



# FOLLOWING JESUS

**Week 3**

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

*- Matthew 9:9*

Who is Jesus? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? If one says 'yes' to following, does anything change? Does a 'yes' impact individual lives? Communities? The world? Over the next six Sundays leading up to Easter, we are going to explore what the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – might teach us in response to these questions. With Jesus as our guide, we'll examine our own lives and the invitation each of us receives to be a follower.

This Lenten sermon series is designed for both Circle gatherings and for individual use as a daily Lenten devotional. As a Circle, when you gather

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you can walk through the daily readings or pick and choose readings and questions for your group conversations. As an individual, you'll find a Scripture, a devotional reflection, and a question for each day for your Lenten journey.

# Following Jesus

## MAR 7 GOOD NEWS

## MARK 1:14-20

*(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 20: The Hidden Messiah.)*

We love a good story. From the time we're kids, stories shape us and our understanding of the world. And we like good news, the kind that encourages and gives us hope. So what makes it difficult to share the story of Jesus, a story of good news? In a world and times of so much bad news, how could we help reshape our communities with the story that we know as followers of Jesus?

**Followers of Jesus aren't afraid to make sacrifices to share the good news of God's saving grace in Jesus.**

## DAILY QUESTIONS

### MAR 8-13

### GOOD NEWS

Monday	Read Mark 1:14-20. What do you think Jesus means when he says to "repent and believe the good news"?
Tuesday	Read Mark 1:21-34. When and how have you experienced or heard about the power of Jesus?
Wednesday	Read Mark 2:1-17. What story can you tell of the forgiveness of Jesus?
Thursday	Read Mark 5:1-20. Who have you told, or who could you tell, about the love and power of Jesus?
Friday	Read Mark 8:1-21. Knowing the full story, how do we follow Jesus and embody His good news in our community today?
Saturday	Read Mark 14:1-11. As the woman is remembered for her act of serving Jesus, how do you want your life to show the good news of Jesus?

**FaithFit Lenten Challenge!**

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Spend 15 minutes each day this week in prayer and Bible study. Read the daily Scripture and devotion, answer the question for the day, and pray how you can answer the invitation of Jesus to follow and grow as a follower of Jesus.

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## GOOD NEWS

SERMON ON MAR 7, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- **What is the best news you have ever received?**
- **Who is one person you have told about Jesus?**

### MONDAY

Read Mark 1:14-20.

The Gospel of Mark starts with the announcement of good news, and to make sure the reader and hearer doesn't miss this point, the gospel repeats the word "news" five times in the first chapter. This is a story about good news, and Mark wants his reader to know that this news isn't reserved for the successful, or the rich, or the powerful, or those with status. This good news is for *everyone*. Jesus offers it first to fishermen on their boats, ordinary folk in the midst of common, everyday life. You, the reader, are invited to see that they aren't so different from you, living life day by day. Rachel Held Evans wrote in her book, *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, "The good news is as epic as it gets, with universal theological implications, and yet the Bible tells it from the perspective of fishermen and farmers, pregnant ladies and squirmy kids. This story about the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity smells like mud and manger hay and tastes like salt and wine." This good news is *relatable*. This good news of the love and saving grace in Jesus is for you to hear, know, and share!

- **What do you think Jesus means when he says to "repent and believe the good news"?**

### TUESDAY

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Read Mark 1:21-34.

If you lay the gospels of Matthew and Mark side by side, you'll notice an important difference. Near the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls his followers, and then he begins to teach them what it means to be a follower. Near the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus calls his followers, but next the story says he casts out demons and heals people. Mark starts his gospel with this picture of the loving presence of Jesus freeing people of the demons that haunt them and then healing them. You probably don't have to look far, maybe not even outside of your own family, to see brokenness and bad news and people haunted by demons – sins that plague relationships, broken trust, addiction, depression or other mental illness, disease, unrelenting grief. The gospel of Mark wants you to see quickly the wholeness and healing Jesus offers. You get to see how this good news in Jesus casts out demons. You get to see how this good news brings wholeness to lives. You get to see how this good news reaches out to those who are sick, outcast, facing the struggles of our human lives. And, you get to see what happens for those who turn to God and trust in this good news.

- **When and how have you experienced or heard about the power of Jesus?**

## **WEDNESDAY**

Read Mark 2:1-17.

Mark's story of the paralyzed man has an interesting detail: the mat (or bed in some translations). Did you notice? Angela Dienhart Hancock, Associate Professor of Homiletics and Worship at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, points out this detail on the Working Preacher blog. The friends carry the paralyzed man to Jesus on the mat. They use the mat to lower him down.

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These details of the story make sense, but what happens next is a bit odd. Why does Jesus tell the man, after he is forgiven and healed, to take the mat with him? He doesn't need it anymore. Jesus could just say, "Get up and walk." But Jesus says, "I tell you, get up, **take your mat** and go home." Mark is the shortest gospel, and he doesn't mince words in telling who Jesus is. So could it be that this mention of the mat is significant, because the mat tells a story of the power of Jesus to forgive and heal? A healthy person carrying a bed around with him raises questions. Why are you carrying around a mat? "Let me tell you the story," the man could say. This healed and forgiven man has now been invited by Jesus to carry his story with him, to let the mat tell this story of healing and forgiveness to others. What story of the power of Jesus to forgive do you carry? What story do you carry of healing and hope?

- **What story can you tell of the forgiveness of Jesus?**

### **THURSDAY**

Read Mark 5:1-20.

Is there a story in your life that, if you told someone, they might not believe it? Imagine telling this story of Jesus expelling demons into nearby pigs, 2000 of them, which then hurl themselves into the water and drown. This story is wild, but that shouldn't cause you to miss a few striking details. The possessed man is banished to the outskirts of town, only after binding him didn't work. Who do we push to the outskirts of our community, out of sight and out of mind? This is who Jesus encounters first in this community. The man, possessed by many demons (perhaps like a multiple-personality disorder) kneels in front of Jesus. Jesus heals him. The people of the town, however, seeing this man now healed, have a very different reaction as they first encounter Jesus. They are fearful, the opposite of faith, and they demand that Jesus leave them. One is left asking, why couldn't the people accept this miracle and welcome Jesus and this power he wields into their

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community? Were the lives of 2000 pigs more important than the life of this mentally tortured man? Was the healing of this man not enough for them to want to know more or believe? Finally, the healed man wants to go with Jesus, but notice what Jesus commands him. Jesus says to go home and to share his story. Sometimes we think to make an impact we need to go on some dramatic adventure. But the simple act of telling our story of encountering Jesus to others in our hometown can be powerful. This man does as Jesus asks, telling others his story not just in his hometown, but in his entire home region. Mark tells us the story has an impact, that the people are amazed. (PS One more interesting note to ponder that a farmer can probably tell you: Pigs are excellent swimmers. Just another layer of intrigue leading us to further question the interpretation of this story.)

- **Who have you told, or who could you tell, about the love and power of Jesus?**

### **FRIDAY**

Read Mark 8:1-26.

Have you ever had a problem you were trying to solve or a big decision you couldn't quite make? Then you started to see the solution but you still couldn't quite see the way forward. In the story of the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida, you might notice that the man doesn't see clearly right away. Only in Mark's Gospel do healings of blindness not happen instantly. Which might help one notice how the disciples, who are following Jesus and seeing what Jesus can do and the way he is leading them, still don't quite fully understand or trust. We, like the disciples, are figuring it out. Sure, we don't always see clearly, but we're searching and learning. And the good news is that Jesus, while he does challenge his followers, also continues to love and encourage them. They aren't perfect. They don't fully get it. And yet, at the call of Jesus, they step up and do their best to embody the good news of the healing, wholeness, and salvation of Jesus. So what do we do as followers when we aren't sure or we can't see the big



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picture? We follow Jesus and serve. Mother Teresa once said, "I want you to find the poor here, right in your own home first. And begin love there. Be that good news to your own people."

- **Knowing the full story, how do we follow Jesus and embody His good news in our community today?**

### **SATURDAY**

Read Mark 14:1-11.

According to Mark, two stories will be remembered from the dinner Jesus has with his followers at the home of Simon the Leper. One is of a woman, who knowing the news that Jesus brings, gives an extravagant gift, anointing him with perfume. The other story is of Judas, who in selfishness or opposition to the way of Jesus (we aren't told which with absolutely certainty) betrays Jesus. The woman, not even identified by name, is willing to part with a year's worth of wages to honor Jesus. Judas, one who followed Jesus, is willing to betray him for much less. The woman's act points to the way of Jesus, to humility and sacrifice, overcoming the death dealing ways of the world not by violence, but by the power of God's grace and forgiveness. Judas' act points to the ways of the world, of violence and power and selfishness. So, we ask ourselves, for what stories will our lives be remembered?

- **As the woman is remembered for her act of serving Jesus, how do you want your life to show the good news of Jesus?**