

Monday, March 27 – Mark 1:1-11

¹ The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

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

³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

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

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

Points of Interest:

- After several centuries of thought and prayer and debate, majority consensus amongst Christian leaders was that the best way to understand Jesus was to consider him as both fully human and fully divine. Mysterious as this statement is, I personally find it to ring both deeply true and deeply helpful. That said, no one in the first century put it quite that way. But Jesus’ first followers were struck by this person who experienced a God-soaked world like no one else and who helped others experience a God-soaked world as well. This was one of many ways that Jesus was good news. Jesus seemed to give others a whole new level of access and depth to their experience of God.
- Mark’s first verse, which is really a title, is also an invitation – today can still be the beginning, or a new beginning, of Jesus’ good news to each of us.
- Before Jesus hits the stage, Mark gives us a short opening act: the quirky and colorful and cross-cultural John the Baptizer. John’s job is to warm up the stage, or prepare the way for Jesus. He does this by telling people to repent or reorient – to turn away from godless thinking and living and to turn toward God and God’s cleansing and acceptance.
- The vehicle for this turning toward God is baptism. The word in Greek means something like “to immerse in water.” Its roots are in Jewish ritual washing – especially the *tevilah* – a full body immersion in water to mark conversion to Judaism or any number of occasions that symbolized cleansing, acceptance by God, and a return to relationship with God.

- John offers a baptism that will symbolically prepare people for connection with God. John says God’s next spokesperson, which turns out to be Jesus, will immerse people in the very presence and experience of God. John has immersion in water to offer, Jesus offers immersion in God. This is part of the New Covenant spirituality we’ve mentioned off and on in this season – actual, deep experience of God available through Jesus for all people, at all times.
- Unexpectedly, the person to offer this baptism first receives it himself. Jesus is lowered into the river by John, and as he’s standing up, he himself experiences what John says Jesus will do for others. Jesus is immersed in, surrounded by, and filled with God. (This is a confusing but deep thought. Let’s say it again. In Jesus’ own baptism, he experiences what he will henceforth offer to others – a deep experience of the presence of God.)
- What is this experience of God like? Jesus sees a vision – something he can only describe as kind of like a bird appearing and descending from the sky to him. And he hears God speak to him – “You are my child, the one I love. And I am so happy with you and proud of you.” Let’s not assume total literalism with the bird and the words. We don’t know how Jesus saw and heard in this moment. Spiritual experiences, as we’ve discussed, are famously ineffable – hard to put into words. Whether this was happening in Jesus’ external senses – really seeing and hearing as we usually mean those words – or whether these were clear thoughts appearing in Jesus’ mind, we don’t know. We also don’t know how much of this experience was unique to Jesus and how much it’s a pattern for everybody’s experience as a child of God.
- It seems safe to say, though, that Jesus’ experience isn’t entirely unique to him. His Jesus-centered baptism is the first of many. Immersion in God as God’s child will always include an experience of God’s love, God’s acceptance, and God’s pleasure.

Prayer for our six – Pray that any of your six who would like it will experience some degree of “baptism” in to God’s love, acceptance, and pleasure – to know for themselves that they are a beloved child of God.

Spiritual Exercise – This week our spiritual exercise will be listening to and meditating on the words of Jesus, letting God speak to us through them. In today’s passage, Jesus is baptized into his identity as child of God. He hears God tell him, “You are my child, the one I love. I accept you and am proud of you.” Sit quietly and imagine God speaking these words to you. What is your reaction to these words? How are they easy or hard to receive? How do they encourage or inspire you?

Tuesday, March 28 – Luke 4:1-13

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,’

¹¹ and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

¹² Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Points of Interest:

- In Luke’s, as well as in Mark’s account, this event immediately follows Jesus’ baptism we read yesterday. So when Luke says Jesus is “full of Holy Spirit”, he at least means full of that experience that showed him how much God loved him and was happy with him. The very same Spirit of God then leads Jesus into challenging circumstances. Perhaps we can suggest this teaches us that bad circumstances do not mean we are far from God. Perhaps we can also suggest that an experience of God’s love and pleasure is fortifying for us in hard times. Perhaps this is one of the most resiliency-building experiences we can have, to know that God loves and likes us and is with us.
- Verse two sounds, well, extreme. For nearly six weeks, Jesus is alone in the wilderness, tempted by an accusing spiritual being, and eats nothing the whole time. I’d be famished too – or nearly dead! I don’t know how to consider this story historically. On the one hand, it could be partly symbolic. On the other hand, we do have many accounts of fasts of this length (think hunger strikes) and desert pilgrims. Either way, even if the account is entirely factual, it is also symbolic. The interpretive key is the word “wilderness.” This moment in Jesus’ life is meant to remind us of a key episode in the story of Jesus’ ancestors – the Jewish journey in the wilderness immediately following their own kind of baptism as God’s children in their exodus out of slavery.

In this story, told in the Old Testament book of Numbers, the recently freed slaves and children of God wander in the desert for forty days, facing hunger at times and temptation to not trust a good God. To summarize, they have a hard time. Jesus now takes another shot at managing this kind of experience.

- Jesus and the devil have a battle over identity, power and the Bible. The devil tells Jesus to get food, authority, and attention without trusting God. Provision, power, and glory capture a lot of what all people, and especially all leaders, want. Jesus is convinced that God – not his own scheming and not a rival force – is the best source of these gifts.

A sub-note is that Jesus and the devil are having a battle over the Bible. Each time Jesus resists temptation, he does so by finding help in the Bible, in this case the book of Deuteronomy, the one that immediately follows the stories in Numbers. But in his third temptation, the devil also uses the words of the Bible, reminding us that the Bible can be used for a lot of things. By itself, it isn't authoritative or "correct." It's only helpful when the Spirit of God guides someone into life-giving truth through its medium.

- Luke doesn't give us this story from a gods-eye perspective. Why does the Spirit of God drive Jesus into the wilderness to have these experiences? We can't say for sure. Here's one stab, though. Just as Jesus has experienced God's love and pleasure in his baptism, he too needs to experience that God's love and pleasure aren't withdrawn during difficult times. And Jesus also gets to deepen his commitment to finding pleasure and provision and power and attention as God provides them, not through tricks or shortcuts or power plays.

This isn't a test in the sense of a gotcha experience designed to stress Jesus out or show his weaknesses. It's a test as learning opportunity. Perhaps this is a helpful way of interpreting our own trying circumstances – not as punishments or traps but as learning experiences to remember God's love and presence and promise that good things come with trusting God.

Prayer for your church – Pray that people in your church will learn the Bible not to feel more religious and certainly not as a tool to use against anybody else, but as one means for finding help in trusting God.

Spiritual Exercise – This week our spiritual exercise will be listening to and meditating on the words of Jesus, letting God speak to us through them. In today's passage, Jesus quotes the old line, "One does not live by bread alone." Sit quietly and imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What is your reaction to these words? How are they easy or hard to receive? How do they encourage or inspire you?

Wednesday, March 29 – Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰ A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. ⁴³ After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Points of Interest:

- Back from the desert, Jesus has embarked on a rural teaching tour. In homes and worship settings and gatherings in his hometown region, he’s talking about what God is like and helping people out along the way. He’s apparently developed a reputation for being helpful because this diseased individual isn’t begging generally but specifically begs Jesus to make him well again.
- We don’t know if this leper has the condition we call leprosy in modern times or some other communicable skin disease. What we do know is that in Jesus’ culture, there was a tradition going back centuries of staying away from these people. This was part public health and part cultural spirituality. People with these conditions were considered untouchables to avoid contagion. They were also treated as outcasts because people assumed – and had some old biblical warrant for doing so – that God had cursed or rejected or punished these people. If so, why associate with them?
- This clarifies the language of the leper’s request. The leper doesn’t ask for healing but cleansing. However he hopes this will happen, he wants to be accepted by God and restored to community, to not be an untouchable outcast anymore.
- In the leper’s mind, the question for Jesus isn’t one of ability but will. In the leper’s psychology, Jesus can make him acceptable by God and restored to community. He has the power – perhaps as a healer, perhaps with the community’s spiritual authority as a rabbi – to make this man acceptable to God and community. The question he has is whether or not Jesus would want to do such a thing. All of his experience to this point with religion and religious leaders would tell him, probably not.
- So Jesus does three different things, almost all at once. First, he touches the untouchable, saying you are not beyond human touch and connection and love. Then he says, I do want you to be restored; in my eyes and in God’s eyes, you are not a dirty outcast. You are now clean. And then, as a pretty sweet bonus, he also heals the man’s skin disease. Based on the man’s jubilant reaction, and not really listening to Jesus’ final words, I’ve got to think this is beyond his highest hopes for this encounter.
- Jesus touches this man, changes his self-concept, and heals him, so why the mysterious command to be quiet and to immediately go to the priests and go through his religion’s approved reentry rituals for someone who’s healthy after suffering from a skin disease. One possibility is that Jesus is more interested in a reputation as a teacher than a miracle-worker. At numerous other points in Mark, Jesus seems to want to

avoid enthusiastic spectacle. Beyond this, Jesus also seems more interested in this man's welfare than in his own popularity. The priestly cleansing commanded by Moses was a public health measure and spiritual reentry process. The testimony they would see was that this man was no longer a threat to others' health and could be fully restored to the social and religious life of his community. Jesus wants our experience of God to increase our connection to community, not to marginalize us.

- Well, out of misunderstanding or exuberance or some other reason, the former leper ignores what Jesus has to say. How this works out for the former leper we don't know, but it's sort of a pain for Jesus. Jesus isn't interested in gaining the power of celebrity, but wants to offer the power of touch to others. Now it's a little harder for him to do so.

Prayer for your Six – Most of us could use more touch – literal and metaphorical – from others and more, rather than less connection to God and community. Pray that each of your six would experience love, touch, and acceptance – from God and others – today.

Spiritual Exercise – This week our spiritual exercise will be listening to and meditating on the words of Jesus, letting God speak to us through them. In today's passage, Jesus is moved with pity. If that's a loaded phrase for you, you can say that he was moved with empathy. And out of empathy he says, "I choose. Be made clean." Sit quietly and imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What is your reaction to these words? How are they easy or hard to receive? How do they encourage or inspire you?

Thursday, March 30 – Mark 2:23-3:6

²³ One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” ²⁷ Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

3 ¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” ⁴ Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Points of Interest:

- The Sabbath was a big deal to Jesus’ contemporaries. It’s one of the ten commandments. Weekly rest and worship ideally helps us remember the point of life as it was meant to be and reminds communities that the point of life isn’t to be enslaved to our work. During Jesus’ age, it was also an important responsibility and an identity marker – a way of showing yourself and others that you were a faithful Jew.
- Jesus and his students are doing what looks like a very “day of rest” thing to do – they’re taking a lovely walk through a field of grain, grabbing snacks for later as they go. To the Pharisees – the most devoted interpreters of religious law in this generation – it looks very much like work, against the Sabbath regulations that had been codified over time.
- On the surface, the argument the Pharisees pick with Jesus sounds trivial. At a deeper level, though, it’s an argument about Bible, authority, and the very meaning of life. The Pharisees view Bible (or at least large parts of it) as Law, an abstract set of timeless regulations to govern good, God-acceptable behavior. In raising a competing story, Jesus shows that he views Bible as a compendium of laws and stories to help you discern God’s ways.

The Pharisees understand the Bible and the religious traditions that surround it as the ultimate source of authority for governing communities and individual choices. In his example of David’s own seemingly law-breaking behavior, Jesus says that David had authority from God to do differently, and that Jesus, by implication, has David’s authority and even more to reinterpret law. Authority is personalized, in Jesus.

And the Pharisees understand the meaning of life first as obedience – doing the things God has taught us to do, finding fulfillment and happiness and approval from God in serving the master – in this case the master of religious law – that has been given to us. Jesus says that that God has given us practices like Sabbath for our benefit. The meaning of life is discovering God’s path for human flourishing and enjoying it.

- Later that day, another encounter takes this dispute and just widens the gulf. In the synagogue, a guy with enough problems of his own – life with one non-functioning hand can't be easy – is used by the same religious authorities to test Jesus. They watch as Jesus demonstrates that the point of religious spaces like synagogue and God-directed practices like Sabbath is human flourishing. All genuine spiritual experience is life-giving, not life-harming or life-sucking.

This recasting of the point of religion and the point of life is so threatening to the religious establishment that they conspire with their natural enemies (the more secular sellouts to Rome, the Herodians) to kill Jesus. Ironically, they are in fact using the Sabbath to kill.

- It seems telling, and maybe timeless, that there is a strong human impulse to use religion to govern and control life. The spirituality of Jesus, though, is to produce life, not to control it.

Prayer for your city – Our city is famous for its ambition and pace of life. One of our church's founding pastors called this a local "spirit of grim drivenness." Pray that our city would discover God's good gift of rest, that there is more to life than work and achievement.

Spiritual Exercise – This week our spiritual exercise will be listening to and meditating on the words of Jesus, letting God speak to us through them. In today's passage, Jesus says, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." To paraphrase and modernize a bit, perhaps Jesus is saying to us, "I am in charge of everything. But my authority and ways are made for you and your flourishing." Sit quietly and imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What is your reaction to these words? How are they easy or hard to receive? How do they encourage or inspire you?

Friday, March 31 – Matthew 11:28-12:8

²⁸ “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

12 ¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.” ³ He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

Points of Interest:

- Matthew tells the same story Mark does of Sabbath grain-picking followed by a Sabbath healing that makes Jesus’ religious contemporaries defensive and angry. We won’t repeat yesterday’s comments on the narrative. You can go back one day if you missed them.

Before the story, though, Matthew adds a few other words Jesus said, and he gives us another pretty juicy quote from Jesus in the middle of the conflict. We’ll focus on those additional words from Jesus today.
- When Jesus says, “Come to me,” he’s expressing a lot of empathy in a few words. Jesus understands that life is hard – that our default posture is to be weary and feel freighted with burden. He also understands that most religious expression has added to, rather than lightened, these stresses and burdens.

Jesus says he has a different way. Jesus is gentle. One friend of mine, critiquing many religious settings that didn’t serve her well, said she heard so many harsh words about so many things. Gentleness is a mark of true Jesus spirituality. So is humility. Jesus isn’t insecure, and he’s not trying to force his way onto anyone. He offers an invitation.
- Jesus’ invitation is to presence and partnership. A yoke ties two working animals together under the leadership of a person walking those animals through a field. It’s a familiar image in Jesus’ agrarian context. Jesus’ yoke – both in any ways he’s united to us as fellow humans and any ways he’s leading us – fits well and feels right. Jesus’ work is light to carry, so to speak, and we get rest when we walk alongside Jesus and when we are led by him.
- In this context, the disciples walking through the fields with Jesus, picking grain on their day off, is a great picture of Jesus’ promise. It’s sane, it’s stress-free, it’s satisfying. It’s everything the Pharisees’ religious world isn’t.
- Jesus gets at his distinctive lifestyle and spiritual approach in another phrase – this not original to him but a quotation from the Old Testament prophet of Hosea. Jesus tells his stressed-out human accusers that they

clearly don't understand God's words, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." I think Jesus is talking about the way he'd love for us to be able to connect with God as well as with our fellow humans.

Jesus says that God doesn't need us to do things for God to please or appease God. Remember that our baptism – our immersion into God – begins with God's basic posture of love and pleasure toward us. Instead, God would love for us to connect with an experience of God's fundamental mercy toward us, that God is eager to meet us in unexpected, unmerited kindness.

And so a God-soaked world finds mercy in how we see and relate to others too. Criticism, judgment, and burden-adding all flow from the fear-based spirit of sacrifice that looks to appease God. Love, friendship, and understanding flow from the spirit of mercy that looks to receive from God.

Prayer for your six – If any of your six are burdened and stressed out, pray that God will lighten their load today. If any have been repelled by sacrifice-sounding faith, pray that they will hear an expression of mercy-based faith instead.

Spiritual Exercise – This week our spiritual exercise will be listening to and meditating on the words of Jesus, letting God speak to us through them. In today's passage, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Sit quietly and imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What is your reaction to these words? How are they easy or hard to receive? How do they encourage or inspire you?

Saturday, April 1 – Mark 10:35-52

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Points of Interest:

- Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where he’ll be betrayed by one of his students, arrested, and killed. According to Mark, he’s just said this to his students. Meanwhile, though, two of them are busy asking him ridiculous questions. Perhaps this is what Jesus gets for including two brothers in his mobile classroom, sibling rivalry being a pretty old and potent force.
- Jesus also has told his friends that after he’s killed, God will restore his life and give him greater power. Seizing on this hope, James and John want to come along for the ride – at least the power and glory side of things. In asking for seats at his right hand and left hand, they’re looking for chief cabinet posts – vice-president, secretary of state-level appointments.
- Jesus says the way to that kind of leadership is immersion in suffering. Drinking the cup here is an allusion to drinking a bitter cup of suffering, and the immersion of baptism a metaphor this time not for being soaked in God’s love but being drenched in the suffering of death. In their zeal for power, James and John are like, “Whatever. Fine.” But they clearly don’t get it.

- Jesus lightly shames his students, telling them they're thinking just like the rest of the world that they look down upon. Jesus says it's not that way with me, so it's not that way with you if you follow me. Greatness comes through service, not power.
- Jesus lives by this rule himself. The Son of Man is a nickname Jesus has applied to himself as a title. It means "everyman" like it sounds, but it's also a reference to an Old Testament title for God's chosen human authority on earth. Jesus says that his authority is there to serve others, to – like a ransom – be a vehicle for the freedom and redemption of other people.
- In the next town, Jesus' students get to see this live. A blind, roadside beggar is making a ruckus, looking for help. The instinct of some is to quiet him, to stop him from disturbing an important person like Jesus. They want to shut him up, to get him away. Jesus, though, says, "Call him here." Jesus wants to serve him.
- As with any good servant, Jesus asks Bartimaeus (as he did the two brothers), "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus recognizes the power of naming our desires and asks Bartimaeus to do this, to express just what type of mercy he's looking for. This is a model for what we are doing in the 40 Days of Faith – telling Jesus what mercy from God would look like for us, naming what we would like God to do for us. Some of us will get what we ask for, as Bartimaeus did. Some won't, as James and John appear not to, at least for now. Jesus asks all of us, though, what we want.
- When Bartimaeus can suddenly see again, Jesus says that his faith – his trust in God expressed through his ask – has made him well. Naming the desire, making the ask of Jesus, did the work. May it be true for us as well!

Prayer for your six – What do your six most want? Pray for each of them, that they will know what they most desire and that their desire will be heard and responded to by Jesus as well.

Spiritual Exercise – This week our spiritual exercise will be listening to and meditating on the words of Jesus, letting God speak to us through them. In today's passage, Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Sit quietly and imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What is your reaction to these words? How are they easy or hard to receive? How do they encourage or inspire you?

Sunday, April 2 – *Selah* (Review)

Taking our cue from the Psalms' interlude moments of rest and meditation, we are practicing a weekly pause in our Bible guide. Each Sunday, we won't introduce a new passage but will pause for reflection and review.

One way you can use this pause is for catch up. If you missed a day or more of the guide this week, you can look at one other day's passage and enjoy it out of sequence.

A second way you can use this pause is to review one of the passages you especially enjoyed or that especially troubled you. Read it and the points of interest a second time, asking God to teach you something new and illumine something God would like you to notice. Try the spiritual exercise again and see where it takes you.

A final way you can use this pause is to touch base on the 40 Days of Faith experiment as a whole. Consider these prompts to do so.

1. How has it gone praying every day for God to do something for you? Has anything changed in your prayer, or in answer to your prayer?

2. What has it been like to pray for your six? Consider re-writing the six names below, or re-committing to prayer for six local people who seem to not be experiencing much from God. Have you seen anything happen – either in you or in their lives – in response to your prayers? Is there anything you would like to say to any of them?

3. How have you experienced God's goodness so far? Did any of Jesus' words particularly speak to you this week? Have you learned anything about God, or seen any ways in which you live in a God-soaked world? Have you noticed anything that helps you engage with God's presence with you?

Take a few minutes of silence with these questions, and see where they take you today. Close your time by thanking God for anything you notice, learn, or experience.