories of Jesus' messengers, like the apostle Paul, literally being bitten without harm. But even if one does die of poison, the effect is not permanent; they will be raised.
- 'These signs will accompany those who believe'—Most of these signs are simply the ability to do what Jesus did: the experience the twelve had when they went out on their mission is being expanded somewhat and widened to all who believe: all of Jesus' followers should be able to cast out demons, heal the sick, and be impervious to death. The miraculous speaking in new languages is described in Acts 2. The intent here seems to be that they will be given a miraculous ability to tell the story to people who don't even speak their language, as indeed happens in Acts 2.
- 'sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand'—the third reference in Mark to Psalm 110:1: the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. Jesus' ascension to the Father marks the beginning of the church, the new temple built

on him. Jesus will watch the Father, through the work of the church, complete the work of establishing his kingdom.

Taking it Home:

- *For you:* Yesterday's 'for you' section is true: the continuing of the story depends on you telling the stories to others. But today's passage gives the rest of the story: Jesus gives us what we need to have the faith to tell the message and the power to confirm it. Ask Jesus to give you the faith to tell the message. Ask him to appear to the people you tell himself, proving what you say. And ask him for the power to cast out demons and heal. Above all, praise him for passing along to you the power of his resurrection, rescuing us from fear of death.
- *For your six:* Jesus keeps appearing until the disciples finally believe. Ask Jesus to keep working on any of your six who don't yet believe also. Ask him to show the same mercy toward the unbelief of your six as he showed to the disciples.
- *For our church:* Pray for an increase in the signs that are supposed to accompany those who believe in our church. Ask God for more healings, for protection, for more power to cast out demons, and even for the ability to communicate the good news in languages we don't know. Pray also that God will send people from our church everywhere, to everyone with this good news.