*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 1 - 6

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, February 1 Mark 6:1-6a**

*“They refused to believe in him”*

In quick succession, Jesus has stilled a storm at sea, cast demons out of a mad man, healed a woman of an incurable disease, and raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. As a result, his fame has spread like a wildfire and wherever he goes, the common people hear him gladly. At the height of his popularity he decides to go to his home town of Nazareth where, on the Sabbath, he begins to teach in the synagogue.

Astonishment ripples through the congregation. They cannot deny the godliness of his presence, the wisdom of his words, or the power of his miracles. Still, they cannot accept the change from when they knew him as one of them. Familiarity has bred a contempt which spouts forth in disbelief. While they ask the right questions about him, they do so with the wrong attitude. Prejudice so overrules all the evidence before them that they dismiss any possible truth about him in favor of their opinions. That a prophet is not honored in his own hometown provides an explanation for their unbelief, but not an excuse.

*While some dismiss you, Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and Savior. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 2 Mark 6:6b-13**

*“Sending out the disciples”*

Jesus launched his public ministry by calling people to repentance (1:14-15); now he expands that mission by sending the Twelve to their unbelieving countrymen to preach repentance, to cast out demons, and to anoint the sick. The message of repentance is that God reigns. The messengers do not invite Israel to accept God’s reign if it suits them; they confront people with a yes or no decision, so that there can be no middle ground. If they reject the message, they will deprive themselves of the opportunity to receive healing and deliverance.

Mark tells us that the disciples obey Jesus’ commission. But Mark tells us nothing more about the results of their mission, whether it is successful or not. Why? The best answer is that Mark sees it as preparatory for the later missions of the disciples after Jesus’ death and resurrection. It introduces them to the requirement of total self-sacrifice in commitment to their mission. It also acquaints them with the reality of rejection – sowing the word means they can expect to find that some ground will be unproductive.

*My mission, Lord, is to share the Good News of what you have done. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 3 Mark 6:14-20**

*“The king soon heard about Jesus”*

Mark interrupts his report of the disciples’ mission with the ominous news that Jesus’ growing reputation has been causing ripples of concern in the highest circles. The question, “Who is this?” is rousing the interest of the political gentry as Herod’s court is abuzz with the news of him. We almost get the impression that a worried Herod is hearing theories concerning this new menacing prophet bandied about in emergency cabinet meetings. Wondering whether Jesus is John the Baptist, whom he had killed, raised from the dead shows that he believes that Jesus’ power must derive from some divine source.

If prophets like the prophets of old are abroad, or if one recently executed has been raised, then the new age of God’s dealing with humanity has been ushered in; but Herod makes no move to go to find out more about him. One of the things that must have troubled someone like *King* Herod is that Jesus and his disciples were proclaiming the kingdom of God. It boils down to the simple message: God is king, and Herod (and anybody else) is not.

*You are my king, Lord, and I worship only you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 1 - 6

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, February 4 Mark 6:21-29**

*“John the Baptist is beheaded”*

Herod’s dealing with his prophetic nemesis, John, provides a classic example of how official Israel treats its prophets. Herod is a prideful person of power pitted against a humble and holy prophet. It recalls the conflicts between king and prophet that run through the Old Testament. As a true prophet, John has no fear of the great and powerful and boldly confronts them with their sin. Strangely, Herod wants to protect John from the wrath of his wife, Herodias, a Jezebel-like figure, and places him in custody.

The account of John’s imprisonment and execution underscores the immorality of Herod. First, John reproaches him publicly for marrying Herodias, his niece, who is already the wife of his half brother, a marriage that ignited religious protests because it was considered incestuous (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). Further, Herod’s young stepdaughter captivates him with her presumably erotic dancing which also hints of incestuous lust, and his inflamed passion results in John’s execution. Lastly, the grisly detail of John’s head brought in on a platter caps off the wretched scene.

*We are called to speak the truth, Lord, regardless of the consequences. Amen.*

**Friday, February 5 Mark 6:30-44**

*“Compassion for the people”*

When his tired but exhilarated disciples return from their first preaching mission, Jesus follows his pattern of inviting them to take a boat and sail to a distant and deserted shore for reporting and resting. His plans are frustrated as hordes of people, numbering in the thousands, run along the shore and beat the boat to its landing. Compassion arises within him as he sees the same signs in the crowd that he had seen in a flock of sheep which had lost its shepherd – aimless wandering that signals lostness. He responds by teaching them and by feeding them.

Jesus teaches them many things in order to build under their enthusiasm the foundation of truth that will sustain them when feelings fall and he is not physically present. When the disciples come to Jesus and reveal the shortsightedness of the people that ran far away from home with nothing to eat, he speaks for them with the same compassion that had caused him to spend the day teaching them, instructing the disciples to feed them. Using what is available, Jesus thanks the Father on behalf of the crowd and they are fed.

*You know my needs, Lord, and you generously provide. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 6 Mark 6:45-56**

*“Take courage! I am here!”*

Jesus directs his disciples to get into the boat to set sail for Bethsaida while he goes up the mountain to pray alone. A storm does not endanger their lives as earlier (4:35-41), but they find themselves stuck in the middle of the lake, fighting against the wind after hours of strenuous rowing. Jesus can see their struggle (one must assume supernaturally in the darkness) and rejoins them during the fourth watch of the night (3:00am – 6:00am) by walking on the sea.

Just as Jesus did not first feed the hungry multitudes but taught them (6:34), so he does not first rescue the disciples from their predicament but tries to teach them something about his presence by “passing by” them, which we should not understand as Jesus trying to trick them into thinking that he is ignoring them but that he is always present to them even when he is not physically with them. As in the Old Testament when God “passed by” Moses so that Moses might be aware of his presence and glory, so Jesus wants his disciples, and us, to know his majesty as the Son of God and to reassure us that he will never leave or forsake us.

*With eyes of faith, Lord, I see that you are always present with me. Amen.*