

The Visitor - February 2021



A Publication of St. James Lutheran Church, 4425 South Jackson Rd. Jackson MI 49201 (517) 782-8297
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February



Dear St. James,

We are about to enter the liturgical season of Lent again. It was during Lent of last year when the world declared a pandemic and we moved from in-person worship to virtual worship to keep us safe. We did not foresee that we would still be in this place a year later, but we continue our virtual worship as do many congregations across the world.



We invite you to join us during Lent on **Wednesday evenings for virtual worship at 7pm** by going to our Facebook page, [Facebook.com/stjameslutheranchurch](https://www.facebook.com/stjameslutheranchurch), or if you wait just a bit, you can find it on our web-page at Stjameslutheran.com. We begin on **February 17, Ash Wednesday, at 7pm.**

Following that, each week, we will meet for Evening Prayers at the same time. I am very excited as our time together on Wednesday evenings will highlight some of our members

coming to us from their homes portraying the biblical characters of the Apostle John, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Peter, and Mary Magdalene.

During this season of spiritual reflection, repentance, and preparation, let us remember this season is a time of hope; hope as we anticipate Easter morning and new life in Christ, and hope for the day when we will meet in person again when it is safe. Be well, be blessed, and be a blessing.

With much love,
 Pastor Martha

REMINDER

Please join us this Sunday morning, **January 31st at 10:30am** for our virtual congregational meeting. We need a quorum of at least 25 people to approve the budget. If we do not have a quorum our next meeting will be February 14th. Refer to your email for the link to the meeting. If you have trouble logging in on your computer you can call 947-207-1203, Phone Conference ID 70175461#.

EDUCATION

THURSDAY BOOK STUDY

With Susan Thornton

The Thursday Study Group is meeting via Zoom. We are reading Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Other by Barbara Brown Taylor. In **February on the 4th at 1:30**, we will discuss chapters 9 and 10. These chapters cover the Evangelical Christian churches and the diversity of God the Creator. **March 4th** we will take a look at Chapter 11..The God You Didn't Make Up, Chapter 12...The Final Exam, and the Epilogue...Church of Common Ground. We are enjoying Barbara Brown Taylor so much that I have suggested using her book Learning to Walk in the Dark next. It seems like we are all walking in the dark through this Covid time. Maybe we will see sunshine by the time we are done and be able to meet together in person. If you are not on our class email, forward your email address to me at thorntonsl@aol.com. I will add you to the class list and you will receive an invitation to the zoom meeting the week before we meet. We will always meet on the first Thursday of the month at 1:30 pm. Susan Thornton

ADULT BIBLE STUDY

Led by Laura Trombley

We will continue our Lectionary Bible Study of the readings for each Sunday. A Microsoft Teams meeting invitation (a link) is being sent out weekly for anyone interested in joining on Sunday mornings at 10:05am.

Please have your bible handy, and we promise our time for study will remain under 45 minutes. The February study guides are included in this newsletter. If you have missed any of our previous bible studies feel free to go to our FaceBook page and watch them.

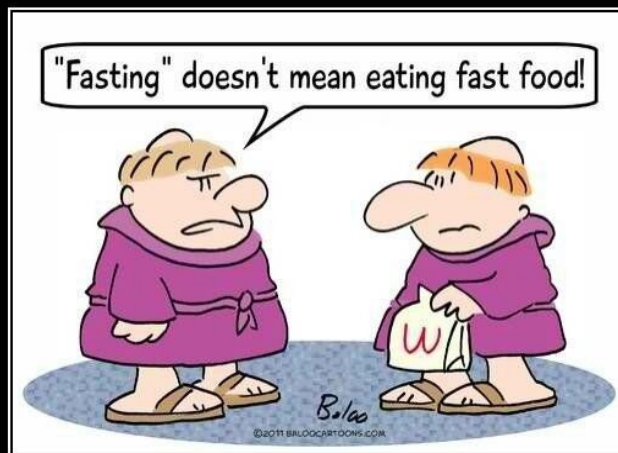


02/04 Zachary Laird
 02/05 Martha Porter-Reid
 02/17 Colin Niemi
 02/19 Chuck Thor
 02/27 Leah Alfred



02/16 Ken and Chris Zebarah (36)

JUST FOR FUN



Happy Ash Wednesday

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BIBLE STUDY FOR 2-7-2021

Daily Discipleship

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany (B) – Mark 1:29-39

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Serving*

Focus Question: *How might God call you to serve this week?*

word of life

“He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.” Mark 1:31 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:29-39

Imagine being in bed with a fever. Imagine your son-in-law bringing home four guests into your home, but you are too sick to serve as their host. Imagine one of those guests being Jesus. Imagine!

This story about Simon’s mother-in-law is an easy one to imagine. Jesus heals her, then takes her by the hand and lifts her up. What a tender image. Even though she literally stood up, there is a sense of being lifted up emotionally which comes with being healed.

Mark describes this woman leaving her sickbed after her fever is gone and serving her guests. Simon’s mother-in-law more than likely had an attitude of serving *before* her illness, but her gratitude at being healed overflows into her care for others.

1. *How do you imagine the conversation around their table?*
2. *Describe a situation in your own life where someone rose off a sickbed and began serving.*

For Jesus, his day is not done. At sundown, sick people and those possessed with demons are brought to the house. In fact, the whole city gathers around the door. Imagine a whole city waiting to be restored to health – at your door. Jesus does not have a 9-to-5 job. His ministry continues into the evening hours as he models the same servant attitude as Simon’s mother-in-law.

3. *Do you think all those who came to be healed wanted to be disciples of Jesus? Why or why not?*

Note how the demons know Jesus. What a contrast to others who have such difficulty discerning the identity of Jesus. Yet Jesus would not let the demons speak.

4. *Why do you think Jesus kept the demons silent?*

There is a consistency between the teaching of Jesus and his living. He does not merely speak of servanthood in his teaching, but exemplifies the life of a servant.

5. *How would you define a serving attitude?*

The next day, Jesus gets up early before dark and goes to a deserted place for prayer. Serving can be exhausting and we can forget the reason we serve. Prayer puts it back in perspective.

6. *Why would Jesus need to find a deserted place for prayer?*

But Simon and his companions hunt him down. You can hear panic in the voices of the disciples, “Everyone is searching for you.” (Mark 1:37 NRSV) But Jesus does not succumb to crowd pressure. Instead, he remains clear about his mission from God. His calling would take him many other places, including the cross, in order to proclaim good news.

7. *What might we learn from Jesus about setting priorities?*

word among us

The new member's class ended with each person sharing possible ways he or she would like to serve the congregation. Each person talked about gifts and areas of interest. When it was Barry's turn, he announced, "I want to be the last person out of the church door." Everyone chuckled.

Barry explained, "I want to turn the lights off and put tables away after receptions and gatherings. Honestly, I will make sure the last dish gets washed, dried, and put away. I will even take out the trash. Sure, I can read lessons at worship. I can teach. But what I really want is to serve by being the last person out the door when the job is done."

1. *What did Barry mean when he said he wanted "to be the last person out the door"?*
2. *Have you ever found yourself in that role? If so, describe how you felt about that role.*
3. *What brings you joy in serving?*

Jesus was often busy serving and helping others, but he also took time out for prayer, even if it meant getting up early in the morning and finding a deserted place. Take a moment and imagine a deserted place. Once that image is locked in your mind, take a deep breath and offer a prayer. Pause and allow God to still your spirit.

4. *Describe an actual deserted place in your neighborhood, church, or home which might be appropriate for prayer.*
5. *Are there other ways to find a deserted place for prayer in the midst of your day?*

It is possible to serve more hours than our bodies will allow, leaving us exhausted, ill-tempered, and resentful. After a long day, Jesus was surrounded by the whole city at his doorstep waiting to be healed. Is it any wonder he got up early and found a deserted place? Even that prayer time was interrupted by his own disciples. They wanted him to know that everyone was searching for him.

6. *How do you balance serving others and prayer?*
7. *How does prayer help us in our serving?*

Sometimes we need a break from our usual ways of serving. Discern God's call to mission in your own life. Consider how God might be calling you to use untapped gifts or honed skills. Perhaps, God is calling you to go out on a limb and tackle a new challenge, using every ounce of life experience, skill, and gift you can muster.

8. *How does God want you to be part of God's mission?*
9. *What new skills might you develop as you serve?*
10. *How might God be calling you to serve?*

Prayer

Christ, instill in my heart an attitude of serving.

Dig Deeper

John 13:1-20

last word

Look for a new way to serve in the coming week.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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BIBLE STUDY FOR 2-14-20201

Daily Discipleship

Transfiguration (B) – Mark 9:2-9

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Listening to Jesus*

Focus Question: *How does a disciple listen to Jesus?*

word of life

“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.” Mark 9:7 (NRSV)

Read Mark 9:2-9 aloud.

1. *As the verses are read aloud, listen closely for familiar phrases. What do you hear?*

The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is the closing “book-end” to the season of Epiphany. Just as the season begins with the heavens opening and a voice proclaiming Jesus as God’s Beloved at his baptism, this season of revelation – Epiphany – concludes with a similar divine revelation and the heavenly voice again revealing Jesus as God’s Son, the Beloved.

The location of the story is significant. Jesus and three of his disciples go up a high mountain apart, by themselves (vs. 2). In the cosmology of ancient Israel, the mountains stood as pillars holding up the dome of the sky. The mountain was symbolically the place of God’s revelation. Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34). It is the place where God’s voice is heard.

As they are on the mountaintop, Jesus is transfigured; his appearance becomes dazzling white. Clearly, the disciples are experiencing a mountaintop moment!

2. *Have you ever had a “mountaintop moment?” Describe it.*

The disciples then see two other figures – Moses and Elijah. Both were expected to return as a sign of the coming Messiah. Both represent the key elements of the Old Testament: Moses, the giver of the Law, the author of the first five books of Scripture; and Elijah, the great prophet taken by a whirlwind into heaven. And here they are, both are talking with Jesus. The law and the prophets are being fulfilled in Jesus.

What is a person to do in the midst of such terrifying splendor? Peter had an idea: build three dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Dear Peter! He always wants to *do* something. One could almost imagine Peter if he were here today wanting to take a photo of the event to remember it. The writer of Mark is almost apologetic for Peter’s words: “he did not know what to say, for they were terrified” (vs. 6).

3. *How do we try to “capture” mountaintop moments?*

A voice is then heard. The words echo the words spoken at Jesus’ baptism; but there are two differences. The words spoken at the baptism were directed to Jesus: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased.” (Mark 1:11 NRSV) In contrast, on the mountain of the Transfiguration, the words are spoken to the disciples: “This is my Son, the Beloved” (Mark 9:7 NRSV). And then another phrase is added, “Listen to him!” (Mark 9:7)

What are the disciples to do in the presence of Jesus, God’s Beloved? Listen! The verb tense of the word is a present imperative, implying a continuing action: “Keep on listening to him.” It is a word to be heard by disciples of every place and time. Keep on listening to Jesus!

word among us

The annual congregational meeting was spirited. A divisive issue was before the gathered group, with seemingly no resolution. Speaker after speaker raised issues and concerns; each point of view was presented more passionately than the previous one. Emotions were high; tension was mounting.

1. *Does this scenario sound familiar?*
2. *How do you deal with differences in your congregation?*

Quietly, an older man sitting in the back of the room slowly rose to his feet. He didn't raise his hand; he didn't need to. He was a patriarch in the church, a faithful disciple who had shown his love for his church and his Lord in a life of quiet service. His stately demeanor commanded the group's attention. "Listen," he began, "Listen to what you are saying and doing to one another. Is this what we are called to be as followers of Jesus?" He spoke softly in simple phrases, reminding the members of their calling and mission. Then he quietly sat down.

3. *Have you experienced a person of quiet authority? Describe.*

An uncomfortable silence followed his words. Finally, someone said, "Let's pray about it and try to hear what God is calling us as a congregation to do." A moment of silent prayer was followed by someone leading the group in the praying the Lord's Prayer. After the "Amen" was spoken in unison, the president of the congregation suggested, "Let's begin the conversation again. Now I think we're ready to listen to each other's point of view."

4. *Why was the congregation ready to listen after a time of prayer?*
5. *What difference does prayer make?*

Several years ago, a Wall Street financial agency used the catch phrase in their ad campaign, "When we (the agency) talk, people listen." If only we would apply that phrase to ourselves and our discipleship. How often do we charge into decisions and situations without taking time to listen, to pray, and to discern God's presence and will? How often do we hurriedly rush to *do* something without allowing time to hear another's point of view? Like Peter in our gospel story, we so readily rush into decisions, not realizing the power and presence of Christ in our midst, not seeking clarity from God as to what we should be doing.

6. *What are some ways to listen to Jesus?*

The heavenly voice speaks to us now just as it did on the Mount of Transfiguration: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Prayer

Holy and gracious Lord, help us, in all of life's moments, to listen to you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Romans 10:14-17

last word

Each day this week,
find ways
to listen to God.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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Transfiguration (B) Page 2 of 2

BIBLE STUDY FOR 2-21-2021

Daily Discipleship

First Sunday in Lent (B) – Mark 1:9-15

The Path of Discipleship: *Into the Wilderness*

Focus Question: *What temptations will you face this week?*

word of life

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” Mark 1:12 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:9-15

Once more the Gospel of Mark keeps the story simple. There are not a lot of details, adjectives and adverbs. Hear the urgency of this story. Mark is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The voice at baptism is a clear one. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11 NRSV) All seems well as Jesus is launched into ministry and mission. The baptism of Jesus is a pinnacle experience. But Jesus does not linger, pondering the moment and mingling with the crowd.

Instead the Spirit immediately drives him into the wilderness. The Greek word used as the verb is often used to describe expelling demons. The Spirit does not give Jesus a gentle nudge towards the wilderness, but instead compels him out.

Many times we imagine God’s Spirit as comforting and encouraging. It is a jolt to realize the Spirit of God drives and pushes Jesus into a time of testing in the wilderness.

1. *Why do you think the Spirit drives Jesus to experience a time of testing?*
2. *What is the significance of the sequence of the baptism of Jesus followed by his time in the wilderness?*

There is an obvious connection between the forty days of Jesus in the wilderness and the freed slaves who spent forty years in the wilderness following the exodus. For those freed from slavery in Egypt, the forty years in the wilderness became formative and instrumental as they discovered new meaning for their identity as God’s people, chosen for purpose and blessing. It was a critical time of being tested and shaped by God. Likewise, Jesus is also being formed and tested.

3. *How might this experience in the wilderness have helped to shape the identity of Jesus?*

Unlike the descriptions of the temptation stories in Matthew and Luke, Mark does not elaborate on the types or the precise number of temptations. It seems important enough to mention, but Mark doesn’t spend time or energy on this story. Onward with the mission of Jesus!

4. *Why do you believe Mark is so brief in his description?*
5. *How important is it for you to know the type of temptations Jesus faced?*

Mark is the only Gospel to mention angels waiting on Jesus. How precious for us to observe not only the struggles and temptations of Jesus, but also the tenderness and care of the angels. Jesus was not alone in the wilderness.

6. *Take a moment to imagine this scene. How might the angels have cared for him?*
7. *What might we learn from this passage?*

word among us

The pastor gathered with the confirmation class for the weekly lesson. Someone read the temptation text from the Gospel of Mark. The pastor slowly asked, “Do you understand what a *temptation* is?” The class quickly nodded their heads. The pastor continued, “Are there temptations at your school?” The class nodded their heads vigorously.

The pastor asked one more question. “What are some of the temptations at your school?” Immediately, the class became quiet. All eyes looked downward. There was a stillness that clouded the room. Dare the temptations even be mentioned? Would this discussion lead to confession of times when temptations had not been resisted?

The pastor could only imagine what temptations were so horrible to shut down the group. What tempts twelve and thirteen-year-olds? Slowly and after some urging, each began to talk about real issues facing a middle-school student on a daily basis – drugs, mean-spiritedness, cheating, lying, cutting class, jealousy, clichés. There were those who urged classmates to act like “big shots” by putting others down. Others tried to persuade their friends to stop studying and begin failing classes. What did school really matter? Peer pressure was intense.

The pastor listened to their stories, realizing more temptations waited each person in high school and throughout life. It was not too early to identify temptations and discern the ways to deal with temptations, trusting in the Spirit’s guidance and protection.

1. *What are your daily temptations?*
2. *Are there more temptations facing any particular generation (or age group)?*
3. *For you personally, were there less or more temptations when you were younger?*

A surprising feature of this week’s text is the Spirit’s role in driving Jesus to the wilderness. It is the Spirit who sends Jesus to a time of temptation. Many times we understand the Spirit as a comforter - not the one to stir us.

4. *Describe a time when you felt the Spirit stirring and testing you.*
5. *How have you grown spiritually through difficult times and testing?*

The story of the temptation of Jesus is typically read in congregations on the first Sunday of Lent, a season lasting forty days. Hopefully, the forty days of Lent will provide you with an opportunity for prayer and reflection. What draws you from God? Lent is a time to change ways and face a new direction, aligning with Christ.

6. *Toward what path of discipleship is the Spirit leading you?*
7. *How might you set aside Lent to become more meaningful?*

Prayer

Mighty Spirit, lead us to the wilderness, but do not let us go. Help us learn through the times of testing to follow Christ. Amen

Dig Deeper

Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11

last word

This week identify three temptations
and pray for God’s Spirit
to help you. .



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BIBLE STUDY FOR 2-28-2021

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday in Lent (B) – Mark 8:31-38

The Path of Discipleship: *Beyond Oneself*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus?*

word of life

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Mark 8:34 (NRSV)

Read Mark 8:31-38

It is important to keep this passage in its context. Thus, take a moment to read the previous verses found in Mark 8:27-30. Jesus asks the disciples what people are saying about him. Then Jesus directly asks the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29 NRSV) It is a shining moment for Peter because he answers correctly. He declares Jesus to be the Messiah. This is Peter’s great declaration of faith.

Immediately following this confession of faith, Jesus begins to talk about his pending death and resurrection. It is as if the disciples are mature enough in faith to hear this critical development unfolding in the coming weeks. But Peter is not ready for such news. Peter imagines something different for the future of Jesus. No doubt Peter has good intentions as he tries to persuade Jesus that he does not have to die. Jesus speaks sternly to Peter. In just a few verses, Peter goes from star student to being called “Satan.”

1. *Why would the news of the death of Jesus have been difficult for Peter to hear?*
2. *Why was Jesus so tough on Peter?*

Jesus turns to the crowd and sets a standard for following him. It is going to take commitment and sacrifice. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34 NRSV) These are not popular words. Carrying a cross in the first century world of Palestine would have meant a death sentence. This image of a cross would have been most perplexing for the listeners. What would a cross have to do with following Jesus? It is important to keep in mind that Jesus is predicting his death, so his audience would not have the crucifixion as a frame of reference.

3. *What might have been the response of the crowd?*
4. *How do you imagine Peter and the disciples responding to these words?*

In reality, who wants to deny themselves? Who wants to sacrifice? This is not a positive marketing strategy. Yet the way of Jesus is not an easy path. Jesus is calling followers to not think of themselves or human things. Instead, Jesus requests followers to set their mind on divine things.

Following Christ is not for those who are undecided or lukewarm. Jesus is calling for a clear commitment. Jesus warns followers not to be ashamed of him. He turns things upside down. Those who cling to their life and possessions will certainly lose it. Those who lose their life will gain it.

5. *What is Jesus trying to say in this passage?*
6. *What are other ways of explaining the message of Jesus in this passage?*

word among us

It is only the second week in the season of Lent, but already the message from Jesus is getting intense. Jesus is describing the demands of discipleship. It is not an easy path, but one filled with sacrifice, suffering and service.

1. *Do you believe more people would follow Jesus if he would make it easier? Why?*
2. *What is lost if it becomes too easy to follow Jesus?*

We know Jesus is not just preaching idle words. Jesus is going to pick up a cross and die. Jesus means what he says. The way of the cross is not a theory. This is a radical calling, placing us against a society that encourages serving ourselves first.

3. *How does the teaching of Jesus conflict with some aspects of modern society?*

Jesus offers a radically different approach. With bold words, Jesus calls for a new humanity, born as people follow the ways of Christ and deny themselves. It is clear the path of discipleship is not going to be on flat ground and protected by shade. Instead, the path includes sacrifice and suffering.

4. *This session is called “Beyond Oneself.” What does that phrase mean as it relates to the words of Jesus?*

Consider your own life. Reflect how your understanding about being a disciple of Jesus has changed over the years.

5. *What is the hardest thing about following Christ?*
6. *What keeps you from being complacent and relaxed about this radical call?*

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he challenges the reader, “The cross is laid on every Christian.... As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.” Bonhoeffer continually warns followers of Jesus to not rely on a false understanding of a cheap grace given by God.

When we pick up our cross, automatically there is a shift as we open our hands and spirits to lift the cross. In order to make room to carry the cross, we put something else down, including hatred, anger, pride and other burdens.

7. *What are you being asked to put down in order to carry the cross?*

Prayer

Gracious God, expand my vision to see things from your perspective. Give me courage and strength to pick up a cross and follow you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Mark 15:21-32

last word

Draw a cross on a paper.

In each quadrant,

write something to let go

so you can follow Christ more fully.



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Rev. Martha Porter-Reid
 Anna Pedrotte
 Tim Ernst
 Jim Skrocki
 Jan Lehman and Robin Vogel
 Pastor
 Parish Administrator
 Tech Director
 Organist
 Custodians

Staff Listing:

Sundays at 9:30 a.m. – Worship Service with Holy Communion

Worship with us:

“We are a grace-centered family of faith that seeks to know Christ and make Him known.”

St. James Lutheran Church
4425 South Jackson Rd.
Jackson, MI 49201



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