



## Spring Term Notes, January to April 2025

Welcome to our term plan for spring 2025. As a church family we are going on a sixteen week journey through Mark's gospel. Together we will explore how Jesus challenges and disrupts societal and cultural norms and traditional ways of thinking. In doing this, Jesus offers a radical new perspective on life. One that is shaped by and expresses the values of the kingdom of God.

Jesus is the way to this new life. It is only through choosing to surrender our lives to him and follow him that we become citizens of God's kingdom and receive the gift of eternal life.

As we journey through the first seven chapters of Mark's gospel we will see the gospel of Jesus revealed. In chapter eight we find the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. The reality of Jesus as Messiah is the fulcrum on which the whole of history turns. In chapters nine to fifteen we see how God's covenant is fulfilled in Jesus. In the closing chapter we celebrate the truth that Jesus is risen.

Through it all we find the call for us as followers of Jesus to share the gospel of Jesus with those who don't yet know Jesus and for our lives to be a living declaration of the kingdom of heaven. In doing this we help people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly and we play our part in the heavenly transformation of people and culture in Bristol.

## Jesus Changes Everything

### The Gospel Revealed

Jesus: Disrupter	Week 1	5 <sup>th</sup> to 11 <sup>th</sup> January	3
Jesus: Disrupter	Week 2	12 <sup>th</sup> to 18 <sup>th</sup> January	4
Jesus: Healer	Week 3	19 <sup>th</sup> to 25 <sup>th</sup> January	5
Jesus: Creator	Week 4	26 <sup>th</sup> January to 1 <sup>st</sup> February	6
Jesus: Ruler	Week 5	2 <sup>nd</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> February	7
Jesus: Provider	Week 6	9 <sup>th</sup> to 15 <sup>th</sup> February	8
Jesus: Teacher	Week 7	16 <sup>th</sup> to 22 <sup>nd</sup> February	9

### History Turns

Jesus: Messiah	Week 8	23 <sup>rd</sup> February to 1 <sup>st</sup> March	10
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### The Covenant Fulfilled

Jesus: God	Week 9	2 <sup>nd</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> March	11
Jesus: Priest	Week 10	9 <sup>th</sup> to 15 <sup>th</sup> March	12
Jesus: King	Week 11	16 <sup>th</sup> to 22 <sup>nd</sup> March	13
Jesus: Judge	Week 12	23 <sup>rd</sup> to 29 <sup>th</sup> March	14
Jesus: Prophet	Week 13	30 <sup>th</sup> March to 5 <sup>th</sup> April	15
Jesus: Lamb	Week 14	6 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> April	16
Jesus: Convict	Week 15	13 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> April	17

### The Risen Christ

Jesus: Saviour	Week 16	20 <sup>th</sup> to 26 <sup>th</sup> April	18
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### The Shape of Small Community Evenings

Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness			19
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## Jesus: Disrupter

Read: Mark chapter 1

Many years ago, Jackie booked a table in a favourite country pub for my birthday, and I spent days looking forward to a quiet evening together. Imagine my shock when I found 12 people already sitting at our table, as still as statues and wearing masks! Jackie had gathered some of our closest friends to celebrate – a delightful surprise to be sure ... but ... not what I was expecting, not at all. I vividly remember being so flummoxed that, for what seemed an age, I just stood there, lost for words, all my expectations for the evening ... disrupted.

Something like this, but on a much, much larger scale, unfolds across Mark's gospel, as we'll see over the coming weeks.

The words of Isaiah 40:3 leave us in no doubt that God's people were expecting Him to come to live among and lead them. Mark introduces Jesus as *Messiah* and *Son of God* – titles instantly recognisable to his contemporaries.

Image after image from the Old Testament builds Mark's case – a messenger to get people ready to receive the Lord (Isaiah 40:3)? – tick; the call to repentance, echoing every Judge and Prophet through Jewish history (Isaiah 30:15)? – tick; God speaking from heaven (2 Samuel 22:14)? – tick ...

Jesus re-enacts some of the most significant moments in Jewish history. His baptism recalls Israel passing through the Red Sea; his 40 days of trial in the desert mirrors their 40 years of wilderness wanderings, which ended as they crossed this very river, the Jordan.

The baptism of Jesus also reminds us that he ministered not *for* but *from* affirmation. Do we minister on the foundation of our Father's love ... or in search of it?

Jesus crystallises the good news into a single phrase – *The kingdom of God has come near* – and calls for a twofold response – *Repent and believe* ...

Further Messianic credentials follow: the call to *Follow Me*; deliverance from demonic oppression; healing for the sick. The Jewish religious system 'managed' skin diseases – lepers were literally untouchable. Jesus, because the Kingdom of God will not accommodate itself to any work of the Enemy, touches – and heals – them. Not what was expected ... not what was expected at all ...

### Application:

The challenge for this week is to identify those areas of society where the Holy Spirit is calling you to be involved in establishing God's kingdom. In what is the Holy Spirit asking you to challenge the societal norms in these areas?

Share: what are the important issues for people you know? How do the values of God's kingdom relate to these issues?

Pray: for wisdom and understanding in how the kingdom of God provides hope for people caught in today's secular culture. Pray for opportunities to share conversation with non-Christian friends about this.

Act: accept an invitation for conversation around these issues and the hope you have in Jesus.

What are my expectations of God?

How can I check that they are legitimate expectations?

Do I have any which need disrupting?

## Jesus: Disrupter

Read: Mark chapter 2

Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,  
**the Saviour promised long;**  
let every heart prepare a throne  
and every voice a song.

The religious leaders, the very people who should have been first to recognise Jesus as their long-promised Messiah, the deliverer of Israel, could see neither who he was nor why he'd come.

Jesus' words, actions and very person were just not what they were expecting. Born in the wrong postcode for a start – *'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'* (John 1:46); and mixing with the sort of people the posh folk only ever noticed when they looked down their noses – *'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'* (2:16).

As we saw last week, the religious leaders *accommodated* the effects of the Fall, pushing its victims away rather than reaching out to them with compassion. Asked to choose between those in need and their religious observance – such as fasting – they'd choose observance any day of the week: and above all on the Sabbath, enforcing it so strictly they'd twisted a blessing into a burden.

They also thought they had a handle on sin, too blind to see it had a handle on them. Surely someone like the paralysed man (whose mates, by the way, should get a shout out for their faith every time we read this) only had himself to blame? So deeply ingrained was this belief that even Jesus followers, seeing a blind man, asked Jesus: *who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* (John 9:2). Jesus confronts these self-appointed guardians of who was worthy by telling this paralytic that his sins were forgiven – and then demonstrating his authority to do so by sending him skipping home ...

This wonderful carol recognises who Jesus is and why he came:

He comes the prisoners to release  
in Satan's bondage held;  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,  
the wounded soul to cure;  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,  
your welcome shall proclaim;  
and heaven's eternal arches ring  
with your beloved name.

Use its ancient words to worship Jesus today.

Do I look down my nose at anyone or any group?

Does my 'religion' ever choke my compassion?

Dare I ask the Holy Spirit to give me a heart for those I disdain?



### Application

The challenge this week is to consider your friendship groups. Who do you regularly spend time with? Is there anyone outside of your normal friendship groups to whom you can extend the invitation of friendship?

Share: how do you choose your friends? What are the attributes you look for? What characteristics would you find challenging in a friend?

Pray: for guidance and discernment about who you can be extending a hand of friendship towards.

Act: get to know someone who is outside your current friendship group.

## Jesus: Healer

Read: Mark chapter 3

This week, we're offered a ring-side seat as religion responds to Jesus ... and it's a chilling sight.

Scripture warns against hardened hearts: <sup>7</sup> *Today, if only you would hear his voice,* <sup>8</sup> *'Do not harden your hearts ...* Psalm 95 reminds us that a hardened heart prevents us hearing the voice of God. In Mark 8, Jesus challenges his followers: <sup>17</sup> *... Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?* <sup>18</sup> *Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?*

Is my heart soft or hard?

Is any part of my faith about following rules rather than Jesus?

How is my rhythm of being with and being sent out by Jesus?

Between Mark 2 and 3, the religious leaders' attitude to Jesus has hardened into hatred. Imagine the lack of compassion required to 'see' *a man with a shrivelled hand* yet only as an opportunity to trap Jesus: *Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath* (v. 2).

The point of contention is not healing per se ... but healing *on the Sabbath*, a mindset Jesus challenges head on: *'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'* They have no answer and so, *in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts*, Jesus heals the man. At which, the religious leaders begin to plot his death.

It beggars belief, but it shouldn't. Religion is attractive, because it's about keeping rules, it tells us when we've done enough – and, if we're good at rule keeping, we can feel superior to those who aren't. The challenge of following Jesus is that he calls us to *take up our cross and offer ourselves as living sacrifices ...*

The 'ordinary people' by contrast – at least for a time – find Jesus magnetic, and are willing to travel for miles to see him: several of the journeys (vv 7-12) would have taken days.

Jesus chooses apostles *that they might be with him and that he might send them out*. Followers still spend intentional time with him in order to be sent out in his name. The chapter ends with an early hint of the way Jesus will re-shape humanity, creating a new family of those who follow him.

### Application:

The challenge this week is to explore the Holy Spirit's call on your life and give particular attention to challenging areas of that call. Is there something that feels hard or scary? Talk to someone about how you might respond.

Share: What is your sense of God's call on your life? How does this shape your decisions?

Pray: for the Holy Spirit to give you clarity in understanding God's call on your life.

Act: make a decision that reflects and strengthens your sense of call.

## Jesus: Creator

Read: Mark 4

Last week, we saw Jesus commanding those who'd been healed and delivered – and even the demons he drove out – *not to tell others about him*. What scholars call *The Messianic Secret* is probably best explained by Jesus' knowledge that people were expecting a warrior Messiah who'd foment a rebellion and drive the Romans out – he wasn't ready for that ultimate conflict just yet ... This may also partly explain why Jesus now turns to parables – riddle-like stories with a hook, a twist, or a hidden meaning:

<sup>10</sup> *Later, ... his followers asked him, 'Why do you speak in riddles?' <sup>11</sup> 'It's a way of testing people,' he replied. 'Each story contains a message about God's Kingdom, like jam in a doughnut. Those who do no more than nibble at the outside never find it. But those who are truly hungry find an explosion of taste just when they least expect it. So, those who are just looking to be entertained simply hear the stories. Those who truly want to find God pick up on the message they tell. (Who?)*

Each parable here is about seed, and in each – explicitly in *The Sower* (v. 14) and implicitly in the others – the seed is *the word* (v. 14). Because we believe that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1) we can recognise that the seed is both the good news of God's invitation to life **and** Jesus himself.

The 4 soils in *The Sower* represent human responses to the word – but perhaps also different areas of my life, some fruitful, others hard as tarmac ...

Seeds are tiny, die to accomplish their work, and then burst into life-giving life. The word is invisible when sown, yet has power for harvest. Even light (this lamp is a flame not an LED!) is a tiny seed with the power to dispel darkness.

Jesus' words *Consider carefully what you hear* might have been written for a world shaped by social media and 'fake news,' warning us all that we can expect to be treated in the way that we treat others. Some theologians see Jesus' calming of the storm as an enacted parable, the riddle begging the question, *Who is this?* ... a question we all must answer ...

Where is my life hard, stopping the Word penetrating?

Where is my life shallow, stopping the Word growing?

What are the thorns in my life – the distractions and 'cares'?

Where am I being fruitful?

### Application:

The challenge this week is to recognise God's abundant generosity towards you. How is the Holy Spirit asking you to respond? How are your decisions and actions expressing the abundant generosity of God's kingdom?

Share: When have you experienced God's generosity towards you? How do you express God's generosity to others?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to show you a specific way you can express God's generosity towards someone.

Act: if the Holy Spirit has shown you a specific way then respond in obedience.



## Jesus: Ruler

Read: Mark chapter 5

It's. Not. Over.

This week, the Holy Spirit shows us that, even in desperate and hopeless situations, Jesus can still work the impossible. When we feel that *It's over*, let's remember how committed Jesus is to our healing and freedom. It's not over!

Our Christmas theme last year was *The Power of Love* yet strength and violence often seem more powerful: *No one was strong enough to subdue* the man Jesus meets here. But the evil power within him recognises a greater power, and drives the man to his knees before Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why God asked Adam to name the animals? It's because we can't tame what we will not name. That holds true for psychological and emotional realities, in conflict and relational disharmony – refuse to acknowledge what's really going on and you'll never resolve it ...

Is there any situation in my life where I feel "It's over"?

Is there anything I can't tame (resolve) because I won't name (own) it?

Does Jesus still amaze and astonish me?

And so Jesus demands the demons' name, as a prelude to evicting these squatters from the Abyss.

But what on earth had the pigs done? Nothing. But their fate left people in no doubt that the devil is real, and *comes only to steal and kill and destroy*. Jesus, by contrast, *has come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10).

This fulness of life is in sharp focus as, back on the other side of the lake, Jesus meets another man on his knees, this time pleading for his desperately ill daughter. On his way, he's interrupted by a woman very likely suffering from endometriosis, a condition which defies cure to this day. Her endless bleeding would have made her *unclean* to people like this man, a synagogue leader, and condemned her to a life in the shadows. But God's compassion extends to religious elite and social outcast alike.

While healing the woman, the daughter dies. But because of Jesus, *death itself begins to work backwards* (C. S. Lewis) and he raises her from the dead. Fulness of life indeed!

After the first miracle, *the people were amazed*. After the last, the girl's parents and the disciples *were completely astonished*. Does Jesus still amaze and astonish you?

Lord, when I'm tempted to despair, let me hear you say: *'Don't be afraid; just believe.'*

### Application:

The challenge this week is to increase your understanding and expectation of God's sovereign nature. Nothing is impossible for God. How can you pray in a way that reflects this reality?

Share: How would you describe God's sovereignty to someone who doesn't know him?

Pray: for the Holy Spirit to give you the right words, and for an opportunity to speak with someone about Jesus.

Act: if an opportunity arises, take it and trust the Holy Spirit to give you the right words in the moment.

## Jesus: Provider

Read: Mark chapter 6

People struggle to square their *expectations* of the Messiah with ... the Messiah. His synagogue teaching leaves sinners agog: no one can fathom his wisdom, any more than they can deny the reality of his miracles.

On the other hand, he's a lowly tradesman ... and they've known Mary's lad since he was her boy child. Joseph's absence suggests he died while Jesus was young. Yet this carpenter is more truly a chip off the old block than his neighbours could possibly imagine ...

Twice we're told that Jesus was amazed – once that a centurion could have so *much* faith (Matthew 8:10); and here, that those who've known him all his life could have so *little*. What amazes Jesus about our faith – its presence or absence?

The Twelve are sent out with nothing to support them but the generosity of others. No faffing on tripadvisor for the best places to stay; and if people reject the good news ... well, *Watch my dust*. Authorised by Jesus, they drive out *many demons*. There's the first New Testament mention of anointing with oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit) for healing. And lest we forget its necessity, the call to repentance takes front stage.

Herod, like many a politician before and since, chooses making political capital over doing the right thing, with tragic results. *John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb* – we'll hear that line again ...

Some reduce the feeding of the thousands to a fable about generosity, but the point isn't what the lad does with his lunch but what Jesus does with it (I know, the lad only appears in John's account). That the miracle happens as the disciples begin to distribute the food begs the question: could Jesus have done this without any help from them? Yes. Did he need their help? No. But our God loves to do his work in partnership with us.

This may help explain why he seems set to walk on by as his disciples' boat flounders, as he will do later on the Emmaus Road. As we pray for our family, friends and colleagues, it's a comforting thought that Jesus loves to be invited in, even by those who don't quite realise who he is.

Has my familiarity with Jesus bred contempt?

What amazes Jesus about my faith – its presence or absence?

Do I relish God's invitation to work in partnership with him?

### Application:

The challenge this week is to ask the Holy Spirit for what you need to fulfil his call. Who is he calling you to pray for, share the gospel with, serve? Ask the Holy Spirit to equip you for these tasks.

Share: When have you been aware of the Holy Spirit giving you the gifts you need to follow God's call?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to show you how these gifts can be used for God's glory and to give you courage to use them.

Act: as the Holy Spirit leads you into opportunities, be bold and use the gifts he has given you.



## Jesus: Teacher

Read: Mark chapter 7

Mark 7<sup>37</sup> *People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'*

Jesus is seen by the people as one who has done everything *well*. He is not just a teacher, a healer, but the anointed Christ, sent by God to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.

But the Pharisees and scribes don't see that. In

v1-23 Jesus is criticised by them for breaking *traditions*, he challenges them, he uses the opportunity to teach the crowd and later his disciples (v17-23). The kingdom values are of grace and mercy, following God's laws not obeying religiously extra man-concocted traditions. Jesus speaks against hypocrisy, pretending to be holy but doing otherwise. The practice of Corban was finding a convenient loophole in the rules and exploiting it, to avoid honouring and caring for parents (5<sup>th</sup> commandment). It can be easy to appear to hold to "traditional values" whilst completely missing the point. What is inside our hearts matters, we can appear squeaky clean on the outside but on the inside be full of impure thoughts. (v21-22)

Jesus needs a break and goes away to Gentile region secretly, v24-30 where, he is recognised by a Greek (Gentile) woman who begs for her daughter. It is like being interrupted by work on your holiday! Jesus' primary vocation was first to help the Jewish people, before His kingdom would spread out *further*, he was not just an itinerant medical missionary, yet he showed kingdom value of generosity towards her, an outsider. Her persistence and faith are rewarded.

Jesus tries again to find a peaceful place to rest so he travels to Decapolis but again he is interrupted by a man who is both deaf and mute (or stammers) -the faith is shown by his friends who bring him to Jesus who heals him completely. See Isa 35v5-6 *Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. <sup>6</sup> Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.* And the result – people were overwhelmed with amazement!

How can we be hypocritical? Give examples.

How do we show kingdom values when we are interrupted? Can we ever be off duty?

For which family or friends can we show faith and bring their needs to Jesus?



**Application:** The challenge this week is to review your previous week. How have you reflected the values of God's kingdom in your thoughts, words and actions? Ask the Holy Spirit to equip you to live your life in a way that reflects the values of God's kingdom.

**Share:** How have you reflected the values of God's kingdom in your thoughts, words and actions?

**Pray:** Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in demonstrating the values of God's kingdom in your thoughts, words and actions.

**Act:** follow the Holy Spirit's lead and share God's kingdom values with people you meet.

## Jesus: Messiah

Read: Mark chapter 8

In the TV series the Traitors, speculation is rife, evidence is accumulated, people try to work out who is who, till finally they draw their own conclusions and maybe a traitor is unmasked. In the same way, Mark lays out more and more evidence about who Jesus really is till now the great revelation, and turning point of the whole gospel, Jesus is the Messiah! *8v29 Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'*

What evidence in Mark is there that Jesus is the Messiah?

How do you understand the concept of a suffering Messiah?

Who do you personally say Jesus is? What difference does it make?

The Messiah or anointed one, Christ, is the anointed king, predicted long ago. Mark has given us hints, (1v1,3,11) till finally the great reveal, He is the promised Messiah!

In v1-13, another miracle, showing God's abundant care and compassion for 4000 hungry people. Yet the Pharisees didn't see, they were blind and asked for a sign from heaven, wasn't another supernatural miracle of provision enough?

Jesus is like an ever patient teacher with the disciples, the yeast symbolised the corrupting influence of Pharisaic hypocrisy, v15.

Next evidence is yet another healing, but in two stages of a blind man.v22-25.He needed a second touch from Jesus, the healing was gradual but Jesus finished what he begun. In Caesarea Philippi, v27-30 Jesus asks two questions, in general, who do people say I am? Secondly, what do you personally think? Jesus wants them to be sure, certain he is the Messiah, and would fulfil both roles of triumphant Messiah, Isa 11 and the suffering servant of Isa 53. See v33, *You have no idea how God works* (Message) Jesus is speaking plainly now, the first of three predictions of his coming death and resurrection. The Messiah will have to suffer, Peter finds this hard to take.

Finally Jesus gives a personal invitation to everyone,

*34-37 Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?"* (Message)

### Application:

The challenge this week is to share how knowing Jesus as Messiah has transformed your life.

Share: How has Jesus transformed your life? Is there a specific moment you can share?

Pray: for each other to have courage to share testimonies and for opportunities to share them with people who don't yet know Jesus.

Act: share your testimony of how Jesus has transformed your life with someone who doesn't yet know Jesus.

## Jesus: God

Read: Mark chapter 9

<sup>2</sup> *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*

Six days ago Peter had the revelation, *Jesus you are the Messiah!* Jesus takes the three disciples high up the mountain (probably Mt Hermon) where he is transfigured. They see his radiant divine glory *shining*

so brightly from within, not a reflection of light from elsewhere. It confirms He is the Messiah; he is divine. This radiance was a foretaste of his glory and dazzled them. A true mountain top experience or encounter!

There two figures *appeared*, Moses, representing the Law and Elijah, the Prophets. Jesus is the fulfilment of all the law and prophets. Peter is scared, doesn't know what to say but wants to prolong the encounter, "let's build shelters!" Note God confirms his reality following their faith, first the belief (expressing faith) in 8v29 then the confirming sign, 9v2-4. We often want the sign first then we will believe, but it works the other way have faith then the encounter follows.

The voice of God confirms *this is my Son, listen to him*, (Mark 1v11). They come down the mountain but are warned not to tell others prematurely what they saw as it would be misunderstood as Jews expected a political Messiah. Though after Jesus death and resurrection they can tell others see 2Pet1v16-18. In v12, Elijah figure of Mal 4v5 is identified with John the Baptist, who suffered as Jesus will do too.

See v14-29 Then down to reality- bump! After the mountain top experience, the challenge of *ordinary* life intrudes, an anxious father, a sick son, ineffective disciples and arguments amongst onlookers.

What is the use of great experiences if we cannot be of use to those in need? If we *encounter* God in an amazing way, then cannot deal with a crisis before our eyes. Jesus rebukes the demon and restores the boy. He challenges their lack of faith, pray persistently.

See V30-50, v35 '*Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.*'  
However great your encounter might be, be humble like a child.



**Application:** The challenge this week is to ask the Holy Spirit to help you encounter Jesus. To see afresh how glorious and majestic Jesus is.

Share: How have you encountered Jesus? Is there a specific occasion when you've encountered Jesus? What was it like?

Pray: Express your thanks to Jesus for the encouragement you've received from sharing and hearing of other peoples encounters with him.

Act: Set aside some time to be with Jesus in prayer.

What does the transfiguration teach us about who Jesus is?

Why does faith often come before heavenly encounter?

What difference does encountering Jesus make to our day to day lives?

## Jesus: Priest

Read: Mark chapter 10

10 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. Jesus is on his final journey south to Judea and then Jerusalem. He uses the opportunities on the way for more teaching. What does giving our lives fully to Jesus look like? It covers every part of our lives, relationships, v1-12, attitudes to children v13-16, attitudes to wealth, v17-31, attitudes to serving, v32-45 and to the marginalised, v46-52.

The Pharisees try to trap Jesus again, but he reminds them of God's original intentions in creation, for permanent relationships between a man and a woman, Gen 1v27, 2v24. Children are welcomed by Jesus, v13-16 not seen as an annoying distraction, no ageism in God's kingdom! What can we as Christians say to our society about God's design for marriage, divorce and children?

What should our attitudes be towards marriage and place of children?

How important are earthly riches to you versus treasures in heaven?

What does humble service look like? Should we be doormats?

In v17-31, the rich man appears sincere, but when challenged about his attitude to money, his face fell. It is easy to think we keep to the letter of the law but miss the underlying importance of loving God first with everything we have. The man seems to trust rather in his possessions and *self-righteousness*. The disciples were shocked that wealth cannot buy you eternal life as

people, like now, regarded prosperity as a sign of God's pleasure, a dangerous attitude to have. The camel/eye of needle is deliberate hyperbole to make a point, only God can do impossible.

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.' Jesus knew he was going to die, v32-34 but kept going, nevertheless. James and John hoped for preferential positions, v35-45 still thinking of a political Messiah but Jesus puts them right, suffering before glory, the cross comes first. A key verse is Mark 10v45

<sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Jesus came to serve, to give up his life (substitutionary atonement) for us all.

Finally Jesus stops for *blind* Bartimaeus, shouting out for mercy, not caring what others thought. Jesus commends him for his faith.



**Application:** The challenge this week is to give our lives more fully to Jesus. Are there areas of your life that you are reluctant to give fully to Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you faith to trust Jesus in these areas of your life.

Share: What aspects of your life do you find challenging to give wholly to Jesus?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can deepen your relationship with Jesus and for strength to do this.

Act: commit to doing whatever the Holy Spirit has asked of you.

## Jesus: King

Read: Mark chapter 11

*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!* And now, he arrives! *Sitting* on a young donkey, Jesus rides into Jerusalem where he is honoured as royalty, singing hosanna, spreading their cloaks, waving branches. *Zech 9v9 See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.* They celebrate him as an earthly king but quote Psalm 118v25,26 which implies a heavenly meaning, the long-promised Messiah. It is the start of Passover week, liberation from Egypt is celebrated, but a deeper freedom of heavenly significance is coming.

In v11, Jesus looks *around* the temple courts, observes this very centre of religious life, is it leading people to true worship of God?

What did Jesus' words and actions on each day signify?

How can we appear to be full of abundant foliage but actually fruitless?

What mountains need moving in your life to be fruitful?

### Monday v12-19

Jerusalem is crowded *for* the Passover festival so like other pilgrims Jesus finds accommodation outside in Bethany. Mark describes an acted parable sandwich here, fig tree/temple/fig tree. The fig tree is full of green foliage, looks great but has no actual fruit so Jesus curses it. In the OT the fig tree is a metaphor for Israel's standing before God. In the temple there is an abundance of religious foliage but what fruit? In the outer temple courts (where Gentiles could worship) Jesus dramatically clears out the money changers and stalls selling lambs and pigeons, quoting Isa 56v7 and Jer7v11 in v17. Jesus is zealous for true worship of God, but the leaders are afraid of his popularity, of losing power and a possible uprising. Jesus challenges their authority.

### Tuesday v20-33

Back to the fig tree, overnight it has completely withered the disciples notice. What is the heavenly significance of that? God's *judgment* on a fruitless Jewish people who have turned to empty ritual and legalism. Jesus encourages the disciples to have faith in God, v22, believe God can move mountains, he can remove whatever hinders us from bearing fruit. God can do the impossible, he is King! See how faithful God is, remember to pray, believe and if necessary, forgive others.

Again the Jewish leaders try to trap Jesus by questioning his authority. He sees their lack of sincerity v27-33.



**Application:** The challenge this week is to recognise that how we live our lives has earthly and heavenly significance. Only the Holy Spirit can equip us and lead us to right action.

Share: How would you describe the heavenly realms to someone who doesn't know Jesus?  
What is your sense of how your life has heavenly significance?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the heavenly and earthly significance of your life.

Act: Re-read Mark 11 and reflect on these events and how they relate to today.

## Jesus: Judge

Read: Mark chapter 12

Imagine playing two truths and a lie with Jesus! It just wouldn't work. This ice-breaker provides an opportunity to present ourselves to the world in ways we are comfortable with. The thing with Jesus is that he is God and therefore all-knowing. Jesus sees us completely. He knows even our innermost thoughts and motivations. There is nothing we can hide from him and yet sometimes we try to. Have you ever tried to hide something from God, or hoped he wouldn't notice something?

Jesus saw the generosity of the widow's gift and the pride of the chief priests. He sees the motivation behind the actions people take.

In the parable of the tenants the owner's generosity was met with contempt by the tenants. The owner sent servants to collect what was rightfully his. The tenants responded by beating or killing the servants. Finally, the owner sent his son, whom he loved. The tenants thought that killing the son would mean the vineyard would be theirs. How wrong they were! The result of their actions was that they would lose everything.

Jesus shared this parable to challenge the chief priests, teachers of the law and the elders. They had shaped their religious practices to their own ends. They were the ones who were gaining status and approval whilst others were suffering. If Jesus is who he claimed to be they stood to lose everything they had built for their own ends. The sad irony of their actions against Jesus was that if they had simply acknowledged who Jesus is and chosen to follow him they would have gained life – eternal life. Jesus challenged them because he wanted them to have the life he offers.

The widow, whom Jesus acknowledged, 'put in everything – all she had to live on.' Her sacrificial giving demonstrated her total commitment to God.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to total surrender of our lives to Jesus. Jesus' response to our total surrender is to offer us life, life to the full.



**Application:** The challenge this week is to understand that Jesus sees the entirety of our lives and calls us to draw near to him, to walk with him and live lives that honour him.

**Share:** What steps do you take to worship Jesus with the whole of your life and to completely surrender your life to Jesus?

**Pray:** ask the Holy Spirit for the courage to trust Jesus completely and to show you one thing you can do to develop greater trust in Jesus.

**Act:** commit to doing the one thing the Holy Spirit has shown you. Ask a friend to check-in with you about how it is going.



## Jesus: Prophet

Read: Mark chapter 13

Jesus is not only a prophet, he is God. He knows all things and provided his disciples with prophetic insight. In Mark 13 we read that Jesus spoke of the certainty of wars, earthquakes and famines. The ongoing reality of nations rising up against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms. It is against this prophetic backdrop that Jesus said to his disciples, “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

Jesus’ prophecy about the temple would have been startling to those listening. The temple was considered to be a glorious building, an object of dazzling beauty. The Roman historian Tacitus described it as ‘immensely opulent.’ One of Jesus’ disciples referred to ‘these tremendous stones and buildings.’ It was a vast and strong building and its demise would have been unthinkable.

How In what ways can our church building become primary rather than secondary in mission?

How can we keep the work of sharing the gospel with all nations as our primary focus in mission?

Where in our society do we find resistance to sharing the gospel of Jesus?

In chapter 11 we read about Jesus clearing the temple. Jesus referred to Jeremiah 7:11 when he said “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of the first temple. Nebuchadnezzar’s army did that in 586BC. Jesus

prophesied the destruction of the second temple. The legions of Rome did that in AD 70. In both cases the temple had ceased to be a place of worship and had become a representation of the self-reliance and rebellion of God’s people.

Jesus continues today to call his followers to preach the gospel to all nations. God’s mission for the Church is to ‘make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ (Matthew 28:19) We do this by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to all people through our words and actions. Our church institutions and buildings are secondary and must exist only to serve our primary commission of making disciples of all nations.

### Application:

The challenge this week is to review the ways in which our words and actions are fulfilling Jesus call to share the gospel with all nations.

Share: How have you shared the gospel in the last year?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and discernment in sharing the gospel.

Act: Be bold! Invite someone you know to one of the performances of the Mark Drama on Good Friday and Easter Saturday.

## Jesus: Lamb

Read: Mark chapter 14

The day began ordinarily enough. The disciples followed Jesus' instructions and busied themselves with preparations for the passover meal they would share later in the day. Perhaps finding things 'just as Jesus had told them' was by now an ordinary occurrence. This ordinariness would rapidly unravel as a series of events unfolded. First the shocking truth that one of them would betray Jesus. The disciples were incredulous in their responses, "Surely you don't mean me?" Then the strangeness of Jesus speaking about the bread as "my body" and the wine as "my blood." Followed by a hint of what was to come as Jesus declared "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Normality quickly returned as they sang a hymn and 'went out to the Mount of Olives.'

In Gethsemane the ordinariness continued as Jesus instructed them to "sit here while I pray." But then he said to them "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Jesus went a little farther to pray and the disciples fell asleep. They didn't see or hear Jesus' anguish as he prayed "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus rebuked Peter, saying to him, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." the disciples fell asleep again and again. Three times in all. We're left wondering how the disciples could fall asleep in Jesus' time of great anguish. Did they not know what he was going through? Jesus knew what was coming and had been warning them. However, the events of the day had not yet finished unfolding. Jesus brought them out of their slumber when he said, "Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" Jesus led them into the final unfolding of events that later they would discover were just as Jesus had told them.

God's plan was always to reconcile people to himself through his son. We have the privilege of being reconciled through Jesus and of sharing our hope in Jesus with others.

How might the disciples have felt as they witnessed these events?

In what ways can we be sleeping when Jesus has asked us to keep watch?

How can we stand up for Jesus in today's society?

### Application:

The challenge this week is to share what Easter means to you with someone who does not know Jesus.

Share: What is important to you about Easter? How would you describe this to someone who does not know Jesus?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit with whom you should share, the words to use, and courage to act.

Act: share the gospel of Jesus with whomever the Holy Spirit leads you to.

## Jesus: Convict

Read: Mark chapter 15

“Hail, king of the Jews!” With these words, beatings and mock worship, the soldiers taunted Jesus. If they had known who it was they mocked, would they have acted with such vulgar brutality and contempt? The irony of their actions is that Jesus is not only a king he is King of kings. Yet here he was treated as a convict. How

do you react to the way Jesus was treated? He was subjected to an incomprehensibly barbaric punishment. Mark’s account is sufficiently detailed to be shocking and disturbing. How could an empire treat people with such total disregard for their humanity? There are broader moral, ethical and anthropological questions here. But, we will keep our focus on Jesus. To the Roman rulers, Jesus was a political problem to be fixed. To the soldiers, once the judgment had been declared, Jesus was a criminal to be punished as any other criminal.

This is hard for us to understand as we know the whole story. We get to read about who Jesus really is and we might wonder “how could the Roman rulers and soldiers not see this?” Pilate saw the self-interest of the chief priests but bowed to the political desire to please the crowd. There were others too. The people in the crowd who shouted “crucify him”, the chief priests and teachers of the law who mocked him. To all these and many others Jesus’ response is beyond comprehension. He doesn’t defend himself. He is the sovereign God and therefore has no need to offer any defence. Apart from a few words to Pilate, he is silent until the final moment. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We can look to Luke’s gospel for an emphasis on Jesus forgiving those who persecuted him. Mark, however, leaves us with this troubling and uncomfortable image of the humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus.

Those with societal power served their own interests by refusing to recognise or acknowledge the one who was before them. Through their actions they intentionally or inadvertently perpetrated injustice towards Jesus.

Jesus endured all this in order that people can be reconciled to God. In order that each person who chooses to put their trust in Jesus and follow him is redeemed, forgiven, filled with the Spirit and given eternal life.



**Application:** The challenge this week is to reflect on what it cost Jesus to reconcile you with God and how you will respond to Jesus' giving of himself to you.

Share: How would you communicate the cost of Jesus' sacrifice to someone else?

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you closer to Jesus. Offer yourself afresh to Jesus, with these or your own words, "Here I am Jesus, I will follow you."

Act: Find somewhere where you feel comfortable reflecting and praying. Read Mark 15 and thank Jesus for his love for you and for making it possible for you to be reconciled with God.

How do you feel about the injustice of the way Jesus was treated?

In what ways can we get caught in the crowd’s reaction today?

How do you respond to Jesus’ generosity in giving his life for you?

## Jesus: Saviour

Read: Mark chapter 16

“Don’t be alarmed.” Angels often began their interactions with people with similar words. Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome had much to be alarmed about. Not least the presence of a young man dressed in white. Also the stone that had been rolled away and the empty tomb. It was a natural and understandable human reaction. The young man told them exactly what had happened to Jesus. “He is risen!” Then, perhaps pre-empting the reality that had not yet dawned on them, “he is not here.” The young man did not give them long to come to terms with this new reality. They had a job to do. “Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” They should have known, Jesus had already told them this would happen. Mark leaves us in suspense at the end of his gospel. The women are so utterly amazed and overwhelmed by what had happened that they respond in fear and bewilderment. These are natural reactions to an event so far beyond human comprehension.


How would you feel if an angel visited you and gave you a job to do?

In what ways can your life communicate the reality that Jesus is risen?

As you’ve read Mark’s gospel over the last sixteen weeks, how has the Holy Spirit transformed you?

What is your reaction to the declaration “Jesus is risen”? Contained in these words is the astonishing reality that Jesus died, that death could not hold him, and that he is now risen. Again and again the prophets spoke of this. Jesus predicted all of this many times in his three years of ministry. It is the risen Jesus who invites you to follow him and to know him. How will you respond to him?

An encounter with the risen Jesus changes everything, our lives are forever transformed. We may find ourselves responding with fear and bewilderment. However, as we continue to encounter him we discover the beauty of his grace and love and our response shifts to worship and obedience. We worship him with all that we are and follow him wherever he leads and whatever the cost. We give our lives to Jesus and in return he gives us life to the full—life eternal. As wholehearted followers of Jesus our lives declare, “Jesus is risen” and we play our part in helping people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly. Together we have the privilege of being involved in the heavenly transformation of people and culture in Bristol.

 **Application:** The challenge this week is worship Jesus with all that you are. To re-affirm your willingness to follow him whatever the cost.

Share: how will you give your life more wholeheartedly to Jesus? As a follower of Jesus, what are your hopes for the next few months?

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you see Jesus more clearly and know him more fully.

Act: set aside specific times to worship Jesus. On your own, with others, on Sunday, during the week. Read the Bible, sing worship songs, go for a walk ... We worship Jesus with our whole lives and there are many different ways and moments to connect with him.

## Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness

### Introducing the “4W’s” – a tool for your Small Community

The 4W’s is a simple structure of welcome, worship, word and witness which you can use as a Small Community.

#### The 4W’s:

- Provide a simple structure for your Small Community evening
- Shorten the amount of preparation time that you as Small Community leader need to put into each evening
- Enable more people to participate in leading a smaller part of the evening
- Enable people to express their creativity as they lead
- Help to develop leadership skills in your Small Community members
- Helps to embed our church values of encounter, family, generosity and transformation into your Small Community

#### How it works?

- Each Small Community evening is divided into 4 parts
- A different member of the Small Community leads each part
- Each part is simple to lead, and so requires minimal preparation
- The sections are not prescriptive so as different people lead them it is likely that no two evenings will look the same

#### What are The 4W’s?

1. **Welcome** – getting to know each other and getting everyone involved (15-20mins)
2. **Worship** – moving the focus away from us and on to God (15-20mins)
3. **Word** - practically applying the Bible passage / Sunday teaching to people’s lives (40 mins)
4. **Witness** - supporting one another to live out our Christian lives in the world (20 mins)

#### Welcome

- The idea behind this is to simply get everyone involved at the beginning of your time together.
- This can take a number of forms but is often a simple exercise or each person answering a fun question in turn.
- The question should be relevant to the stage of your group (eg – getting to know a new group, or going deeper for a group that has been together for a while).
- The question could connect with the theme or the passage that you will be looking at later.

## Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness

### Worship

- The aim of this section is to connect us with God, moving our focus off ourselves, where it has been for the welcome, and onto the Lord.
- Worship can take many forms including singing (live if you have musicians or singing along to a song on Spotify), listening to a piece of music, reading a psalm together, using objects or pictures, or sharing bread and wine together.
- You will find lots of creativity within your group – the key is to keep it simple and enable people to participate together.

### Word

- Leading a Bible Study can feel like an overwhelming task that needs expert biblical knowledge, a degree in theology and skills at group interaction.
- The Word section is not a Bible Study! You are not teaching the group, regurgitating the sermon or sharing your expertise (or lack of it!).
- You are simply helping people apply the message of scripture (or the theme of the Sunday teaching) to their lives.
- This can be done in three stages:
  - Stage 1 – What is God saying?
    - Review the message / passage from Sunday
    - Ask – What was the main point of the passage / teaching? What stands out to you?
  - Stage 2 – Connecting with your experience
    - Share – share stories that illustrate what you are learning from your own lives
  - Stage 3 – Ministry time
    - What is God saying to us right now? Who needs help? Pray into this.
- Our CC Small Community notes (on our website) are structured to allow you to do this easily with questions (in yellow box) and application (in the blue box).

### Witness

- Each of us has a frontline – a place where we connect with the world around us. This may be our workplace, the school gates, clubs that we belong to, family connections etc.
- It is often surprising how little we know about each other and these other areas of our lives.
- The last part of the 4W's aims to connect what we are learning with the life we are living.
- There are lots of different ways to do this, but one way may be to ask someone in your group to share responses to the following questions then to pray for them.
  - Presence: How or where do you sense God's presence?
  - Pressure: Where are you feeling pressured?
  - Purpose: What do you feel is your purpose?
- As with the other sections of the 4W's, you can be as creative as you like. The key point is to keep this section outward looking.