Beloved Son, Blessed Community

Lenten Reflections from the Gospel of Mark

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Introduction

Mark's Jesus

Mark 1:1

All of us may experience feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and lack of purpose from time to time. These things can lead to anxiety, worry, and dread about the future—but there is a solution. When we seek friendship and community, and pay attention to the sacred narrative of our lives, the impact of those things that cause us fear is lessened. In the Gospel of Mark, we find these practices modeled throughout the narrative by Jesus and his followers. Mark presents Jesus as a beloved son, devoted friend, and dedicated community builder, whose life has sacred purpose. Like Jesus, we can also listen for our own message from God: that we, too, are beloved children and can work together toward a fuller expression of the divine presence in our lives and the world.

The following forty reflections on Mark's story about Jesus invite us to the practice of reading and reflection, conversation, and community building. These are activities that help us today but are in fact quite old—practiced by Bible-reading people for centuries and beneficial for overcoming the isolation and fragmentation that threatens our well-being. When we read the Gospel narrative in conversation with our own life stories and with each other, it brings us closer to our true selves, to each other, and to God.

Mark begins with important claims about Jesus. In the very first line (Mark 1:1), the Gospel writer asserts that Jesus is two things: (1) *Christos* and (2) God's Son. *Christos* or "Christ" isn't a name given by Jesus's parents, but a title. It's a Greek term that translates the

Hebrew word *messiah*, which means "anointed one." Throughout the Bible, anointing is associated with kings and rulers specially chosen by God (see 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:1–13; Ps. 45). Likewise, parent-child relationships are used to express the covenant between God and Israel (see Pss. 68:5; 89:26; 103:13). In choosing this language, Mark is connecting Jesus to these important ideas. This is why Mark also calls Jesus's story *euangelion*, translated from Greek into English as "good news" or "gospel."[1]

Notably, there are two specific occasions in Mark where God speaks directly, calling Jesus "my Beloved Son" (1:11; 9:7)[2] and giving approval of Jesus, his teaching, and his work. This loving relationship is central to Jesus's self-understanding; it motivates and defines his work. The first occasion is at Jesus's baptism, where the words of love are the beginning of an ongoing conversation in which Jesus hears God's voice and is attuned to the presence of God's Spirit. In the later occurrence, when Jesus is transfigured on the mountain, God speaks to the disciples. If they haven't understood who he is yet, Jesus's dazzling white appearance, his conversation with heavenly figures, and God's direct command all provide reason for them to listen and do what Jesus says. In the structure of the Gospel narrative, these two moments emphasize what Mark's readers have been told since the opening line: Jesus's story is *good news*; therefore, we should hear it clearly and consider what it means for our own experiences of belonging and being loved by God.

Reading This Book with Scripture in Hand

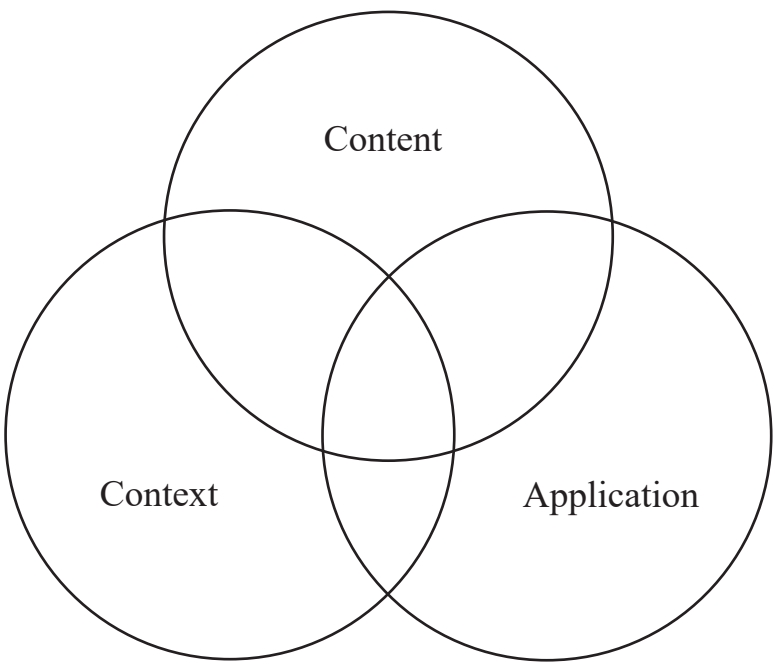
Each of the following chapters in this book is designed to be read with a passage from Mark, and together they cover the Gospel from beginning to end. Read the focus text each day before turning to the chapter, prayer, and reflection question. For reasons of length, some episodes of similar type and theme are grouped together under "See also . . ." and may be read with the main passage if desired.

Although you may read this book at any time, the forty chapters are grouped into sections corresponding to the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends the day before Easter. This is fitting, as we can trace some origins of Christian Lenten practice to Mark's narrative, where Jesus spends forty days praying in the wilderness (1:13). Since the traditional forty days of Lent do

not include Sundays, a weekly summary and additional questions for reflection and group discussion follow each set of chapters.

You may also read this book with an eye to sharpen skills and become more adept at reading the Bible. Through careful attention, you may note the people (some characters appear repeatedly, while some come and go quickly). You may see repeated words, phrases, themes, and concepts. You may notice that Mark's style is episodic: He writes short scenes that, when collected and composed, build a full narrative. These observations will give you an impression of Jesus that Mark develops from the opening line and chapter.

When I am studying the Bible, I am always doing three things. They don't always happen in order, with steps one-two-three. But I make sure to pay attention to each of these as I read and study. This is true whether I'm preparing to teach, preach, or write, as well as for personal prayer and reflection. Over the years I have diagrammed my process with a Venn diagram of three interlocking circles. I use the acronym COCOA and label the areas of attention Content, Context, and Application.



Content asks questions like these: What does this passage say? Who are the characters? What happens (the plot)? Are there images, metaphors, figures of speech? What's easy to understand? What is confusing or hard? Although there are many ways to read and interpret a passage, and sometimes sincere people disagree about the best interpretation, content should be the place where everyone agrees. These are the facts of the text as it appears on the page. As I read, I take notes that summarize and describe the passage. This can serve as a place to begin discussion with others as well.

Context has to do with where a biblical text is written and read. Cultural and historical contexts illuminate the assumptions, situations, and concerns of authors and audiences. Literary contexts connect passages to other texts within and outside of the Bible, allowing readers to identify themes, motifs, and types of writing. Context also helps readers name their own experience, social situation, and reading communities.

Application is the most important—and the aim of this book. Reading Mark's Gospel, we can make sense of its stories, its claims about Jesus, and what we will do in response. The practice of reading or hearing Scripture, reflecting on it, and responding is quite old—and has served people for millennia. Jesus himself does this in Mark 12:28–34, where he and a scribe discuss the most important commandments of God, and in 12:35–37, where he applies his own interpretation of Psalm 110 while teaching in the temple. When we apply what we read, reflect on, and discuss, we're in good company.

So as you read (alone or in a group) this book alongside Mark's Gospel, I invite and encourage you to hear the story of Jesus as if it were new—as if you had never heard it before. Likewise, if this is your first time hearing it, fantastic! I hope your experience with Mark's story invites reflection on your life and the world we live in. This is the process I've followed in writing each chapter and its accompanying questions. Most importantly, I want to encourage all of us to hear God's words of love to Jesus—because they are also words that can change and transform us and our world for good.

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The Week Leading Up to the First Sunday in Lent

1
Beloved

Mark 1:2–11

Being Loved

When my parents were still able to decorate for Christmas, there was a particular ornament I looked for whenever I went to visit them for the holidays. I can remember seeing it every year while growing up—hanging there among the sharp needles, alongside candy canes and Christmas bells, reflecting both the soft gold of twinkling tree lights and the harsher glare of winter's waning sun. Now it sits in a box, archived and waiting patiently. Perhaps in days to come I'll hang it on my own tree. But not quite yet.

The core of this ornament is a foam ball, cut precisely in half—a classic example of mid-century modern suburban crafting. The rounded back is covered in glitter, and the flat front displays the photo of a child. He has full cheeks and wispy brown hair and is wearing a little sweater. This child is me at one year old. And I'm smiling.

There's another Christmas image that has persisted with me over the years: a photo of a baby propped up in an infant seat, covered in a warm blanket—his swaddling clothes. He's flanked by attending angels: a large stuffed bear and a small soft blue dog named Sammy. In the background is a family Christmas tree, cheerful and warmly lit by those same twinkling lights. This child is me at three months old. And I am loved.

When I think about the picture and the ornament, I'm filled with thoughts of family and home. The photos were taken at my first Christmas and first birthday. They represent not only my new life but a new chapter for my mom and dad, who had waited a long time to become parents. Just a few years ago, before the diagnosis of dementia that preceded her death, my mom would say, "We didn't care at all about the details like hair or eye color, or how big you were. We were just thankful you were healthy and whole." So these images represent and remind me that I am loved—and that I have been loved by good people, starting with my mom and dad, from the beginning until now.

To be sure, not every person gets this kind of start in life. And even when there's a loving family in childhood, things can happen. Tragedies can occur. People can get mixed up and go astray. But I also know this: No matter where we start, and no matter where we find ourselves, we all deserve love. This is God's intention and eternal purpose—to communicate and demonstrate that we are loved.

Every person needs love to survive and thrive. None of us do well if we're cut off and disconnected. Occasional and purposeful solitude can be helpful for renewal, but isolation isn't how we're meant to live. At their best, family and community show us how to love and be loved. And if you haven't heard it lately, let me say this: God loves you. And I do too.

The Beloved Son

As Mark begins the first act of his story about Jesus, the theme of love is one that we see from the outset.[3] In the opening scene we meet John the Baptist, preaching and baptizing in the wilderness. Like the prophets of old, John calls people to renew their relationship with God. Judging by results, he's a compelling speaker. Many go out to hear his message and respond by going down into the waters of the Jordan River. John baptizes them there as a sign of commitment: They are renewing Israel's covenant, promising to live faithfully, according to God's word of love.[4]

Into this scene comes Jesus. Like others in the crowd, Jesus also hears John and goes into the waters (1:9). And while he's there, something happens: Jesus has a vision. Like Isaiah in the temple

(Isa. 6:1–8) and Ezekiel on the riverbank (Ezek. 1:1–3:14), Jesus sees the heavens open and God's Spirit comes down. Like Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1–14) and young Samuel lying on his bed at night (1 Sam. 3:1–21), Jesus hears God's voice. God says, "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased*" (Mark 1:11). These words are important, because they shape Jesus's identity and the purpose of his life. The scene connects Jesus to the prophets before him. And God's words illustrate Mark's claim in the opening line of the Gospel: Jesus is God's Son and Anointed One, and this is good news for all who may hear.

In the coming days we will see how God's words of love guide Jesus to teach and heal, feed the hungry, and challenge the powerful elite who perpetuate injustice. Mark will show us how Jesus goes about creating community, restoring relationships, and stitching the social fabric back together. Jesus speaks about God and God's love. He shows us what God's Beloved can do.

We Are God's Beloved Too!

Regardless of where we come from, what kind of families we were raised in, and the choices we've made along the way in life, God is speaking—even now—to you and to me. We don't need to have ornaments and happy memories to know the importance of love. All of us can understand how God's affirmation of Jesus was good for him, and through him good news for all who heard and hear his story.

Jesus's experience of God and God's love can be true for us as well. And what God says to us is the same message that Jesus heard so long ago: *You are my child. I'm proud of you. I delight in all the good you can do with your life. I love you. And that will never change.*

There are times we are tempted to doubt this. There are times we may feel as if God isn't hearing our prayers. There may be periods when we wander (literally and spiritually) in a wilderness—where we come face-to-face with our demons and the temptations that they offer. But no matter where we have come from or where we find ourselves today, no matter how amazing (or how broken) our family or our life has been, these words are for us—for you and for me.

Prayer

Thank you, Holy God, for your loving-kindness and the witness of your Beloved Son. Amen.

Reflection

How have you experienced God's love, and how has it changed you?

2
Prayer

Mark 1:12–13, 35–39

Purpose

Long ago—before I was married and had grown children, lived in four Midwestern states, or became a pastor and scholar—I was a college student, freshly launched from my parents' house and left to my own devices. The horizon was wide and open. Life was full of possibilities.

Like many students, after a hard week of classes I wanted to socialize and have some fun. And who more natural to do this with than those I lived with, the people in my residence hall. Unfortunately for me, I soon found out that their ideas of fun and mine were a bit different. For several months, I gave it the old college try. But house parties weren't my scene. Between the aimless crowds, the bad smells, the kegs of cheap lite beer, and the drunken fights, I didn't fit in. I wasn't happy and was struggling to find my way.

So one weekend I didn't go out. I stayed in my room with a question on my mind: What should I do? I was talking to myself—and probably to God—and happened to open my Bible to 2 Timothy 2:20–21. It was an answered prayer. And it helped to point my life in a new direction.

Prayer as Petition

Since that time, it's been my experience that people often think and talk about prayer in this mode. Prayer is petition—in other

words, we ask God for something. Please help Mrs. A, who lost her job. Please heal Mr. B, who is sick and in the hospital. Please help John, who is alone at college and going through a hard time.

All these prayers are important, because they communicate to God important things that are going on in our lives. In fact, the Bible teaches and invites us to pray just like this. In Psalm 6:2–3 we find a cry for God to help. In the earliest years of the church, when people pray by petition, these prayers are "powerful and effective" (Jas. 5:13–16).

We also see that Jesus himself prays by petition. In Mark 14:32–36, Jesus has come to Jerusalem and can see that the path before him will include suffering and crucifixion. So he goes late at night to a quiet garden and makes a big request of God. At this moment of acute stress and deepest fear, Jesus prays. He makes his desires known and in so doing shows us what we see throughout the Bible: Prayers can be petitions. We can ask God to help with our most important problems, and we can speak honestly to God from the deepest places in our hearts.

Prayer as Presence

At the same time, if prayer can be petition, it can also be about relationship. When we understand prayer to be about simply being in God's presence, we can pray by meditating—breathing in and out, allowing ourselves to rest, inviting the Spirit of God to fill and envelop us, welcoming peace into every part of our lives.

When we approach prayer as being with God, we can use poetic imagery to describe our experience. And here, too, we find examples in the Bible. In the familiar words of Psalm 23, the poet writes that God is like a shepherd, leading beside still waters. In Psalm 42, the psalmist likens God to a flowing stream and roaring falls whose waters surround and cover.

Studies have shown that meditation reduces stress and heart problems.[5] People of faith have known this for centuries. Wherever we are, when we take time during our busy days to stop, to listen, to appreciate God's presence, it makes a difference in our sense of self and outlook on the world. So I commend and recommend this kind of prayer to you.

Prayer as Motivation

There is a third aspect of prayer that's connected to the others but distinct. I like to call it prayerful motivation: when prayers lead directly to action. Mark tells us that Jesus often prays, then acts. He may pray with a petition, asking God for something; he may pray by simply being in God's presence. But then, because Jesus is constantly praying, he is also motivated to act for good and for God. We see this first in Mark 1:12–15 and then as a repeated habit of Jesus throughout the Gospel.

Following his baptism, the Spirit of God compels Jesus to stay for a while in the rough country (1:12). Jesus finds his example for this in the teaching and preaching of John the Baptist, who also lives a simple life—led by God's Spirit and close to the land. There's also a parallel to Jesus's ancestors, the Israelites, who stayed in the desert with Moses for forty years. Jesus stays for forty days, until finally, when the time is right, he returns with a purpose, ready to get to work (1:13).

Jesus begins to announce that the "kingdom/empire of God" has arrived (1:14–15). He calls disciples and begins to travel with them (1:16–20, 35–39). He teaches, heals, and casts out evil spirits (1:21–34, 40–45). This is his life's work: a program of spiritual, relational, and community renewal; a call for individuals, families, communities, and society to seek and find God's ways and God's desires—rather than the current state of things.

As Jesus does his work, none of it happens without the practice of prayer. In fact, it is prayer that guides and empowers him. Elsewhere in Mark, we will see how Jesus's practice of prayer is intimately connected to his work for and relationship with God. He prays, then casts out evil spirits. He prays, then heals sickness and disease. He prays to brace and fortify himself for torture and crucifixion. He prays to place his life in God's hands. Here, after Jesus calls disciples, teaches in a synagogue, silences an evil spirit, and cures illness (1:16–34), he rests. Then he gets up early to find a quiet place to pray. Peter and the others begin to worry and go out to find him. When they do, Jesus's prayers have filled and motivated him. He says, "Let's go . . . , for this is what I came to do" (1:38).

Our Prayers

We are probably good at prayers of petition. That's where most people start. We may also dabble in prayers of presence. We know that meditation is good for us, although many find it hard to quiet the mind to breathe and listen. But what would happen if our prayers served as motivation? What would our lives be like if praying filled us with power and strength, energy and purpose, so that we could act in the world? What good might we do? What changes can you imagine we might see? What blessing might we be to everyone around us?

Prayer

Take ten minutes. Breathe in and out. Say: Speak to me, Lord. Show me the way. *Then listen.*

Reflection

What is God's Spirit motivating you to do? How can prayer help you sustain the task?

3
Community

Mark 1:14–15

Neighbors

What is a neighbor? And what makes a good one? It may seem obvious that neighbors are found in the places we call home: They are the people who live near us. But *having* a neighbor and *being* a neighbor isn't only about our street or zip code. Neighbors are more than simply the people who live nearby. They are people we interact with, have relationships with, who help us when we need it. They can become our friends. But most importantly, neighbors are the people with whom we build community. And that's something all of us benefit from.

These days *having* good neighbors and *being* a good neighbor is more important than ever. Our sense of community is frayed, divided, and broken. We have political, economic, and

social divisions. Some leaders are actively engaged in breaking institutions to gain more power; others are co-opted by the lure of wealth; and the rest struggle to offer solutions. We have fragmented information ecosystems that inflate our passions and align with partisan purposes. We have social media algorithms that manipulate our interests and provide misinformation with zero vetting. All these things increase our sense of isolation and fear and work against the experience of community.

So how can we move away from what isn't working? Without giving up our convictions or betraying our values, how can we regain our connection to each other? It seems to me that having good neighbors and being a good neighbor is part of the answer. When we develop a network of relationships in and around the places we live, we don't have to go through life all alone. When we act in good faith toward each other, we begin to create community. And, according to Jesus, community is one of the most important ways in which we see God's presence in the world.

The Kingdom of God

In Mark 1:14–15 we're introduced to an important idea that we must know if we're going to understand what Jesus is up to. The phrase in New Testament Greek is *hē basileia tou theou*, which can be translated as the "kingdom or empire of God." We know from the opening line (1:1) that Jesus is "Christ" (anointed by God) and that he is "God's Son" (sent as the Father's representative to show what God desires and intends for us). In 1:14–15 we read how this work begins: Jesus comes to Galilee, proclaiming God's good news that the time is fulfilled and that the kingdom of God has arrived. He tells people to stop what they're doing and believe it.

The idea of God's kingdom or empire seems far removed from our conceptions of what society ought to be like today. Jesus, however, uses the idea throughout Mark as an all-inclusive term. We should think of it as the tagline or slogan for all his work and teaching. While we will need to navigate the implications of the term's ancient conceptions of power and social relations, when Jesus speaks of God's kingdom he calls it good news. He proclaims that through his work God's presence, intention, and purpose has come among the people of Galilee and Judea. Additionally, we

should not forget that God's kingdom stands in contrast to and in tension with the kingdom of Herod and the empire of Rome.

As we continue reading, we'll see how Jesus further explains and expands upon the meaning and significance of *hē basileia tou theou*. It will include theological teaching, healing, feeding, friendship, restoring relationships, and inviting others to join a network of like-minded people. There are stories about all these things throughout Mark's Gospel. For now, we should notice that when Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, he is describing community—being good neighbors to one another.

Another example of this facet of Jesus's work is found in a related passage where Jesus is teaching about the purpose of the Scripture, who God is, and what God wants from us (12:28–34). When a scribe asks Jesus which commandment is the most important one of all, Jesus replies by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18. People are to love God and neighbors with everything they have.

Welcome to the Neighborhood

The conclusion of the conversation between Jesus and the scribe points toward a good result and a divine promise. Just as Jesus reveals in Galilee and Jerusalem, when we focus our time, effort, and energy on loving God and loving our neighbors, something blessed begins to appear among us.

Today we learn that Jesus has expectations for his followers: We are to create the kind of community that God desires. This community (God's kingdom) isn't tied to a land, a property, or a place. It is for all people, for anyone who wishes to take part. It is rooted in biblical values and tradition: in the commandments of Moses, and in our ability to interpret them well and then live according to their teachings. It is founded on love—the love of God for us, and our love for God and each other.

I wonder what would happen if we took these values as our own. I wonder what would happen if we expected and demanded that our leaders did the same. What if we looked around and were aware of all the people who live near us? What if we thought of everyone as worthy and deserving of love?

I wonder what would happen if we expressed this love by looking after each other more. What if we crossed the street to talk in each other's driveways? What if we lifted boxes or raked leaves or carried groceries for others? What if we gave rides to school and looked after neighbors' children?

As we do these things, there is a promise. Our sense of community will be stronger. We will have better neighbors. We will *be* better neighbors. And as we do these things, we will show ourselves to be following Jesus's example of revealing God's presence in the world.

Prayer

Lord, teach me to welcome others and be a good neighbor to all. Amen.

Reflection

What does being a good neighbor look like for you?

4
Following

Mark 1:16–20

Cracks

I recently saw a video taken at the pond in a local park. It was late winter, so the pond was mostly solid ice, but two open places remained. Between these, the ice had cracked, and a long, jagged space connected the two patches of open water. The focus, however, wasn't on the icy water. Instead, the video zoomed in on a flock of ducks swimming around in one of the open spaces. Before too long, one duck found the crack and began to swim down it, quacking loudly to all the others. A nearby duck heard and followed. A third one followed, and then another. Before long, all the ducks—about fifty of them—were swimming in a single line down the small break. Then, one by one, they popped out in the second area of open water.

Many weeks, when we turn on the news, we see hard things. Whenever we think about the challenges all of us face, it takes

energy and focus. It wears us down. That was how my week was going. But then I saw the ducks, and they made me smile. I played the video again, three or four times. Each time, I stared at the ducks calling to each other, swimming purposefully through melting snow and icy waters. They used that little crack to find a way. And suddenly I realized that I was witnessing something important.

Jesus's Invitation

Mark 1:16–20 describes another day when Jesus is beside some water. Mark does not tell us the time of year, but I imagine it is springtime and Jesus has woken up early to hike through the hills to find a quiet place to pray. On the morning breeze, he may hear ducks in the distance, calling out as they paddle on the quiet waters of the Sea of Galilee. I picture Jesus finishing his prayer and coming down to walk along the shore, finding his way past brackish water and smells of seaweed to the boats and docks at Capernaum. Above him, gulls flap and scream, sharp eyes open for a stray morsel of sardines, catfish, or tilapia. I can imagine Jesus pausing to watch them, remembering how God's Spirit had appeared, descending like a dove from the heavenly sky.

At this moment, Jesus stands at the beginning of his life's work to reveal the reign of God—first in Capernaum, then throughout Galilee, and eventually in Jerusalem. He walks with a purpose, aware of fishermen off-loading their boats, paying tolls at the tax booth, then taking the catch to market. These are men he may have known or met earlier. He greets Andrew and then Simon, and asks about his wife's mother. A little farther on, Jesus says hello to James and John, their father Zebedee, and all the hired men. Confidently, Jesus asks them to join his work. "Follow me," he says, "and I will make you fishers of people" (1:17).

A World Reimagined

When Jesus extends the invitation to follow, he is inviting the fishermen to join his work of teaching, healing, casting out evil spirits, feeding and clothing, and inviting people to imagine a new world where God is fully present in everyone's lives and relationships. When Mark tells us in the opening line that Jesus is God's Son, the Savior, who brings good news—this is what it looks like.

We should understand that in Jesus's day society was designed to be inequitable. It was organized to benefit a very few—local wealthy and elite who were increasingly integrated into systems and networks of imperial Roman power. For this reason, most people lived on the edge of subsistence and at times struggled to have enough. Besides the risks they all shared from crop diseases, pests, and drought, agricultural communities in Galilee were also weighed down by the taxes, tolls, and demands from emperors, local rulers, and their representatives.

When Jesus tells his parables about God's kingdom being like seeds in good soil or like a small mustard seed that grows large enough that every bird can roost in it, food and housing security are real, tangible needs in his community. When Jesus heals individuals and feeds crowds, he is addressing those needs as he sees them. Jesus, I am sure, wasn't the only one who could identify these problems. This is why the fishermen are ready to follow when he calls. They go immediately. We'll see in the following chapters that there are others who hear and appreciate what Jesus is proclaiming. They, too, will follow.

Called to Follow

It seems to me that Jesus's invitation to the fishermen is a good one for us as well. He knows that working together is better than working alone. He is interested in addressing real needs and solving problems. His proclamation that God's kingdom has arrived is not only an affirmation of his baptismal vision but also a theological message with tangible, practical results. That is why he is well received by the disciples, the crowds, and others. From this moment, Jesus will be creating a network of like-minded people in towns and villages across Galilee. Eventually he will go as far as Jerusalem. Finally, through Mark's narrative, the invitation to join him is offered to us.

From my perspective, none of us are all that different from Andrew and Simon, James and John, or others whom Jesus calls. We work hard; we love our families; we pray for a world that's better than it is right now. We wonder what we can do to thaw the frozen places—in our lives, in our souls, in our relationships, and in the world around us.

Usually, we think of cracks in a negative way: They are broken and dangerous places; if they split or grow larger, we might fall in. We sometimes describe ourselves, our relationships, our neighborhoods, or the society we live in as cracked or broken. But what if there's another way? What if—like ducks on a winter pond—we begin to think of cracks as opportunities? What if the cracks we notice in our world are places where God is speaking to us? What if, when we see these cracks, we call out to our families, friends, and neighbors to follow?

In this metaphor, we may not immediately experience the change we seek. But if we flock together, communicate well, wait for and help the stragglers, a crack can be the place where we build a new community. Where we find new paths to open water. Where we wait for spring, which will eventually come.

Prayer

God of new life, teach us to create communities of love wherever we are. Amen.

Reflection

What "cracks" do you see in your community, and how is God calling you to navigate them?

The First Sunday in Lent

The first scenes in Mark's Gospel introduce us to Jesus, God's Son and *Christos* (Anointed One). Mark believes this is good news for us. Jesus has a divine vision in which God calls him "Beloved"—which motivates his work to teach, heal, cast out evil, oppose oppression, and create a community of like-minded neighbors. Mark's Jesus can serve as an example for our own efforts to address isolation, fragmentation, and lack of purpose in our lives and in the world around us. If you'd like to think more deeply on the chapters from the previous week, the following questions can be used individually or for group discussion.

1. Who has loved you, and how did they show it?
2. How have you experienced God's love, and how has it changed you?
3. What petitions are you making of God right now?
4. What is God's Spirit motivating you to do?
5. Who are your neighbors now, and what do they do that you appreciate?
6. What does being a good neighbor look like for you?
7. Where are the "frozen" places in your life or community right now?
8. Where might cracks be breaking open, and who can join you in addressing them?