

Daily Readings

Please note: We begin the year by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. For the next several weeks we will move carefully through Mark's gospel following the message and story of Jesus the Christ. This is week five of our reading from Mark.

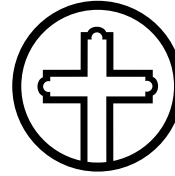
Monday, February 9 — Read Mark 8:22-26. This is an interesting passage where Jesus heals the blind man of Bethsaida. The passage shows that the first touch of Jesus only heals part of the blind man's blindness. It took an additional touch before the man could see clearly. Some believe that Mark sees this healing as a metaphor for the spiritual healing that Jesus is offering all of humanity. At first even the disciples have a hard time understanding, but finally after experiencing the resurrected Christ, they believe and others follow. What needs the healing touch of Jesus in your life? Is it a relationship, a job, a financial situation, a health issue, forgiveness or something else? Are you willing to offer this to Jesus for a second touch? Do you need to have your eyes opened to the truth of Christ?

Tuesday, February 10 — Read Mark 8:27-33. This passage is the turning point in Mark's gospel. Clearly, Jesus reveals himself as the messiah that must suffer for the sins of the whole world. From now on, they will see him as the Son of God. Peter does not want Jesus to pay the steep price for humanity and confronts Jesus. Peter is thinking in the limited experience of this life. Jesus rebukes Peter and accuses him of being part of the world's standards (Satan), **"you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."** In what way have you limited your thinking? Can you pray that God would open your mind and set you on the divine things of God?

Wednesday, February 11 — Read Mark 8:34-9:1. Jesus follows the rebuke of Peter with an astounding word about the ways of God. **"Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."** The ways of God are eternal; the ways of the world are temporary. What in your life is temporary, and what is eternal?

Thursday, February 12 — Read Mark 9:2-13. Mark tells us about the transfiguration of Jesus with Elijah and Moses. A voice from heaven proclaims, **"This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!"** There is now no question about the identity of Jesus. How have you recognized the identity of Jesus in your life?

Friday, February 13 — Read Mark 9:14-29. The healing of this young boy is mixed with several questions. Why were the disciples unsuccessful? Is this a question of attitude, prayer or faith? But for our purposes at the end of this week, let's focus on the words of Jesus and the words of the boy's father. Jesus said, **"If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes."** Immediately the father of the child cried out, **"I believe, help my unbelief."** Have you offered your unbelief to Christ today? Can you with confidence call on Christ in all things?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, February 8, 2009

Love at Last Sight (Week 1)

First Glance — Restoring Original Love

Revelation 2:1-5

Write this to Ephesus, to the Angel of the church. The One with Seven Stars in his right-fist grip, striding through the golden seven-light' circle, speaks: I see what you've done, your hard, hard work, and your refusal to quit. I know you can't stomach evil, that you weed out apostolic pretenders. I know your persistence, your courage in my cause that you never wear out.

But you walked away from your first love—why? What's going on with you, anyway? Do you have any idea how far you've fallen? A Lucifer fall!

Turn back! Recover your dear early love. No time to waste, for I'm well on my way to removing your light from the golden circle.

The Word from the Bible, the Message

The Book of Revelation

John's Revelation is primarily an appeal for resistance to the demands of cultic worship. He speaks to the human tendency to worship that which satisfies our longings. The glories and privileges of martyrdom are extolled throughout the book. It is filled with a host of images that have confused Christians and scholars throughout the ages.

Revelation speaks to the fears and anxieties of every age with a message of hope and promise. For those who hang on to their faith, rewards await. For in the end, the Christ who won the eternal battle with evil on the Cross, will come to claim that victory and unite the Kingdom of earth and heaven.

Reclaiming our first love in relationships

The message in Revelation is one for churches who have lost their first passion for the Lord. They have kept the faith, but have lost the zeal. While this message is relevant for all of us in our faith, we can also heed what the spirit is saying about all our relationships.

The symbol of light or fire — Fire served three functions for the ancient world. First it provided light when it was dark. Second, it provided heat when it was cold. Third, it provided energy for basic functions like cooking.

Direction — In the same way, God provides for us light and fire for our lives and relationships. Our futures can be full of dark and mysterious questions. God promises direction as we follow the way God intended for our life.

Warmth and security — When we live under the presence of God’s abiding flame, we experience the blessing of healthy relationships. Instead of approaching those around us with the attitude of *what’s in it for me*, we can, in confidence, treat each other with love and respect. By focusing first on God’s presence, we live within the bounds of the Christian discipline of love. By living the ethic of love and respect, the blessing of a secure relationship is ours.

Passion — Passion is fleeting in every human relationship. God has blessed us with physical attraction in relationships. Particularly in the early stages of our relationships we experience this attraction as infatuation. The more familiar we are with another person, the less we feel infatuated and the more we take each other for granted. In a God-led relationship, passion takes a back seat to spiritual and emotional oneness. In this formula, passion does not die, but instead grows hot as we fuel the fires of emotion and spirit.

How to Keep Love Going or Renew a Relationship

The lesson in Revelation is directed to the church at Ephesus, but can be applied to our human relationships. He says, “remember and repent.” These are critical for every relationship. First, you can not go forward unless you keep in mind the things that brought you together in the first place. Second, you can not go forward unless you change (repent) the behaviors that have caused harm or potentially can cause harm.

Discussion Questions / Next Steps

- What is the direction of your relationship? Can you imagine where you will be in five, ten or twenty years? What part does God play in your plans for the future?
- What do you intentionally do each day to feed the emotional needs of those you love? Have you taken the time to listen to what they may need? Can you safely share your deepest feelings?
- How do you define passion in your relationship? Can you first attend to the emotional needs of others without letting passion rule your actions?
- Remembering is a powerful practice. Spend time this week looking at old pictures, remembering what you have shared together. What first attracted together? Can you plan an outing like first time you met?
- Change is necessary in every relationship. Without it, we get stuck and are blinded to our weaknesses. Share together in love those things that need to change about your relationship. Instead of accusing each other, take turns offering a list of your own failings in your relationship. Together decide what one thing you can change during the next week.