

St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church
Formation in Faith Lectionary
2018

February 4

Who is Jesus?

Mark 8:27-35

Jesus brings the disciples to Caesarea Philippi at the headwaters of the Jordan River, to ask them an important question. There, amid pagan temples celebrating the divine origin of the life-giving waters of the Jordan, Jesus asks them, "Who do you say that I am?" While Peter answers that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus then makes it clear that being the Messiah is going to mean something different than anyone expects.

Questions for Discussion:

Caesarea Philippi was an important place for pagan worship. The Greeks, Romans, and others had built temples there to thank the gods for giving them the waters of the Jordan River. After all, water makes it possible to live in the desert. Do you think it is important that Jesus brought the disciples there? Why do you think Jesus chose this place to ask his important question?

*Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"
How would you answer that question? Who you say Jesus is?
In what ways does your life reflect your answer to the question?*

The disciples report that the people seem to think Jesus is some kind of prophet. While Peter confesses Jesus is the Messiah, it is soon made clear that Peter misunderstands what this means. The Messiah is to suffer and die, and be raised again. What does Jesus say about being the messiah? Why do you think Jesus tells them not to tell anyone yet?

Peter is upset by the news that the messiah is to suffer and die. Why do you think Peter is upset? What does messiahship mean to him?

Jesus tells the disciples they must "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." What do you think it means to deny yourself and take up your cross? What would that mean for you in your life?

February 11

The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-8

Jesus takes his closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, up a tall mountain and is transfigured before them. As they watch in amazement, he shines as brightly as the sun, Moses and Elijah appear to speak with him, and again a voice from heaven proclaims him as the beloved Son of God. In this sublime yet fleeting moment, Jesus has revealed something important about God and humanity.

Questions for Discussion:

Jesus takes his three closest disciples up a high mountain by themselves, where they have a truly remarkable experience. Do you and your family take time to be alone with God? Have you ever had a profound spiritual experience? How did it make you feel?

As the disciples watch in amazement, Jesus is transfigured. He shines as brightly as the sun and his clothes become dazzling white. This has often been interpreted as revealing the glory of God. If we believe Jesus is fully God and fully human, what does this moment tell us about humanity?

The disciples see Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus. Both the Law (Moses and the Ten Commandments) and the Prophets (Elijah) are brought together in Jesus. How do you think it felt for the disciples to see these two great figures of their history standing with Jesus?

Peter offers to build three dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He seems to want to capture the moment and hold onto it. Have you ever tried to hold onto a beautiful experience? Does it usually work?

A voice from heaven proclaims that "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased, listen to him." Where else have we heard this great proclamation from heaven?

Often in the Gospels, Jesus tells the disciples not to tell anyone something has happened, at least not yet. Why does he not think people will understand?

February 18

Mary and Martha

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus visits the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary. While Martha is distracted by the work she has to do to keep the house and to welcome their guests, her sister Mary sits and listens to what Jesus is saying. When Martha comes to Jesus to complain that Mary is not helping her, Jesus gives an important lesson on the value of being with him.

Questions for Discussion:

As soon as Jesus and the disciples arrive in the village, Martha invites them into their home. Hospitality was an important value in the ancient world, and remains an important part of our Christian call. What do you think it meant to Martha to be able to welcome Jesus into her home? In what ways do we welcome Jesus into our lives and our homes?

Martha becomes angry that Mary is not helping her with the task of hosting their guests. Have you ever been angry that someone was not helping you with important work? Can you understand how Martha felt?

Mary chooses to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him. What ways do we have of listening to Jesus? How can we do to sit at his feet?

The Gospel tells us that Martha was distracted by her many tasks. Are there things that distract us from being with Jesus? What gets in the way of our spiritual life and enjoying the presence of God? Are there things that prevent us from participating more fully in the life of the church?

Jesus tells Martha that she is too worried and distracted, and that Mary has chosen the better part by taking the time to be with Jesus. As this season of Lent begins, what can we do to be less distracted by life and to spend more time with Jesus?

In Jesus' day, women were often not permitted to sit with the men and participate in their conversations. They would have been expected to stay with the women doing housework. What does it mean that Jesus breaks this pattern? What does it mean that he welcomes Mary to sit with him?

February 25

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus tells the Parable of the Prodigal Son, a story about a young man who abandons his father and wastes his inheritance foolishly in a foreign country. Now poor and alone, the foolish son returns to his father expecting to be made a lowly servant, but the father greets him with love, forgiveness, and great joy. The complaints of the older brother, and the father's response, serve as a powerful lesson in forgiveness and the love that we are to have for one another.

Questions for Discussion:

At the beginning of the story, the young man asks his father for his share of the inheritance. In many ways he is saying that he wishes his father were dead, so that he could gain his share of his family's wealth. How might the father feel about this request?

The young man wastes his inheritance on "dissolute living." The word "prodigal" means reckless, and wastefully extravagant. What gifts have you been given by God? What is your inheritance? How are you called to use the resources that God has given you?

Having spent everything he has, the son hires himself out to tend the pigs. Pigs were considered unclean in Jewish society, so this job was particularly degrading. Do you think this is why the son decided to return to his father?

The father runs to his son, showing great joy that he has returned. What response do you think the son was expecting from his father? Why do you think the father greets his son with such joy? What does this scene tell us about how God receives those who return to him?

The elder brother is angry that the father has treated the wicked son so well. Religious people are often angry when people thought to be "sinners" want to return to the Church, even though we are all sinners. What does this story tell us about greeting people who return for forgiveness?

Who do you think is God in this story? Which character are you?