*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 1 - 6

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, March 1 Mark 10:1-12**

*“The question about divorce”*

 When the Pharisees ask whether divorce is lawful, Jesus’ response exposes their approach to God’s law as a whole. They come at the law asking, “What does it allow me to do?” or, to put it more bluntly, “What can I get away with?” This preoccupation with legal subtleties ultimately neglects God’s will, which is primarily concerned with love for the neighbor. They are interested in their rights, not their responsibilities. They ask only about the husband’s right to divorce and pay no attention to the needs of the wife – what it does to her or to children.

 Jesus contends that what Moses commanded was only a compromise situation designed to reduce the fallout from men’s hardness of heart. The legislation on divorce certificates freed a wife from the accusation of adultery when she, out of necessity, remarried. The law was therefore intended to keep the social upheaval associated with divorce to a minimum. Since the law had its roots in men’s hardness of heart – willful defiance against God – then it cannot reflect God’s will. Divorce is not God’s will for marriage.

*May love rule our hearts, Lord, rather than what is most expedient. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 2 Mark 10:13-16**

*“Jesus blessed the children”*

 Jesus’ concern for children follows immediately after his statements about divorce. Both women and children could be mistreated and abused because of their lack of power. When parents bring children for Jesus to touch, the disciples act like bad-tempered bouncers. Once again, they want to throw their weight around and exercise control by keeping at bay others who come from outside their circle. Jesus intercedes on behalf of the children and informs his disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

 The childlikeness to which Jesus refers is not any supposedly inherent qualities that children are said to possess, such as humility, trustfulness, transparency, hopefulness, modesty or willingness to believe. Children can also be demanding, short-tempered, sulky, stubborn, thankless, and selfish. It is their lack of power and status, contrasting sharply with the overbearing disciples, that is the issue. When one is appropriately little, like a child, one is more open to receiving and entering the kingdom of God.

*I come to you humbly, Lord, without any proud declaration of merit. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 3 Mark 10:17-31**

*“He had many possessions”*

 The encounter of Jesus with a rich man comes immediately after blessing the small children, throwing into sharp relief the difference in status between the two. From a human perspective, the children have little while the man has much. In the end, the children will have entered the kingdom of God, at least in part because they don’t have to give up much in order to do so, while the man will walk away from the kingdom, at least in part because he is unwilling to meet its demands. His wealth is more important to him than eternal life.

 Jewish law and its interpretations made wealth a sign of God’s special favor. Thus, the man represents, from a human point of view, the best of both God’s favor and man’s desire for eternal life which should practically guarantee his entry into the kingdom of God. Jesus turns this false expectation upside down. To trust in one’s riches actually hinders one’s access. In the end, it is not just riches that can make entry difficult. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief – none can enter by their own merit or need, but all can be saved by the gift of God.

*What is impossible for me, Lord, is possible with you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 1 - 6

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, March 4 Mark 10:32-34**

*“They will kill the Son of Man”*

 Jesus is walking ahead of his disciples, leading them to Jerusalem. Mark tells us that they are amazed and afraid. Is it the fear of persecution and suffering that slows their steps? And is it a sense of awe and amazement directed toward Jesus, who orders his own destiny and theirs? Jesus goes to Jerusalem not to triumph in a military campaign but to die. He leads his disciples on the way to his Passion, as he will later lead the way to Galilee after the resurrection and there commission them to take the gospel into all the world.

 Jesus does not allay their fear but predicts for the third time his impending death and subsequent resurrection. He gives more specific details. He will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law, who will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles, who in turn will mock him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him. The Messiah will suffer indignity and a shameful death. Then he will be handed over to God, who will resurrect him.

*You knew what would happen to you, Lord, yet you went for my sake. Amen.*

**Friday, March 5 Mark 10:35-45**

*“Not to be served but to serve”*

 As Jesus draws nearer to his ordeal, the disciples do not draw nearer to understanding. Each time he speaks to them about his suffering, his words go in one ear and out the other. Immediately after his announcement, James and John come sidling up to him with a special request. The earlier dispute about status and rank among the disciples (9:34) was silenced but not buried. Brazenly, they request the seats of honor in God’s kingdom. Jesus responds to their selfish request with grace: “You don’t know what you are asking.”

 Jesus asks them if they are willing to share his suffering. Responding glibly that they are willing, Jesus tells them that they will indeed suffer, and he informs them that the Father has not placed him in charge of the seating arrangements in the kingdom. When the other disciples become indignant at the brothers’ audacity, Jesus is prompted to speak with them about true discipleship and his role as Messiah. He tries to channel their desire to be great into humble service: Be great servants of others.

*Your way, Lord, is self-giving service; may it also be my way. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 6 Mark 10:46-52**

 *“Blind Bartimaeus”*

 Jesus’ last healing in the Gospel of Mark is set in Jericho. Anticipating the generosity of pilgrims headed toward Jerusalem, a blind man reduced to beggary sits by the roadside, one of society’s expendables. When he cries out to Jesus as the Son of David, they chide him for making a nuisance of himself. The crowd must think that so august a figure as Jesus would not want to bother with a man like Bartimaeus. The blind man will not be put off by reproaches from the crowd and yells more desperately. And, despite the shadow of the cross looming ever larger across his path, Jesus can still hear the cries of others in distress.

 The crowds tell Bartimaeus to keep quiet. Jesus, however, stops and says, “Call him.” Jesus answers Bartimaeus’ insistent cries for help with a call of his own. He comes to Jesus, who then asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” His reply, “I want to see,” demonstrates enough faith to transform him from a blind man begging along the way to a person who sees and follows Jesus on the way.

*When I called you answered, Lord, and healed my spiritual blindness. Amen.*