



LENT RESOURCES 2018

Week 3 – Identity revealed

Love is at the heart of the Jesus story. In Mark 9:7, God's voice from heaven is heard saying: 'This is my Son, and I love him. Listen to him!' These words are similar to the words heard at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11).

In John 3:16 we read: 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.' God sent Jesus to show us his love.

Jesus also promises to love us. He said, 'Anyone who has my commands and obeys them loves me. My Father will love the one who loves me. I too will love them. And I will show myself to them' (John 14:21). We show our love for God by following Jesus and living God's way, instead of living to please ourselves.

Jesus is revealed as the 'Messiah' – the Saviour people had been expecting. They were expecting a conquering king who would save them from Roman rule, just like Moses had led them out of captivity in Egypt. Jesus surprised them. He wasn't what they expected.

As you read the Bible passages and prayer story this next week, think about how God shows his love to people. How does God show his love and care to you, and to others through you?

READ: MARK CHAPTERS 7-9

Key verses

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

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. Still others say one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Mark 8:27-29

THINK

1. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" When asked, some people today say Jesus was just a good man, or a prophet. What would you say if he asked you the same question?

2. Reading the stories about Jesus' miracles in Mark's Gospel, which story stands out most from your perspective and why?

3. In Mark chapters 7-9 we read about Jesus healing people. Notice how every healing is different. Jesus doesn't use a formula - he treats each person as an individual. What are the differences in the healing stories?

4. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must say no to themselves. They must pick up their cross and follow me' (Mark 8:34)? This Bible passage helps to explain: 'Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering' (Romans 12:1, *The Message*).

5. In Mark 9:24 we read about a father who came to ask Jesus to heal his son. He wanted to believe Jesus could help and said, 'I do believe! Help me overcome my unbelief!' Do you find it difficult to believe that Jesus is God's Son? What evidence and experience do you have to share with others?

LIFE LESSONS

1. God speaks to each of us in different ways. How does God speak to you?

2. Which of the prison stories you have read so far stands out most for you and why?

3. How has God answered your prayers recently?

4. In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, God makes a promise:

“I know the plans I have for you,” announces the LORD. “I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come. Then you will call out to me. You will come and pray to me. And I will listen to you. When you look for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be found by you,” announces the LORD.’ (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Many people in prison and out of prison find encouragement from these verses. It is as if God is speaking these words today to each of us personally. How do you respond to this promise?

LOOK AHEAD

We will see that Jesus makes enemies of many of the rich and powerful people in Jerusalem. For many of the people he met face to face, it was decision time: would they follow him or not?

As we follow the story of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is heading to Jerusalem and his execution. There are surprises along the way in how he reacts. See who the important people are in Jesus’ opinion. Find out what Jesus’ top priority is in living God’s way.

3 Changed on the inside

From a young age, Shane started to burgle houses and steal cars. He stabbed people and sold drugs. Soon he was on the run for kidnapping and attempted murder.

Shane eventually got caught and was put in prison, but his incarceration did little to stem his rebellion. His hatred of authority saw him stab two prison officers after he wasn't allowed to use the prison gym. It sparked a riot.

His out-of-control behaviour quickly saw him transferred to a high security prison. Even then he needed further locking up, and was placed within a close supervision system.

'They felt I was a danger to everybody,' Shane says. 'They had to feed me through a hatch in the door because they couldn't have physical contact with me.'

He's real!

Then Shane met Robert, who had been imprisoned for murder, but had since become a Christian. 'He was saying a load of things that sounded mad to me,' says Shane, 'but the one thing that stuck in my mind was when he said, "I've been in prison for 15 years and am probably never getting out - but I'm free." I used to think, "What's he on about?"'

Shane felt an urge to start writing to Robert, and began reading the Bible that was in his cell. He was then

moved to another prison, where a minister invited him to an Alpha course.

‘I said, “Yeah, put my name down.” I was mostly interested in getting the chocolate biscuits and having debates.’

It was about halfway through doing Alpha that Shane experienced the presence of God for the first time. ‘I said, “Jesus, I know you died on a cross for me. I don’t like who I am... please forgive me.” I started to feel tears coming into my eyes. I tried to hold it back. But it rose up, until suddenly I began crying my eyes out. I hadn’t cried in years. I cried for about five minutes, and I could feel a weight being lifted off me,’ Shane remembers. ‘In that split second I knew it was real. I knew God existed, I knew Jesus had touched me and that I was going to live for him forever.’

Amazing love

Shane’s behaviour changed so much that within weeks he went from being in permanent segregation to getting a trusted job in the prison chaplaincy. He no longer saw the prison officers as the enemy.

‘Not long after all this, I was lying on my bed in my cell. All the bad things I’d done to people flicked through my head and all the times I’d upset people – and I started crying. It occurred to me that for many years I’d been aggressive towards people without even realising it.’

Almost exactly a year after the Alpha day, Shane was freed from prison. He started going to church where, seven months later, he met his future wife, Sam.

The couple got married in church in October 2008, with 100 family and friends celebrating with them.

‘Jesus has changed my life,’ Shane says. ‘Jesus has shown me how to love and how to forgive.’

Story contributed by Alpha. Used with permission.



MARK 7:14-16,21-23

‘Again Jesus called the crowd to him. He said, “Listen to me, everyone. Understand this. Nothing outside of a person can make them ‘unclean’ by going into them. It is what comes out of them that makes them ‘unclean’.

Evil thoughts come from the inside, from a person’s heart. So do sexual sins, stealing and murder. Adultery, greed, hate and cheating come from a person’s heart too. So do desires that are not pure, and wanting what belongs to others. And so do telling lies about others and being proud and being foolish. All these evil things come from inside a person and make them ‘unclean.’”



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Someone once wrote to the Christian Enquiry Agency asking what meat Christians can eat. Jesus’ words in today’s reading are good news for meat-eaters! It’s what we *do* that puts a barrier between us and God, not what we eat. The good news is, Jesus’ death on the cross destroyed the barrier. If we ask, Jesus can forgive all the wrong we’ve ever done and make us clean.





Prayer

This prayer was written by King David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, then arranged for Bathsheba's husband to be killed:

'Wash me, then I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear you say, "Your sins are forgiven."

That will bring me joy and gladness.

Let the body you have broken be glad.

Take away all my sins.

***Wipe away all the evil things I've done.'* (Psalm 51:7-9)**

Amen.



**"Come. Let us settle this matter,"
says the LORD.**

**"Even though your sins are bright red,
they will be as white as snow.**

**Even though they are deep red,
they will be white like wool.'**

ISAIAH 1:18

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