

Excerpts from “40 Days to Forever”

2021 Lent Devotional for Bayside Church



Feb. 26: Day 9

“Casting Out Demons” | Mark 5:1-20

Scripture:

1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.[a] 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” 8 For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”

9 Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” 10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 13 He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis[b] how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Devotional:

How accustomed we get to living with our pain. How easy it is to live alone. We believe that our hurt and our trials are a burden to others. It's counter-intuitive, really, that we lean away just when we should be leaning in. And the world only reinforces that message. It's hard enough to love ourselves, much less those around us. To ease the pain, we self-medicate, we chase temporary comforts, we numb out, distract, and even harm ourselves.

This passage can seem foreign, unrelatable, and maybe even uncomfortable. But what it teaches us is this: Our pain (regardless of what causes it) isolates us and separates us from others and Jesus. That's not what Jesus intended at all. He knows exactly what we need, and His healing is specific and complete. And when we experience healing and the wholeness Jesus has to offer, we can't help but be drawn in. Our response is worship. It's freedom. And out of our freedom, we cannot help but share our story with others so they may be freed from their pain too. Our pain is simply the starting point of a beautiful new beginning.

Question:

When was the last time you trusted Jesus with your pain? Are you willing to run before Him and fall on your knees?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for sending us a Savior who confronts our pain and provides perfect and complete healing. Thank you for making a way for us to come to you so that we may experience freedom. Show me the areas I haven't been brave enough to show you, and give me the courage I need to come to you with my pain. Amen.



Mar. 3: Day 13

“Traditions & Commandments” | Mark 7:1-8

Scripture:

1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus 2 and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.[a])

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’[b]

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

Devotional:

We, as humans, have a rule-obsession—even the most rebellious and anti-establishment among us love rules. Maybe we just don't like calling them that. But we sure like calling the shots, bringing order out of chaos. Knowing what to expect. Clarity of confusion. The list goes on and on. How do we know this? Think back to when you were a kid playing house, school, or any sort of imagination game. How did that always start? We set up the rules or the circumstances so that we can bring others into our world-building. Or, depending on the scenario, exclude or leave out—think of that pesky younger sibling, for example. This continues and only gets more and more intricate into adulthood. Rules give us a sense of control. But the danger here is that when we place our confidence in the rules, it can negate our need for God. Look how quickly the Israelites took to worshipping the golden calf hot on the heels of their miraculous exodus from Egypt. In our comfort, we fall back on what we know or what we create—we worship our human rules.

This passage is a beautiful reminder of our need for the new covenant—or new promise—that Jesus brings. He knows our hearts are fickle, and He knows that we are so easily distracted. That's why His grace is ultimately sufficient, and our relationship with Him is not dependent on our ability to uphold human rules.

Question:

Where does your comfort and security lie? In human traditions? Or in the abounding love of God?

Prayer:

Lord, help me to let go of my dependence on human laws and traditions. I don't want my worship to be in vain. I want my heart to be close to you, not far. Help me stay focused on you. Amen.



Mar. 5: Day 15

“Peter Claims Jesus” | Mark 8:27-30

Scripture:

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

28 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

29 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Devotional:

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”. Far be it from me to disagree with Juliet Capulet, but the words we use to describe something or someone do matter. Maybe they’re not the whole story but combined with actions and circumstances; they certainly begin to tell you the whole story—that story being one of *identity*. And doesn’t identity get at that nebulous concept of *calling*? Who we are and what we do. What we are *meant* to do. Identity and calling are the subjects of philosophers, songwriters, screenwriters, college students, Disney movies; you name it!

A quick Google search tells us Messiah means "the one anointed with oil." A deeper dive, using the *The Handbook to Bible Study*, however, tells us that a Messiah is the one appointed by God, serves Him, and humanity. There is a long history of anointing in the Jewish faith. Therefore, *appointing* individuals (think kings, prophets, priests, etc.) and identifying them for God's specific work in the service or leading of His people. A Messiah, to the Israelites, is essentially the ideal Israelite. Perfect. God's perfect delegate. Sound a lot like the Jesus we know today? Peter calls Jesus Messiah not only to tell us who He is but what He is meant to do. Jesus is the anointed one, the one who came, as a servant of God to serve humanity in the most profound way. He came to show us how to live, to serve us, and ultimately die for us.

Question:

How does exploring a name of Jesus help us understand, praise, and love Him more?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for sending Jesus, our Messiah. Thank you for this account in the book of Mark that shows us how Jesus lived and died for us. Thank you for revealing who you are to us so we may understand who you are more. Amen.



Mar. 18: Day 26

"Cleansing the Temple" | Mark 11:15-19

Scripture:

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’[a]? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’[b]”

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples[c] went out of the city.

Devotional:

Imagine you need to pay off a debt. The bank says you need to do it in person, it has to be before a particular time, and you have to drive to their headquarters. There isn't a way around it. You get there, but the lobby is packed with people offering you credit cards, insisting you buy their insurance, and someone saying you need to be represented by some bank employee. That person is going to take a significant fee for representing you. And the bank will refuse to see you without them. There's no customer service or bank manager. In fact, you can't even make up to the teller window. You wait outside the front door playing a long telephone game with you and the other, more senior, representatives inside behind closed doors. The debt you owe and your very livelihood hang in the balance. Sound infuriating?

This passage of scripture is evocative and one of the few times we see Jesus lose it. That's an understatement. He flips over tables. That's true, righteous anger. He's raging at the temple-capitalism that has sprung up around His *house of prayer*. Jewish tradition meant that you needed atonement—like a payment for a debt—for your sins. So having doves, lambs, goats, etc., on hand for sacrifices sounds convenient. But unfortunately, humans being humans, they got greedy. And exclusive. This was no longer a house of prayer for all nations; it was one for those who could afford it. Markups on sacrificial animals became a problem, and the marginalized were forced farther and farther away from the temple. The temple literally housed the Spirit of God. God was already separated from His people due to their sins—but now humankind was separating itself from God even more. And Jesus, knowing that He was mere days away from reversing that separation forever through *His* sacrifice, raged against the cost, the greed, the corruption, the sin that stood between our Creator and us. In His righteous anger, there is a righteous longing—a longing for the atonement that would be final and permanent.

Question:

Have you ever considered the righteous anger Jesus felt because of the ways we separate ourselves (directly or indirectly) from Him? Does that add depth to the way you understand His love for you?

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for loving me so much that the thought of being separated from me enrages you. Thank you for how you demonstrated your love for me and for displaying righteous anger. Help me remember your love for me as I go about my day today. Amen.



Mar. 29: Day 35

“Judas Betrays Jesus” | Mark 14:43-50

Scripture:

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him.

46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

48 “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled.

Devotional:

Why did Judas do it? Was it hate? Greed? Satan himself (see Luke 22:3)?

In this passage, it's easy to marvel at the betrayal and watch as a crooked trial unfolds over the coming chapters. Isn't it funny how we so often empathize with the victim, never considering that we could relate to the perpetrator? It's confounding how the events that set into motion a gross miscarriage of justice begin with a friend. Someone in Jesus's inner circle itself. Walking on water? Judas was there. Miracles? Judas was there. Sure, he was a little stingy with money and suspicious of acts of generosity, but he was still a participant in Jesus's ministry. Jesus called him a disciple and even washed his feet. It's easy to understand you have an enemy, but more complex and far more human to experience the betrayal of a friend.

As painful and confusing as that is, the reality is sometimes you don't get the full story—the inner workings of someone's motivations. Haven't we all been tempted to do what we know is wrong? Don't we all fall short? Now, this doesn't dismiss the consequences of our actions. Perhaps this is less about needing to understand the "why" of it all and instead look at how it gets us closer to the resurrection. Mere verses later, a guilty man walks free while our Messiah receives the death sentence. Maybe it would have been better if Judas hadn't been born (Mark 14:21), but without his betrayal, we don't get to the cross. The "why" is far less important than the result. The story of Judas is not only a reminder of our need for a Savior; it's a reminder that Jesus's sacrifice redeems even the most devastating betrayal and brokenness.

Question:

Do you find yourself hung up on the "why" when seeking to understand something difficult or painful? In your search for justification? Or do you look for opportunities to see God's redemption?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the tragic story of Judas—painful as it is. Thank you for being the one who not only sees our pain but heals it. Thank you that justice and redemption come from you and you alone. Amen.