

# SRGN

Some Really Good News

*"The kingdom of God has come near"*

A LENTEN PRAYER GROUP STUDY | 2021

**O**ur worship focus during this season of Lent is on Jesus' declaration in Mark 1 that God's kingdom "has come near" is Jesus' coming and in our response to his message. The Gospel of Mark wants its first hearers and subsequent readers to understand those words of Jesus as good news—really good news. Right now.

For these six weeks we will explore the implications of Jesus' declaration depicted in some key events recounted in Mark's Gospel.

Week 1:	<b>Mark 1: 9-15</b>	<b>IMAGE:</b> <i>The Mealtime Prayer</i> , Fritz von Uhde
Week 2:	<b>Mark 8: 31-38</b>	<b>IMAGE:</b> <i>Get Behind Me, Satan!</i> Ilya Repin
Week 3:	<b>Mark 4: 35-41</b>	<b>IMAGE:</b> <i>Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee</i> , Rembrandt
Week 4:	<b>Mark 10: 46-52</b>	<b>IMAGE:</b> <i>The Man Born Blind</i> , Fr. Ron Rabb
Week 5:	<b>Mark 14: 3-9</b>	<b>IMAGE:</b> <i>The Anointing of Christ</i> , Julia Stankava
Week: 6:	<b>Mark 11:1-11, 15-19</b>	<b>IMAGES:</b> <i>Entry of Christ into Jerusalem</i> <i>Christ Crowned with Thorns</i> , Anthony Van Dyck

## General Session Guide

Generally speaking, you want to spend most of your time (1) attending to the Scripture passages, (2) sharing insights, and (3) spending time in prayer. Think guide, rather than script. If you find something doesn't work, do something else.

## WELCOMING | GATHERING:

Take what time you need to welcome participants, make introductions as needed, and provide what orientation to the hour as you see fit. A psalm prayer is provided for your use as a gathering prayer. *Given the audio constraints of a Zoom meeting, unison reading will be hard to understand, so consider asking one person in the group to read aloud the psalm.*

## ATTENDING:

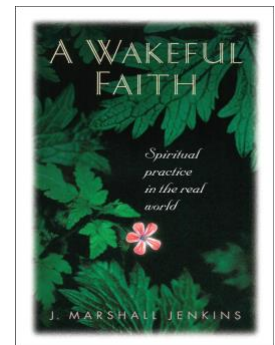
Approach the week's Gospel passages meditatively. This *lectio divina* approach invites us into God's presence as we pay attention to the texts read aloud. The process: Hear the selected Bible passage(s) read aloud **three times** (preferably by a different reader). During each hearing, listen for a word or phrase, a question or insight, that comes to mind. Consider this pattern for discussing:

- 1<sup>st</sup> reading: *What words or phrases especially came to mind?*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> reading: *What questions did the passage raise?*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> reading: *What insights did the passage yield?*

This should be a prayerful reading—so take your time. Allow a moment or so of silence between each of the three readings. Invite persons to share responses as they feel comfortable.

## REFLECTING:

Invite the group to read the brief selection from **J. Marshall Jenkins, *A Wakeful Faith: Spiritual Practice in the Real World***, then discuss together any insights the reading yielded, specifically around what it means to become more attentive to the kingdom of God here and now, to “live awake to God in our daily affairs.”



## SEEING:

Prayerful reflection of Scripture can take many forms. *Visio divina* (divine seeing) offers a way to approach a text through images. The practice is similar to the tradition of praying with icons.

Invite prayerful viewing of each week's art selection, using this method:

- View the whole and then stop on whatever first catches your eye. Consider what the artist might have been trying to convey through perspective or color or form.
- Let your viewing be more like waiting—waiting to be addressed, to be surprised, to be drawn in, to be moved by what you see.
- Hear persons share responses as they feel comfortable.

## CLOSING:

Close in whatever way feels most appropriate: consider using the prayer list in the weekly worship bulletin as a guide (also available online in the church newsletter). **To aid your approach to God through this closing prayer time, create a playlist of meditative music for use each week (a suggested list of music is included at the end of this guide).** Consider ending with the Lord's Prayer.

## VIRTUAL (ZOOM) MEETING: Some Best Practices

- Before your meeting begins, test your audio and video.
- If you plan to share your screen, review how to do that.
- Close unnecessary tabs in your browser and turn off notifications such as email or messaging.
- Set up where the light source is aimed at the front of you or from the side, in order to best light your face.
- Keep your background clear of distractions.
- Remind your group members to mute their mics when others are speaking.
- Let your group members know how they can get your attention during the meeting:
  - Will you be checking the chat window?
  - Should they unmute themselves to speak up?



## MEDITATIVE MUSIC

*If you close your sessions with music, the recommended selections listed below are available from music streaming services like Spotify or AmazonMusic. Create your own playlists ahead of time. Or just ask Alexa.*

- Karl Jenkins. | Piano
- Eric Whitacre | Sing as One: Virtual Choir
- John Williams | Classic Williams
- Phillip Wesley | Dark Night of the Soul
- Music Lab Co | Chilled Piano No. 1
- John Rutter | The Piano Collection
- Mormon Tabernacle Choir | Consider the Lilies



## WEEK ONE | Jesus Proclaims His Mission

### WELCOME | GATHERING

Welcome each other as seems appropriate and introduce yourselves if you are not already acquainted.

**Pray Psalm 25**

### ATTENDING: Mark 1: 9-15

- After 1st reading: *What one word in the story seemed most meaningful?*
- After 2nd reading: *What one question did the story raise for you?*
- After 3rd reading: *What one insight did the story yield?*

Share responses as people are comfortable.

### REFLECTING:

*“We’ve heard it all before, that we are poor in spite of our wealth, fearful in spite of our comforts, that the struggle for survival goes on. What the newspaper will not tell us is that Jesus came, not to offer sentimental moral adages or a heavenly escape route. He came to pray with us, ‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’—on earth with all its bombs and hungers and anxieties, as in heaven. And Jesus is still here, wooing us and cajoling us, declaring that we can live the kingdom here and now if we get out of survival mode and awaken.”* (Jenkins, pp. 10-11)

It’s not out of bounds to read the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel as a portrayal of Jesus’ own awakening, of his coming to heightened awareness of his own divinely confirmed mission to proclaim, promise, and teach about another kingdom, the new reign of God already breaking in. Marshall Jenkins suggests that most of the time we operate in survival mode, only half-awake. By that he means that we too readily impose our economic, political, and personal expectations on the reign of God and so miss out on what God is actually doing in the world, that is, God’s kingdom *coming among us*.

**SEEING:**



*The Mealtime Prayer, by 19<sup>th</sup> c. painter, Fritz von Uhde, depicts the person of Jesus invited to be a participant in what appears to be an ordinary family gathering. Expectant family members seem to be both humbly waiting and expectant, perhaps the prerequisites for seeing God's kingdom among us. Jesus looks to be on the verge of speaking to the woman at the table. Wonder what he is about to say?*

**CLOSING:**

Share concerns among the group. Take time to listen to a selection of music. Close with the Lord's Prayer or in a manner of the group's choosing.

## WEEK TWO | Jesus Rebukes Peter's Misunderstanding

### WELCOME | GATHERING

Take time to welcome each other in the peace of Christ and introduce yourselves if you are not already acquainted.

**Pray Psalm 27**

### ATTENDING: Mark 8: 31-38

- After 1st reading: *What one word in the story seemed most meaningful*
- After 2nd reading: *What one question did the story raise for you?*
- After 3rd reading: *What one insight did the story yield?*

Share responses as people are comfortable.

### REFLECTING:

*“Jesus’ disciples hoped for a new kingdom under God. To this day we find in Jesus’ teachings the hope that someday God will intervene and dry our tears and calm our fears and keep us safely. That remains a part of the promise of God’s reign on this earth. Yet, that part of the promise can also blind us because our half-awake ideas of the kingdom confuse much of Jesus’ meaning. No sooner had Jesus praised Peter for being the first to openly identify Jesus as the Messiah, than Jesus had to rebuke Peter for understanding his lordship in terms of worldly fame and power.”* (Jenkins, p. 11)

Jenkins observes that we make the same mistake that Peter makes—wanting a Messiah on our terms. We already idolize the famous and the powerful, so it’s relatively natural to look for a Jesus who is as much as a celebrity as a savior. That’s essentially what Peter was trying to do. Which is why Jesus called him out. Called him *Satan*, in fact. As if Peter was with Jesus back in the wilderness, trying to undermine his mission. But of course, we could never be accused of doing that. Could we?



## SEEING:



*The title of this late 19 c. painting is **Get Behind Me, Satan!** by a Russian artist named Ilya Repin—a self-avowed rebel within the established academy of artists of his day. Interestingly, his impressionist rendering of Jesus being tempted by Satan takes its title from Jesus' rebuke Peter.*

## CLOSING:

Share concerns among the group. Take time to listen to a selection of music. Close with the Lord's Prayer or in a manner of the group's choosing.



## WEEK THREE | Jesus Calms His Disciples' Fears

### WELCOME

Take time to welcome each other in the peace of Christ and introduce yourselves if you are not already acquainted.

### GATHERING: Pray Psalm 19

### ATTENDING: Mark 4: 35-41

- After 1st reading: *What one word in the story seemed most meaningful*
- After 2nd reading: *What one question did the story raise for you?*
- After 3rd reading: *What one insight did the story yield?*

### REFLECTING:

*“I see the day ahead through bifocals. Through one lens I see chaos. I hear phones ringing, my name called, the sound of a client sobbing. Faces pitch before me as on the deck of a ship in a storm. God is somehow in the chaos and above it. The wind of the Spirit blows where it will. God calls from the storm, ‘Be still.’ Through another lens, I see the same day and find order. Ritual gives the day rhythm. In a moment, the sun will rise and trek across the heavens. I can see the faint glow of daybreak . . . Mortals cannot grasp chaos and order at once as God can, so wakeful ones keep a sailor’s eye to the wind, watching the signs of its shifts, its intensity, the weather it brings. They must direct their ships by the whims of the invisible wind and the deep dark tide. This is how they find God through the chaos of the day.”*  
*(Jenkins, pp. 88-89)*

The disciples in the boat with Jesus see only the storm, the chaos, the danger. The fact that Jesus was sound asleep and not in a white-knuckled panic is lost on the terrified men clinging to their ropes for dear life. In fact, even after the sea stills at Jesus’ command, the Gospel account describes the soaking wet disciples as terrified. Still afraid. Afraid of the invisible wind and the deep dark tide. Yep, still afraid.

## SEEING:



*Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee, by Rembrandt van Rijn, is well known as one of the artist's most poignant narrative paintings. Notable features are the interplay of darkness and light, the jarring juxtaposition of terror (the disciples' faces) and calm (the figure of Jesus), and the purposeful placement of the artist himself [INSET], looking anxiously out of the scene and into the gaze of the viewer.*

## CLOSING:

Share concerns among the group. Take time to listen to a selection of music. Close with the Lord's Prayer or in a manner of the group's choosing.

## WEEK FOUR | Jesus Restores Vision

### WELCOME

Take time to welcome each other in the peace of Christ and introduce yourselves if you are not already acquainted.

### GATHERING: Pray Psalm 107:1-22

### ATTENDING: Mark 10: 46-52

- After 1st reading: *What one word in the story seemed most meaningful?*
- After 2nd reading: *What one question did the story raise for you?*
- After 3rd reading: *What one insight did the story yield?*

Share responses as people are comfortable.

### REFLECTING:

*“Obedient action conditions our vision to see God’s face.*

*“To see God’s kingdom, we must live like we belong there. To live in God’s kingdom, we must open our eyes to see it. Doing God’s will help us see God’s kingdom and seeing God’s kingdom helps us do God’s will. Doing helps us see and seeing helps us do.*

*“In order to see the kingdom of God, Jesus taught, humbly serve others. Share generously. Love your enemy. Forgive your friends. Do not conform to this world. Pray intimately to God. Honor your calling. Then you will find God’s kingdom in what otherwise seems like a godless world. In the center of God’s kingdom, you will find God face-to-face.”*

*(Jenkins, pp.34-35)*

Jesus asked the blind man, Bartimaeus, what he wanted Jesus to do for him. His response to Jesus appears in a single verb in the Greek, the verb “to see,” with a prefix that most English translations render as “again.” But that prefix can also mean, among other things, “up.” What if Bartimaeus, after so long staring blindly down into his begging bowl—the only thing he could do—wanted Jesus to restore to him the capacity to look up, up into God’s face? Then: wonder what Bartimaeus decided to do with his newfound vision?



## SEEING:



*The Man Born Blind*, by Fr. Ronald Rabb, pastor of Sacred Heart Church Parish, Colorado Springs. From his experiences in living the Gospel among the poor, he speaks and writes about prayer and service and knowing the love of God through our common poverty. His colorful depiction of Jesus' healing of the blind man is focused on the man's face, one eye opening as Jesus' thumb passes over.

## CLOSING:

Share concerns among the group. Take time to listen to a selection of music. Close with the Lord's Prayer or in a manner of the group's choosing.

## WEEK FIVE | Jesus Receives a Beautiful Gift

### WELCOME

Take time to welcome each other in the peace of Christ and introduce yourselves if you are not already acquainted.

### GATHERING: Pray Psalm 119

### ATTENDING: Mark 14: 3-9

- After 1st reading: *What one word in the story seemed most meaningful?*
- After 2nd reading: *What one question did the story raise for you?*
- After 3rd reading: *What one insight did the story yield?*

Share responses as people are comfortable.

### REFLECTING:

*“An NBC interviewer once asked Rabbi Abraham Heschel, ‘What message have you for young people?’ Heschel responded, ‘Let them remember that there is meaning beyond absurdity. Let them be sure that every deed counts, that every word has power, and that we all can do our share to redeem the world in spite of all its absurdities, frustrations and disappointments. And above all, remember . . . to build a life as if it were a work of art.’ An artist stands before a blank canvas. A poet hunches over a blank hunch. A sculptor contemplates a block of granite. A composer sits at a piano in silence. I awaken and faced 1440 minutes that have never been and never will be again. The truly faithful face those minutes as an artist.”*

Among the various ways to understand what the woman intended to do at the feet of Jesus, maybe one is to see her as an artist—her loosened hair the brush, her alabaster jar of perfume the medium, her blank canvas the extended feet of Christ, yet unpierced and unmarred—in need of being caressed and consecrated before the absurdity of the cross. There is the meaning beyond the absurdity.



## SEEING:



*The Anointing of Christ, by Bulgarian artist, Julia Stankava, is notable for its dominant color palette, the absence of most of Jesus, and the centrality of the woman's face, so close to Jesus' feet, an almost unimaginable (to us?) depiction of intimacy, humility, generosity. Interestingly, the three observers in the background have no hair, perhaps revealing . . . ?*

## CLOSING:

Share concerns among the group. Take time to listen to a selection of music. Close with the Lord's Prayer or in a manner of the group's choosing.



## WEEK SIX | Jesus Challenges Religious Tradition

### WELCOME | GATHERING:

Take time to welcome each other in the peace of Christ and introduce yourselves if you are not already acquainted.

**Pray Psalm 118: 1-9**

### ATTENDING: Mark 11: 11-19 | Mark 13: 1-5, 32-37

- After 1st reading:      *What one word in the story seemed most meaningful?*
- After 2nd reading:     *What one question did the story raise for you?*
- After 3rd reading:     *What one insight did the story yield?*

Share responses as people are comfortable.

### REFLECTING:

*Jesus had already created a stir. He entered town on a donkey to an adoring crowd of fans who sang his praises and buzzed for hope for the kingdom he promised. Yet rather than schmoozing with the high priests, he angrily overturned the vending booths in the temple's outer courts and drove out the merchants. He told off the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, blind guides, and prophet killers. The spotlight was getting hot. So the disciples tried to change the subject, do a little sight-seeing with Jesus. 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Jesus used the spectacle of the skyline to issue a wake up call. 'Do you see these great buildings?' Jesus asked. 'Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.' . . . Jesus meant his warning for all time, for his time and ours and the age to come. When the world seems to be going to hell in a hand basket, look. Keep awake. The kingdom of heaven is at hand . . . But where does one look for another kingdom while the walls of Jerusalem still stand? Is it a kingdom without walls or tall buildings? A kingdom without streets?' (Jenkins, pp. 18-19)*

Jesus did not offer his disciple a map of the kingdom he had in mind. Instead he gathered them around a table in an upper room. To show. And tell. And break bread.

**SEEING:**



*Both of these paintings, by Anthony Van Dyck, show his ability to convey emotion and drama through realistic facial features and gestures—such as the face and hands of Christ; and the faces and gestures of those in the top image who praise Jesus and those in the bottom image who mock him. Notice a branch appears in both paintings—each symbolic of a king: one lauded (a palm), the other humiliated (a reed).*

**CLOSING:**

Share concerns among the group. Take time to listen to a selection of music. Close with the Lord's Prayer or in a manner of the group's choosing.