

Gospel Matthew 1.29-39 Mark has written this along with last week's passage as all happening on the same day – quite a day! It may well be a literary device giving a glimpse of the ongoing nature of the effect of Jesus' ministry. In the same way his use of the word 'immediately' often in the gospel and the use of the present tense gives a dynamic feel to the way Mark tells us about Jesus. At the end of today's gospel it looks like he has many to minister to but refuses? Why do you think he does that? What might have been the consequences if he had not moved on?

Week beginning Sunday 12th February Epiphany 6

OT 2 Kings 5.1-14 Naaman is healed of leprosy. In the background there are institutions of slavery, edgy international relations, high and low status. What does this story tell us about receiving God's gifts?

Psalm 30 The psalm is chosen as a response to the OT lesson. How do you see this as a response that Naaman might have made? How might we respond when we are healed or delivered from a condition that alienates us from others?

NT 1 Corinthians 9.24-27 Paul uses a metaphor from elite sport to describe how seriously he takes his faith. Practice makes perfect. How might we apply that to our faith journey? Does it just mean attendance at worship? What else might it mean for you?

Gospel Mark 1 40-45 Leprosy probably refers to a whole variety of skin diseases, exclusion from society was common though. Sending the leper to the priest was a way of formally reinstating a person back into the community. Who are the people we can't touch in our society? How might we bring healing and social wholeness to them by our actions?

Week beginning Sunday 19th February Last Sunday after Epiphany - Transfiguration

OT 2 Kings 2.1-12 Elijah is taken up into heaven. Elijah is an archetypal prophet – he stands for the prophets in the vision of the Transfiguration. He was a champion for God who walked very closely with God. The idea in this passage is that he doesn't die but that God takes him, reminiscent of Enoch (Genesis 5.24). The sense of anticipation in the story is immense. Where have you experienced such anticipation yourself? Did it have a similarly 'high' ending?

Psalm 50.1-6 is a short portion of a much longer psalm which deals with issues to do with sacrifice and righteousness. This first part is an introduction of praise of God's power and Judgement. What links are there between this and the OT reading and the story of the Transfiguration?

NT 2 Corinthians 4.3-12 contains truths about us 'in Christ' e.g. about how God has shone in our hearts, about our weakness together with this glory (treasure in clay jars) and the way God's power sustains us in great adversity. What resonates with you and your experience? What does it mean to have this treasure?

Gospel Mark 9.2-9 Mark has told this story very baldly probably so that we are not guided by the response or reaction of the disciples. We are to make our own response. Try imagining the story. It has some dream-like qualities – how they know it is Moses or Elijah for example. There are lots of metaphors for the Jewish tradition (Law and Prophets), for God (light, cloud, voice). There are words we have heard in the baptism of Jesus story plus a command. As you picture all this and hear what is said how do you respond? How is this an entry into the 'holy'?

Ash Wednesday 22nd February 2012 (we will celebrate this on the previous Tuesday evening and early on Wednesday morning). We enter Lent with Shrove Tuesday (a time for being 'shriven' or absolved of guilt as we confess our sins) and enter a time of stripping off the things that cling to us through fasting in various ways and taken on some new spiritual discipline to deepen our life of faith as we approach the celebration of Holy Week and Easter.

OT Isaiah 58.1-12 False or true worship. Isaiah castigates people for going through the motions, using the forms without heart, as they approach God in worship. True worship makes a difference. Contemporary theologian John Hull talks about how the second of the two great commandments is not just like the first but is essentially the same as the first. Isaiah seems to bring this out in the second half of the passage? How does this passage challenge us? What might we be asked to do?

Psalm 51.1-17 is one of the great penitential poems of all time. It is originally linked with David's adultery with Bathsheba and the other associated sins. How does this psalm express the desire to be different? In what areas of your life do

you want to make lasting changes that will free you from the consequences of past actions or words?

NT 2 Corinthians 5.20b-6.10 The context is how everything has become a new creation in Christ following Christ's death and resurrection. Here Paul calls us to be reconciled to God. It is the right time. And he describes the challenge of discipleship. How do you respond – do you want a faith that brings you into challenging situations?

Gospel Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21 True piety in terms of almsgiving, fasting and our relationship to possessions (prayer has been omitted because we will deal with that on another occasion). Jesus raises the question each time about our motivation for almsgiving, for fasting. Is it to make us look good in other people's eyes? or is it between you and God? We can apply this wider and look at all sorts of actions that we do in family, among friends and at work? Why do we act this way – are we looking for affirmation or praise? Or is this the right thing to do without drawing attention to self?

Week beginning Sunday 26th February Lent 1 (first Sunday IN Lent)

OT Genesis 9.8-17 The Covenant with Noah. A covenant is a solemn binding agreement. The word 'all' is important in this passage in the light of recent natural disasters where many have died and there has been much destruction. How is this a story that we can find helpful in our reflection on natural disaster?

Psalms 25.1-10 the writer responds to God in terms of trust, desire to know God's ways and asking God to remember to be merciful. How does this psalm match any of your desires and feelings?

NT 1 Peter 3.18-22 Peter uses the metaphor of Noah's ark for baptism, salvation and the church. What do you think he is trying to say here? How does it affect you?

Gospel Mark 1.9-15 The filling of the Spirit at baptism, the wilderness and new purpose and ministry. Wilderness or desert has been an important part of human spirituality – stripping us of everything that does not matter and providing the silence we need to hear God. How has Australian wilderness been part of your spirituality? How does that help you resonate with Jesus here? How might you open yourself to God in Lent?

Notes and questions to ponder on the Sunday Lectionary Year B February 2012

How to use these notes

You can use these notes individually at home or in small groups as a basis for discussion (why not get some people together to do that?).

You can read them and ponder questions before coming to worship on Sunday as a way of preparing yourself. Or you can use the notes and questions to extend what you have heard on Sunday. (Or you can do both).

If you are looking at these on your own, try and spend at least 30 minutes reading the lessons and psalm and pondering the questions. You may find it easier to split the time over several days. In which case it will be helpful to read the Old Testament passage and the psalm in relation to each other – the psalm portion is chosen as a response to the Old Testament passage.

If you are discussing the readings in a group, appoint a time keeper for the evening just to keep you on track. You will find that an hour to and hour and a half will give you a good but necessarily not exhaustive discussion. If you find that one lesson keeps you occupied for the whole time that is fine.

Seasonal note For the first part of the month we continue with Sundays after Epiphany – a showing of God.

Week beginning Sunday 5th February Epiphany 5

OT Isaiah 40.21-31 This is written during the Exile in Babylon in the late 6th century. It is a portrait of God spoken in response to the exiles belief that they are invisible to God. What encouraging elements to this portrait of God are there? How does this description of God extend your own ideas?

Psalms 147.1-11 describes God's care for Jerusalem with much poetic language about God. How does this description fit with your ideas. How might you rephrase some of this description in 21st century imagery?

NT I Corinthians 9.16-23 The context for this passage is a section where Paul talks about the 'rights of an apostle' and how he has NOT taken these up. Here he talks about how and under what conditions he proclaims the Gospel. What do you think he means when he says (verse 19) 'I have made myself a slave to all so that I might win more of them'? What does that say to us as we engage with people in society?