

Meet Jesus...Again: 5. Who Do You Say That I Am?

Mark 8:27-36

April 7, 2019

Pastor Tami Luckhardt

The Gospel of Mark is a drama written in three Parts. Part 1 starts at the beginning and goes through the middle of chapter 8. It takes place in Galilee. Mark begins by making a statement about who Jesus is. *The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, God's Son.* (Mark 1:1) This is the only time that Mark is going to tell you who he thinks Jesus is. Throughout the rest of the book, he is going to influence you by putting Jesus' actions and words in front of you and sharing with you how other people react to him. Part 3 (Chapter 11-to the end) takes place in Jerusalem and focuses on how Jesus became the Messianic King. We'll talk more about that in the weeks ahead as we continue our Lenten journey with Jesus to the Cross and ultimately to Easter morning!

But in Part 2, where we find today's scripture, Jesus is on the road with his disciples from Bethsaida to the city of Caesarea Philippi. This 2nd Part is sometimes called a "hinge text" or the turning point for Mark's Gospel, in that everything that comes before it seems to lead up to this point, and all that follows after it seems to go away and leads us directly to the cross. Before this story- there were great crowds. After this story, Jesus speaks mainly to his disciples. In fact, starting with this text we enter a section that could be subtitled, Discipleship Training 101. So why did Jesus feel it necessary to take his disciples to Caesarea Philippi? It's quite a walk, 25 miles and at least a 2 day journey. Even in a car today, with all the winding roads, the trip takes about 2 hours. Bethsaida, where this journey begins, is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and Caesarea Philippi is way up north, on the slopes of Mt. Hermon, near the source of the Jordan River. If you were to climb up Mt. Hermon, on a clear day, you can see straight down the Jordan Valley to where the road and the story turn towards Jerusalem. Caesarea Philippi was a pagan Roman city that had a temple dedicated to the half-man/half-goat god named Pan, the nature god. A huge spring gushed from a cave in the side of a massive mountain, and the temple was built over this gushing spring that was known as the Gates of Hades. Human sacrifice was practiced there. It was a wicked city. Caesar Philippi was named after the Roman Emperor Caesar (Caesarea) as well as the regional King, King Herod's son, Philip (Philippi) and it was home to King Philip's palace. So picture this... the disciples are seated looking at this area that is dedicated to worshipping the Greek gods and is home to the King's palace and the seat of the government. It is here that Jesus is going to ask them a very dangerous question, "Who do you say that I am?" Up until now, Jesus has not revealed to the disciples who he is. He just said, "Come and follow me and I will make you fisher of people" and this spoke to their hearts and they dropped everything and followed Him.

Now they are beginning to understand that He might be more than a rabbi, a teacher, or prophet. They are starting to believe that He is the long awaited Messiah. But, based on their understanding of the Old Testament scriptures, this Jesus is not what the Jews were expecting. They were waiting for a very different kind of king. They were expecting the Messiah to be a military leader who would create a great Israel, throw off other military powers, and bring in a new age of peace. This is indeed a very dangerous question to be asking in the King's city because if anyone hears them say that they think Jesus is the Messiah, it could start a rebellion and their lives would be in danger. So, Jesus starts off by asking the guys an easy question. "Who do the people say I am?" Some of the disciples spoke up and claimed that people were saying that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. They probably had a good laugh at those answers.

Then Jesus goes right in and asks, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?” I think this is when the laughter got caught in their throats and there was a period of awkward silence. Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever been somewhere, in a classroom or among friends or at a party, where someone asks a question and you are pretty sure you know the answer but you’re not 100% sure and you don’t want to look stupid, so you remain silent? Maybe you’ve been in a meeting at work and your boss asks the team a question and you know the answer but you don’t want to be the first to speak up, just in case you’re wrong. That’s what I picture is happening here. I can imagine them standing around nervously shuffling their sandals in the dirt, starting to squirm a bit. I think they know the answer but they don’t want to be the first person to say it out loud, in case they are wrong, or in case someone nearby overhears them. They are afraid. Remember, up until this point, Jesus had not identified himself as the Messiah. The disciples had watched him heal the sick, cast out demons, feed the multitudes, calm the wind and the waves and even walk on water. But he had never come right out and said he was the Messiah. And they had never come right out and asked, either. But Jesus brought them here, to this place, to ask them this question. “Who do you say that I am?” And who was the only one brave enough, bold enough to answer? Peter, impetuous, passionate Peter of course! He says, “You are the Christ!” Peter, who usually said the wrong thing, finally gets it right for once. He answered, “You are the Christ—you are the Messiah—you are Lord.” It’s important for us to not underestimate what a *politically dangerous and theologically risky claim it is for Jesus to be making, that he is the True King of Israel, their final heir to the throne of David, the one before whom King Herod and all other would-be Jewish princelings are just shabby little imposters.* (Mark for Everyone, Tom Wright. pg 107)

So who do YOU say that Jesus is? You may have grown up hearing what others say about Jesus. You may have grew up hearing that “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells you so.” But when it comes down to it, it’s not what others say about Jesus. It’s what YOU say about Jesus. To his disciples, for generations past and generations to come, right now, Jesus is asking you, “Who do YOU say I am.” It’s not enough for you to say, “Well, my parents say you’re the Son of God.” Or “My pastor says that you are the only way to heaven.” You’ve got to answer that question for yourself.

If you ask someone what it means to be a follower of Jesus, they might say, I have accepted Jesus in my heart or I have a personal relationship with Jesus. These are good responses and important part of our faith but Jesus didn’t go around Galilee saying, “Come and have a relationship with me.” Or “Accept me into your heart.” He said, “Follow me.” A relationship is important but it starts by us asking Him to be our Christ, our King, the highest authority in our lives, to yield our entire lives to him. To say, *You are the Christ.* (Mark 8:29) But we can’t stop there. It is not enough for us to just say that He is the Christ. We have to do something about it. Action is required! And it starts by getting rid of our egos and putting others first. *All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.* (Mark 8:34)

Now, just to compare, there’s another story from this middle section of Mark about the young, rich, ruler who was invited to follow Jesus and chose not to. In her book, *The Preaching Life*, Barbara Brown Taylor shares these unique insights to this story.

This was a young man who had everything that life could offer. You can tell this because of the question he asked Jesus. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This was a rich man’s question, posed by someone who had their bills paid, whose income was secure and was not preoccupied with lesser questions like, “How can I feed my family?” or “Where can I find a job?” In the first century, bestowing wealth on people was seen as one of the ways that God freed people up to serve the Lord. So this man approaches Jesus with no shame about his possessions. He’s looking for an important assignment. Maybe he hopes that Jesus will ask him to buy shoes for every man, woman and child in Palestine. But Jesus is not impressed with

his wealth. He tells the man that you lack one thing. Finally, someone who will help him find what's missing in his life. Only Jesus' answer is not one of addition but of subtraction. "Go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then, come, follow me." This is a rich prescription for a rich man, designed to melt the lump in his throat and the knot in his stomach by dissolving the burden on his back, the hump that keeps banging into the doorway to God. It's an invitation to become smaller and more agile... it's daring him to become a new creature, defined in a new way, to trade in all the words that describe him up until now, wealthy, committed, cultured, responsible, educated, powerful, obedient... to trade them all in for one radically different word which is free. See, you have to be free to receive God's gift to you. You cannot be tied up or tied down. You cannot make room for something new if your rooms are all full. You cannot follow if you are not free to go. And that is why the rich, young, ruler went away sorrowful, lugging behind him all of his great possessions like a ball and chain. He is the only person in the entire Gospel of Mark who walks away from an invitation to follow Christ. He declines to be healed. He could not believe that the opposite of rich might not be poor but free.

Then it says that Jesus' disciples were amazed at his words. I don't know why they were so amazed. Two of them had left their fishing nets behind, two more of them their fishing boat (not to mention their father). Another one left a lucrative career as a tax collector. All of them had walked away from something. Not because it was a prerequisite for becoming a disciple. It was more like a consequence. He called. They followed and stuff got left behind. Not because it was bad, but because it was in the way. Not because they had to but because they wanted to. He called, and nothing else seemed that important anymore. Jesus was so much more real to them than anything else in their lives. He set them free, that is all.

But you're probably thinking but there's the mortgage and the rent. The children. College tuition. Aging parents. Doctor bills. Retirement. I know. It's the same for me. There are days when threading a camel through the eye of a needle seems easier than following Jesus. When Jesus said deny yourself and follow me, I don't think he was saying you have to live a miserable life, never go to Disneyland for a spring break vacation or have a winter vacation spot in Arizona. Jesus lived on the lakeshore and spent a lot of time in a boat. Jesus knew how to have a good time. But what he is saying is that the rhythm of our lives is not "me first". It is "God first" and then others.

This is an important part of our life together here at Messiah Church is serving other people. We exist to make life better for others. Serving together is part of the promise that we make in our faith groups, to serve together. We exist to bless other people. Yes, we come here to worship and to be inspired but then to go out into the world and get to work sharing the love of Jesus. I want to tell you the story of Fletcher. Fletcher is a member of our youth group and the youngest of 3 kids in his family. He's a 10th grader at St. Michael-Albertville High School where he plays football and sings in the choir. In 2017, Fletcher's older sister, Abby, and older brother, Ethan, "encouraged" Fletcher to go with them to STORM Camp that summer. They had been for many years and decided that it was time for Fletcher to join them. Fletcher admits that he was less than "excited" about the idea. Ok, he really didn't want to go. But he has such great respect for Abby and Ethan that he said okay. Once they arrived onsite, the thing that really bothered Fletcher was that he was going to have to be on a work team for the week with total strangers, people from other churches, people he'd never even met before. He was pretty sure that this week was going to be miserable. But after just one day of working with his new team, he had a complete change of heart. When I asked what happened, he said because everyone was there for the same reason, to serve God and love the neighbors. The "take up your cross and follow me" wasn't scary anymore. In fact, it was such a positive experience for Fletcher, he

returned last summer and will be going again this summer. When I asked him why he goes back, he said it is because of the relationships he's formed with the people he serves with as well as with the people he has served. He said the narrative in his head and his heart changed from "I have to do this" to "I get to do this." He thought he was going to STORM Camp to bless other people but what he didn't know was that it was going to be his life that would be blessed. So let me show you a picture of Fletcher. Now I ask you, does this look like someone who is miserable? When I look at this picture, I see joy and I think this is what it looks like when we follow Jesus. Henri Nouwen, the beloved author and theologian said, "You don't think your way into a new kind of living. You live your way into a new kind of thinking." And I think that's what Fletcher did.

So let me close with this question. Is your faith a faith of convenience or do you step out of your comfort zone, take risks, and deny yourself, put others first and follow Jesus? Who do you say that Jesus is?

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of April 7, 2019

Weekly Prayer: Lord, help us to know, love, and serve you. Guide us as we listen for your direction. Use us to reach the people beyond our walls. Make us a blessing to those in need. And in everything, we want to honor you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The glory of serving

Monday, April 8

Scripture: Mark 10:32-45

Jesus and his disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, with Jesus in the lead. The disciples were amazed while the others following behind were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he told them what was about to happen to him. "Look!" he said. "We're going up to Jerusalem. The Human One will be handed over to the chief priests and the legal experts. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles. They will ridicule him, spit on him, torture him, and kill him. After three days, he will rise up."

James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory." Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared." Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Observation: "Jesus and his disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem." Jesus had been speaking plainly about why he was going to Jerusalem for some time. But James, John, and all of them still thought he must be going there to declare himself king, raise an army, drive out the Romans and set up God's eternal kingdom on earth. The brothers thought they'd make

their bid for power before the other disciples. "You don't know what you're asking!" Jesus said. In Heaven's kingdom, there is no status seeking. In my kingdom, we serve.

Application: We know (as James and John did) what earthly importance, power and privilege look like. Deep down, most of us would like to have at least some of those things. Jesus' teaching about his kingdom was clear: "that's not the way it will be with you." Jesus said he didn't come to be served, but to serve, even to the extent of giving his life. In what specific ways does choosing to follow Jesus change your approach to life?

Faith Group Discussion: Jesus said: "The ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around." That kind of power can be a "high." But Jesus went on, "Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant." Where do you have power (parent, boss, teacher, public office, etc.)? Do you most often use your power to serve others, or are you tempted to use it on your own behalf? How can you become more of a "servant leader"?

Prayer: Loving Lord, I'm human. Sometimes I have ambitious dreams and wishes. Keep reshaping me, making those ambitions into ambitions to serve you and others. Amen.

The prince of peace infuriated by an unholy rip-off

Tuesday, April 9

Scripture: Mark 11:1-25

When Jesus and his followers approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. Jesus gave two disciples a task, saying to them, "Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'Its master needs it, and he will send it back right away.'" They went and found a colt tied to a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. Some people standing around said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them just what Jesus said, and they left them alone. They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes upon it, and he sat on it. Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. Those in front of him and those following were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. After he looked around at everything, because it was already late in the evening, he returned to Bethany with the Twelve.

The next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. From far away, he noticed a fig tree in leaf, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing except leaves, since it wasn't the season for figs. So he said to it, "No one will ever again eat your fruit!" His disciples heard this. They came into Jerusalem. After entering the temple, he threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He taught them, "Hasn't it been written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you've turned it into a hideout for crooks." The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching. When it was evening, Jesus and his disciples went outside the city.

Early in the morning, as Jesus and his disciples were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered from the root up. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look how the fig tree you cursed has dried up." Jesus responded to them, "Have faith in God! I assure you that

whoever says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea'—and doesn't waver but believes that what is said will really happen—it will happen. Therefore I say to you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive it, and it will be so for you. And whenever you stand up to pray, if you have something against anyone, forgive so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your wrongdoings."

Observation: The deliberate journey south from Galilee that began in Mark 9:30 reached Jerusalem. Jesus purposely entered in a way that echoed history (1 Kings 1:32-39) and prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-10), a clear claim to peaceful kingship. Lending Jesus a donkey's colt may not sound like a big deal. But in his day, that colt was as important to all but wealthiest families as a car is to us. Sometimes several families pooled resources to buy one animal they could all share.

Application: The prophet Zechariah wrote that a righteous king would ride on a donkey's colt, and bring Jerusalem salvation and peace. Mark 11:2 indicated that Jesus pre-arranged his ride into Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy. Who found Jesus' entrance into the holy city offensive (verse 18)? Would you more likely have been with "the establishment" who didn't want the orderly status quo disrupted, or with the upstart rabbi from Galilee?

Faith Group Discussion: Verses 23-24 showed how Jesus used "hyperbole" (overstatement to make a point) in his teaching. Jesus used that image often—Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6 quoted versions of it in different contexts. Throwing mountains into the sea would not actually advance God's kingdom. Changing our inner anger and hurt into forgiveness (verse 25) can be a mountainous challenge. In what ways have you sensed God's grace changing you into a more gracious person?

Prayer: Jesus, in this passage I see your holy anger against a trade that exploited pilgrims at Passover time. And I see your assurance that your power can move the "mountain" of my unholy anger against people who offend me. Amen.

The fearful tenants abusing God's vineyard

Wednesday, April 10

Scripture: Mark 11:27-12:12

Jesus and his disciples entered Jerusalem again. As Jesus was walking around the temple, the chief priests, legal experts, and elders came to him. They asked, "What kind of authority do you have for doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I have a question for you. Give me an answer, then I'll tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things. Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin? Answer me." They argued among themselves, "If we say, 'It's of heavenly origin,' he'll say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But we can't say, 'It's of earthly origin.'" They said this because they were afraid of the crowd, because they all thought John was a prophet. They answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things."

Jesus spoke to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower. Then he rented it to tenant farmers and took a trip. When it was time, he sent a servant to collect from the tenants his share of the fruit of the vineyard. But they grabbed the servant, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Again the landowner sent another servant to them, but they struck him on the head and treated him disgracefully. He sent another one; that one they killed. The landlord sent many other servants, but the tenants

beat some and killed others. Now the landowner had one son whom he loved dearly. He sent him last, thinking, They will respect my son. But those tenant farmers said to each other, 'This is the heir. Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' They grabbed him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. "So what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this scripture, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it's amazing in our eyes?" They wanted to arrest Jesus because they knew that he had told the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away.

Observation: Jesus' vineyard story drew on a beloved Scripture (Isaiah 5:1-7), which called Israel God's vineyard. Jesus told it in sadness, answering people who assumed that their positions and titles gave them the authority to rebuke and refuse him. Jesus loved the people of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-42), but their heedless leaders did not love him. As they plotted his death, Jesus told a story that pointedly exposed the murder in their hearts.

Application: Mark 11:18, 28 and 12:12 graphically showed the atmosphere charged with hatred that surrounded Jesus during his last week. We're tempted to look down on the Jerusalem leaders but, like them, we're subject to blind spots. Is there anything God's spirit is nudging you to face honestly in your life? Do you have the courage to face it, to grant Jesus the authority to guide you in tending the vineyard of your life?

Faith Group Discussion: The temple priests and legal experts held all the visible, human power at the Temple. Why didn't they just arrest Jesus on the spot? "They were afraid of the crowd." Jesus didn't blindly follow "the crowd" (John 2:23-25), but in this case they saw more clearly than the religious leaders. What blocked the leaders' vision? How can you keep your spiritual eyes and ears clear to recognize God's work in either expected or unexpected places?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you've entrusted the gift of life to me, and you ask me to lead that life in a way that bears fruit for your kingdom. Make me a faithful tenant farmer, one who respects and values your lordship. Amen.

Malicious hypotheticals and great commandments

Thursday, April 11

Scripture: Mark 12:13-34

They sent some of the Pharisees and supporters of Herod to trap him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you're genuine and you don't worry about what people think. You don't show favoritism but teach God's way as it really is. Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay taxes or not?" Since Jesus recognized their deceit, he said to them, "Why are you testing me? Bring me a coin. Show it to me." And they brought one. He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" "Caesar's," they replied. Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." His reply left them overcome with wonder.

Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a widow but no children, the brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman; when he died, he left no children. The second married her and died without leaving any children. The third did the same. None of the seven left any children. Finally, the woman died. At the resurrection, when they all rise up, whose wife will she be? All seven were married to her." Jesus said to them, "Isn't this the reason you are wrong, because you don't

know either the scriptures or God's power? When people rise from the dead, they won't marry nor will they be given in marriage. Instead, they will be like God's angels. As for the resurrection from the dead, haven't you read in the scroll from Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God said to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He isn't the God of the dead but of the living. You are seriously mistaken."

One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these." The legal expert said to him, "Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides him. And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, "You aren't far from God's kingdom." After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Observation: Jesus' enemies tried hard to ask him "no win" questions, for which either answer would get him in trouble. Taxes were as much or more a hot button then as now. But Jesus said it wasn't as simple as a "yes" or "no" answer. There was a valid realm for "Caesar" (human authority), and a citizen's duty to pay taxes fit into that. Yet God's kingdom was larger and higher than human authority, and Jesus clearly indicated that God's kingdom held his (and our) ultimate loyalty.

Application: The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, and they tried their best to make the idea sound ridiculous. Jesus replied by challenging their earthbound assumptions. What made absolute conviction that death was not the end, that the worst thing is never the last thing, crucial to Jesus in that week before the cross? Do you share his confidence? If so, in what ways does that assurance shape your day-to-day life for the better?

Faith Group Discussion: In Barclay's commentary on Mark, he noted that there were two schools of thought among rabbis. Some believed "there were lighter and weightier matters of the law...great principles which were all important to grasp." Others "held that every smallest principle was equally binding." When asked, Jesus was clear about that. He saw some principles as far more vital than others, central to understanding God's will. What are the implications of Jesus' answer for how you read your Bible, and how you let it guide your life?

Prayer: O God, you spoke to the human family many times and in many ways. But supremely you spoke to us through a Son. Help me to root all my service to you in the great commandments Jesus identified. Amen.

Praising a poor widow, not greedy legal experts

Friday, April 12

Scripture: Mark 12:35-44

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, "Why do the legal experts say that the Christ is David's son? David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right side until I turn your enemies into your footstool.' David himself calls him 'Lord,' so how can he be David's son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight. As he was teaching, he said, "Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They want to be

greeted with honor in the markets. They long for places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly."

Jesus sat across from the collection box for the temple treasury and observed how the crowd gave their money. Many rich people were throwing in lots of money. One poor widow came forward and put in two small copper coins worth a penny. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who's been putting money in the treasury. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on."

Observation: Jesus turned the elaborate, often technical way the rabbis and legal experts used the Bible to his own ends. The Christ (a Greek word) was the title for the promised Messiah (a Hebrew word). Jesus used Psalm 110 to teach that the Messiah was not just David's descendant, but also his eternal Lord. In the Temple Jesus noticed and prized a widow's devout generosity, such a welcome contrast to the hostile authorities who kept pursuing him.

Application: We use the phrase "all in" about a person fully committed to a belief or course of action. How was the widow Jesus saw in the Temple "all in" for God's kingdom? (As with the young ruler in Mark 10:17-27, Jesus did not mean it was wrong to be able to pay bills or buy food. He was honoring a heart that worships and serves God before material goods.) In what ways are you "all in" with Jesus? In what ways, if any, are you holding back?

Faith Group Discussion: In N. T. Wright's commentary of Mark, he said of the legal experts: "They give themselves airs, and have a great reputation for piety, but are only interested in lining their pockets. The world has not changed, it seems. Not only lawyers, but also politicians and other leaders in the civic world, are again and again discovered to be putting on a show to gain favour while underneath they are after money." What helps you to monitor your motives, to avoid putting on a show that doesn't match your inner reality?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to be honest with myself so that I can be honest with other people and with you. I desire to be "all in" for you as the eternal Lord of my life. Amen.

A shocking glimpse of what fighting Rome would bring

Saturday, April 13

Scripture: Mark 13:1-20

As Jesus left the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, look! What awesome stones and buildings!" Jesus responded, "Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished." Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? What sign will show that all these things are about to come to an end?" Jesus said, "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many people will come in my name, saying, 'I'm the one!' They will deceive many people. When you hear of wars and reports of wars, don't be alarmed. These things must happen, but this isn't the end yet. Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other, and there will be earthquakes and famines in all sorts of places. These things are just the beginning of the sufferings associated with the end. "Watch out for yourselves. People will hand you over to the councils. You will be beaten in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me so that you can testify before them. First, the good news must be proclaimed to all the nations. When they haul you in and hand you over, don't worry ahead of time about what to answer or say. Instead, say whatever is given to

you at that moment, for you aren't doing the speaking but the Holy Spirit is. Brothers and sisters will hand each other over to death. A father will turn in his children. Children will rise up against their parents and have them executed. Everyone will hate you because of my name. But whoever stands firm until the end will be saved. "When you see the disgusting and destructive thing standing where it shouldn't be (the reader should understand this), then those in Judea must escape to the mountains. Those on the roof shouldn't come down or enter their houses to grab anything. Those in the field shouldn't come back to grab their clothes. How terrible it will be at that time for women who are pregnant and for women who are nursing their children. Pray that it doesn't happen in winter. In those days there will be great suffering such as the world has never before seen and will never again see. If the Lord hadn't shortened that time, no one would be rescued. But for the sake of the chosen ones, the ones whom God chose, he has cut short the time.

Observation: Herod the Great built the Temple complex in a futile attempt to win the Jewish people's acceptance. It was the largest, most striking building for miles in any direction. Yet Jesus said none of it would last. That seemed impossible to the disciples. The only set of events they could imagine that would lead to the ruin of the great Temple would be the convulsive events when God made the earth new and purged all that was evil. With clearer insight, Jesus knew that if Israel's leaders insisted on seeking political, military deliverance, they'd face a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Roman armies.

Application: As Mark was writing this Gospel, Roman soldiers smashed Jerusalem and the Temple. It was awful, but not the end of the world. People often find fearful signs in verses 5-8 (false messiahs, famines, wars, earthquakes). Some voices say, "The world is about to end." Jesus said, "Don't be alarmed" (verse 7) by such things. They are part of life in a broken world. How can Jesus' words help you avoid needless fear? The disciples believed the Temple would be permanent. What permanent realities in your world have changed or "shaken" just since the year 2000? How can trusting God always give you peace about whatever the future holds?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you taught your disciples what the apostle Paul learned: "The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Help me to build my life on the solid foundation of your eternal kingdom. Amen.