*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 29 – April 3

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, March 29 Mark 14:1-31**

*“Anointing, betrayal arrangement, last supper, and denial prediction”*

 Jesus’ commendation of the woman reveals that one can never be fully aware of one’s own significance or role in God’s kingdom, and it is a mistake for us to think that our sacrificial devotion is wasteful or insignificant. While Mark gives no clear motive for Judas’ betrayal, Matthew suggests greed and Luke speaks of Satan entering him. If no specific reason can be given except greed or Satan, than we all are susceptible. We too can betray Jesus.

 The Lord’s Supper works for good. It reminds us who we are, what our story is, what our values are, and who claims us as his own. It also binds the past, present, and future together. We look back and experience the love of God in giving us Christ. We experience the power of our sins being forgiven in the present. We look forward to the future banquet in God’s kingdom. After the Supper, Jesus predicts that his disciples will all desert him. Peter’s denial and subsequent failure will be immortalized. We can all be grateful that our failures are not recorded for all to read.

*Remember me for my acts of love, Lord, and forgive all my sin. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 30 Mark 14:32-52**

*“Prayer, betrayal, and arrest”*

 Jesus retires after the Last Supper to a place on the Mount of Olives identified as Gethsemane. He separates Peter, James and John from the rest of the group to go with him as he prays. Peter has just boasted that he would stand firm with Jesus through his trials even if they lead to death (14:29). James and John promised that they could be baptized with his baptism and could drink his cup of suffering (10:39). Jesus gives them a chance to back up their words. These three disciples have witnessed his miracles. Now they must witness his agony.

 A crowd, sent by the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders, guided by Judas, arrive armed with swords and clubs as if Jesus were some terrorist bandit surrounded by his fellow revolutionaries. To them, it might have seemed a wise precaution. To the reader, they only look foolish. Jesus is a nonviolent teacher with no weapons and nothing to hide. Justifiably, he condemns their violent ways (14:48).

*Your will not mine be done, Lord, even in times of suffering. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 31 Mark 14:53-72**

*“Trial before the Sanhedrin, and Peter’s denial”*

 Mark shows that Jesus suffered the greatest injustice. He was the victim of lies and innuendo, frame-ups, and a rigged jury. What makes this worse is that Jesus’ condemnation was not done in a fit of mindless passion. Those who were supposedly the wisest and the holiest in the land had Jesus killed after deliberate proceedings, coldly and rationally. Jesus was killed by self-serving religious leaders who were intent on preserving their power.

 The sad plight of Peter, the rock who disintegrates into a pile of sand, evokes our shock and sympathy. We understand how tempting it is to withdraw from others who get into difficulty with the authorities. In private we may say, “We are behind you all the way.” And we usually are – way behind. We can learn from examples of bravery, including Jesus himself, who fearlessly confessed and then withstood the withering assault from those who hated him. Yet the vivid portrayal of Peter’s abject failure perhaps teaches us best. In spite of his denial, Jesus restored him. He went on to preach boldly the gospel, and his faith cost him his life.

*When treated unjustly for following you, Lord, may I remain strong in you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 29 – April 3

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, April 1 Mark 15:1-20**

*“Trial before Pilate, and the soldiers’ mockery”*

 People with no moral compass and no moral backbone ask, “What am I to do?” The answer they usually get is to satisfy the crowd. In doing so, Pilate cedes his responsibility, acquiesces to injustice, and refuses to risk anything for another. He is the type of leader who forever has his finger in the wind to see which way it is blowing and does something for others as long as it costs him nothing. He will not pursue truth or justice. He only wants to satisfy the crowd, whose intentions he knows are less than honorable, and allows them to make his decisions. Pilate did ask the right question, “What shall I do, then, with [Jesus]?” but came up with the wrong answer.

 Many today are like Pilate. They prefer Jesus to the envious, malicious high priests and the violent Barabbas, but that is as far as it goes. They see no harm in him, but they see nothing else, and therefore they see no reason to risk anything for him. They regard Jesus as simply “the king of the Jews” and do not recognize that he is the “King of kings.”

*You are my King, Lord, and I will serve no other. Amen.*

**Friday, April 2 Mark 15:21-47**

*“Crucifixion, death, and burial”*

 Mark’s picture of Jesus’ suffering on the cross is bleak but avoids sensationalism. He provides no graphic description of Jesus’ physical agony, but focuses on the theological significance of Jesus’ death. The cross is the point at which the blind rage of humanity against God is unleashed with a horrible intensity and is shown for what it is. The Gospel story depicts many of the sins that put Jesus on the cross: pride, envy, jealousy, betrayal, cruelty, greed, indifference, cowardice, and murder. We need only add our own many sins to complete the list.

 While the cross reveals the truth about humankind’s sin, it also reveals God’s incredible power. God’s power takes the mockery spit out at Jesus and turns it into the proclamation of the gospel. God’s power absorbs the poison of human sin and turns it into salvation for all who put their trust in a God who loves this much and who works in this way. We truly see who God is when we see the Son of God crying out from the cross and then raised in glory, and when we hear the offer of forgiveness of sins.

*You took my sin upon yourself, Lord, sparing me its penalty. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 3 Mark 16:1-8**

 *“Resurrection”*

 Mark’s ending fits the title of his Gospel: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). The burial of Jesus and the news of his resurrection bring the narrative to a close, but the resurrection is not the end of the story, only the beginning. How does one end such a story? Just as the tomb will not contain Jesus, neither can Mark’s story. The resurrection sets in motion a new story that is not yet finished or resolved. It will not be complete until God gathers his chosen ones from the ends of the earth (13:27). What happens next, then, is up to us as believers.

 We cannot allow the resurrection account to become a faded if cherished memory that is to be placed in a photo album and taken out once a year and admired. The ending forces us to enter the story. We are the next chapter. What would we have done if we were those first women let in on the tremendous news? Will we flee in fear and become silent? Or will we obediently accept Jesus’ post-resurrection charge: “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8)?

*I celebrate your resurrection, Lord, by being a witness to its truth. Amen.*