



Praying the Scriptures

with

The gospel according to Mark

Prayers for December

Praying the Scriptures with the gospel according to Mark

Introduction

As part of our year's focus on prayer we are taking time this month to *pray the scriptures*. That means to mindfully and prayerfully read our Bibles, allowing God to speak to us. It's easy for much of our prayer life to revolve around us talking to God; by praying the scriptures we allow *God to speak to us*.

Next year in the Anglican calendar we will be using the gospel of Mark in our readings Sunday by Sunday. Before those readings begin, we invite you to spend a month diving into the wonderful world of Mark, and to savour his telling of the story of the Good News of Jesus (see *Mark 1:14*).

Mark doesn't contain anything about the birth of Jesus at all, which might make it a strange choice for Advent. In this gospel, Jesus' incarnation is all about God's reaching down to us in the life, teaching and saving work of his Son. As we prepare for Christmas, with all the risks of being sucked into its commercialism and glitz, it's good to remind ourselves that the purpose of Jesus' birth was what came next - the good news of God come to meet us in the joys and struggles of our everyday lives.

Mark is a short, succinct accessible Gospel – it contains lots of the raw material that the other gospel writers elaborate on. Only 16 chapters long and neatly divided into two sections of eight chapters divided by the key question *Who do they / you say I am?* - (see *Mark 8 v 27-29*)

If you'd like to get a bible commentary to help you get the most out of reading Mark, Tom Wright's commentary, *Mark for Everyone* is highly recommended, there are copies on the bookstall in St Mary's, or you can get it online from Eden books or a local Christian bookshop.

You can find a simple summary of the gospel at <http://biblehub.com/summary/mark/1.htm>

Why should I pray the scriptures – what is it?

Praying the scriptures is simply a way of allowing God to speak to you, sometimes deeply, through a particular passage, bible verse or story; it's a way for us to let the reading go from something passive to something dynamic by which God can speak into your life situation. You may also find it is a way that you can express your own feelings and prayers to God as you identify with people in the stories or where God prompts memories or responses of thanksgiving, appreciation, love and repentance as you allow God to speak to you through the living words on the page.

Praying the Scriptures as a family

If you are doing this activity as a family one way to involve children is to link it to the lighting of an advent candle and opening an advent calendar, then use a child friendly translation – like the Good News version. Why not make a simple cartoon framework and encourage children to create an ongoing pictorial cartoon of the gospel as you read it, adding a couple of pictures each day? Remember children are often very good at listening to and hearing from God. Allow space for God to

speak to you individually but also make space to hear from each other about what you feel God is saying to you.

How to read Mark's gospel in a month

Each of you will have different ways of reading a book like Mark in a month. One simple way to do this is to read the whole of chapter 1 on day 1. Then read roughly half a chapter every day – 31 readings.

You could use your own favourite translation or try a different translation each day using an online bible reading website like Bible Gateway or Bible Hub. Or you could try this version set out by Christianity Explored - www.christianityexplored.org/read-mark

How should I pray the scriptures? – a suggested pattern.

Preparation – take some quiet, reflective time, listen to some gentle worship music or focus on relaxed breathing – whatever works best for you to get yourself ready to listen to God.

It's a busy time of year, there are a lot of "to do lists" in our heads, but this is a time to come away from the busyness for a few minutes. When interruptions come at any point during the prayer time - either external or internal - just acknowledge them, set them to one side and return to the present moment.

You may find it helpful to have a visual or tactile focus – you could use a candle (an advent candle) or a cross such as a holding cross can also be a useful way of stilling yourself.

Pray – say a simple prayer to ask God to speak to you through the Word. You could use your own words or this...

Lord God, come to me / us this day. As I / we read this passage please open the scriptures to my head and my heart. Speak to me, challenge me, shape me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read the passage in full at least twice right through – out loud if at all possible. Notice the overall story of the passage, notice the themes and emphasis. Try not to come with too much of an analytical mind but rather enter deeply into the reading, immerse yourself in the feel and atmosphere of it.

Stop and take a few moments to let the reading sink in.

Pray the prayer again.

Then read the passage again slowly, one or two verses at a time. As you do this you might want to change your position to a more prayerful pose – kneeling or with your hands open to receive from God.

Take note - There may be phrases or words that stand out for you – note them in some way. This part of the praying and reading is dependent on you to set the pace and rhythm. If you find yourself rushing, just pause, go back and re-join the process.

You may want to write down anything particular that has stood out to you but again it might be helpful to try not to be too analytical. You might find it helpful to keep a small notebook for the month. Or to use art or pictures instead of words as a response or reminder of what you feel God is saying to you. But

resist the temptation to make this part over-busy. You are praying and listening – not doing a bible study. Do allow God space and time to cut in!

Pray - Finish either by reading the whole thing again, or by simply saying a short prayer thanking God for meeting with you this day.

You may wish to finish with a set prayer like the Lord's Prayer.



You may have noticed that we are building on several of the prayer themes we've already been using this year – the Lord's Prayer, simple set prayers, meditation and mindfulness, journaling, and art as prayer. Praying the Scriptures allows us to start to bring these strands together. Over the next few months we will continue to bring our prayer themes together, and in March we will conclude our year of prayer with a 24 hour prayer event. More news to come.