

Jesus Scandals

In online services during May and June 2020 will include the teaching series ***Jesus Scandals: how Christ shocked his contemporaries and still shocks today.***

Everything that Jesus did subverted expectations and challenged the norm. His teaching, his miracles, his unconditional love for all people, it all challenged a culture of social, economic and religious privilege and injustice. Looking at 9 snapshots of Jesus' ministry in Mark's Gospel we aim to discover how this scandalous Jesus challenged the norm then, and still does, and why he is good news for our world today.

Reading Mark

To help us get the most from the teaching series (due to the online format the Sunday talks are quite brief) we recommend reading Mark's Gospel in its entirety. To encourage and strengthen our sense of unity and fellowship in this project, we propose the following Reading Plan, which covers the entire Gospel and also allows us a week of readings from Luke and Acts, to prepare for Pentecost (31 May).

Mark can seem like something of a Cinderella among the Gospels. For many hundreds of years it was used in public worship far less than the other Gospels. Yet Mark is a fascinating text, inviting readers to understand Jesus in relation to themselves, and themselves in relation to God. The Jesus of Mark is arguably stranger, more transcendent, more scandalous, more simply worrying than the Jesus of any other Gospel. So just what sort of change is he supposed to have brought about? Read on!

Week one - 4 May

Monday	Mark 1.1-13
Tuesday	Mark 1.14-20
Wednesday	Mark 1.21-34
Thursday	Mark 1.35-45
Friday	Mark 2.1-12
Saturday	Mark 2.13-17

Reflection:

Unlike the other Gospels, Mark jumps right into Jesus' adult life and ministry, with his baptism by John, temptation in the wilderness, calling of the first disciples, and numerous healings. The 62 verses we read this week offer an intense, close-up view of Jesus' early ministry. If these passages were all you knew of the Jesus story, what would your reaction be? Try to imagine yourself hearing this bit of 'good news' for the first time and encountering Jesus afresh, without the baggage of centuries of conflict and myriad interpretations. Let the story of Jesus surprise and amaze you.

God, grant me fresh eyes to see Jesus like one of those who first received the good news. Amen.

Week Two - 11 May

Monday	Mark 2.18-28
Tuesday	Mark 3.1-12
Wednesday	Mark 3. 13-35
Thursday	Mark 4.1-20
Friday	Mark 4. 21-34
Saturday	Mark 4.35-41

Reflection:

Jesus was a controversial figure, and sometimes a confusing one. He plucked grain on the Sabbath, which was unlawful but not unprecedented. His own family said he was out of his mind and must have a demon. He told cryptic stories but wouldn't explain them except to his disciples. He healed without even a touch and calmed a raging storm with a simple rebuke. What is your reaction to these stories? What impression do these stories give you of Jesus, and how do you experience God through them?

God, let me stand in awe of your power. Give me wonder that goes beyond facts, scandal and controversy. Amen.

Week three -18 May

Monday	Mark 5.1-20
Tuesday	Mark 5.21-43
Wednesday	Mark 6.1-13
Thursday	Mark 6.1-14-29
Friday	Mark 6.30-56
Saturday	Mark 7.1-23

Reflection:

Reactions to Jesus (and similarly, John, in the middle of chapter 6) vary widely, from awe and enthusiasm to contempt and violent rejection. What distinctions do you see between those who are eager to see, hear and touch these holy men and those who condemn them? We all like to think we would have embraced Jesus enthusiastically and looked to him for wisdom and healing, but might we have been among his opponents? What do you have in common with those who embraced Jesus, and what do you have in common with those who rejected him?

God, grant me the humility to see my own privilege. Let me see Jesus' challenge as a gift and not a threat. Amen.

Week four - 25 May
Preparing for Pentecost

Monday	Luke 24:1-12
Tuesday	Luke 24:13-35
Wednesday	Luke 24: 36-50
Thursday	Acts 1.1-11
Friday	Acts 1.12-26
Saturday	Acts 2.1-21

Reflection:

This week we are tracing the journey from Resurrection to Pentecost, as reported by St Luke - the story overlapping from his Gospel and its 'sequel', the book of Acts. Pentecost is sometimes called the birthday of the church. The wind of God's Spirit swept through Jesus' followers and filled them with God's power, and a new sense of his joy, presence and purpose. The experience of God's love at Pentecost was not just for them and for then; the Father is still graciously giving of himself, by his Holy Spirit, to all who believe in his Son. How willing are we to receive what God wants to give?

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Reading Mark / continued

Week five - 1 June

Monday	Mark 7.24-37
Tuesday	Mark 8.1-21
Wednesday	Mark 8.22 - 9.1
Thursday	Mark 9.2-13
Friday	Mark 9.14-29
Saturday	Mark 9.30-49

Reflection:

The stakes grow higher as Jesus gets deeper into his public ministry. He seems to get easily frustrated, dismissing a Syro-Phoenician woman who asks for help and walking away from Pharisees who ask for a sign. He shames disciples who don't seem to 'get it', but sternly orders those who do realise his identity to keep quiet about it. Thinking of Jesus' discussion of his coming death, his bold display on the mountaintop and affirmation of those outside the disciples' circle, what do you think is behind his attitude in these chapters? Why do you think Mark portrayed Jesus this way, even if his writing would make readers confused by or concerned about Jesus?

God, help me to walk in Jesus' shoes and experience the world through his eyes.
Amen.

Week six - 8 June

Monday	Mark 10.1-16
Tuesday	Mark 10. 17-34
Wednesday	Mark 10. 35-52
Thursday	Mark 11.1-11
Friday	Mark 11. 12-33
Saturday	Mark 12.1-17

Reflection:

Reflect on an experience of suffering or self-denial, and on the struggles people endure by sheer accident or misfortune. Consider these things in the light of Jesus' teachings about the blessedness of those who are not rich, who have left home and family to follow him, and who take on the role of servant to others. Do your ideas of who is blessed in the world align with Jesus' views? How do these teachings challenge you to live differently?

God, help me to see my own struggles and those of others through your eyes. Transform my desire for satisfaction and success into a desire to please you. Amen.

Week seven - 15 June

Monday	Mark 12.18-37
Tuesday	Mark 12.38-44
Wednesday	Mark 13.1-23
Thursday	Mark 13.24-37
Friday	Mark 14.1-11
Saturday	Mark 14.12-31

Reflection:

The tension between Jesus and the authorities is building, as is the reader's sense of agitation. Jesus is becoming more isolated, and even his follower's efforts at faithfulness are found wanting. The reader's enthusiasm for the approaching climax to Jesus' story is tempered by his unsettling apocalyptic warnings. What do you imagine God is experiencing as the time of the Son's death draws near? How would you feel if you were one of Jesus' disciples at this stage of his ministry?

God, give me insight to experience Jesus' story as it was, not only the beautiful parts, but the difficult as well. Amen.

Week eight - 22 June

Monday	Mark 14.32-42
Tuesday	Mark 14.43-52
Wednesday	Mark 14.53-65
Thursday	Mark 14.66-72
Friday	Mark 15.1-15
Saturday	Mark 15.16-24

Reflection:

Take some time daily to really think about the reading. Too often we quickly pass through this part of scripture because we 'know the story'. Ask God to show you something new in it - this is the story that offers you new life.

God betrayed by the kiss of a friend, help me to be a true to you. 'May I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day'.
(Prayer of Richard of Chichester)

Week nine - 29 June

Monday	Mark 15:25-32
Tuesday	Mark 15.33-39
Wednesday	Mark 15.40-47
Thursday	Mark 16.1-8a
Friday	Mark 16.8b-20

Reflection:

Most serious New Testament scholars think that the original version of Mark's Gospel ended at verse 8a: '*and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid*'. The two 'extra' endings are not found in the best manuscripts and are likely to have been added later by copyists in the early church, who decided to add what they thought was a more rounded, suitable conclusion. What is probably the 'original' ending is mysterious, especially when compared to the other Gospel writers' accounts. For you, does this abrupt ending cast doubt on the resurrection, or does it add power and realism to the story?

God, thank you for Jesus' triumph over death. Thank you for Mark's Gospel, and for all the people - women and men - who passed down the good news of Jesus, each in their own way.