

Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the world
sent your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ,
to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience
and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Thoughts about NLT:

One of the hardest things that people affected by leprosy face is isolation. This usually leads to loneliness and hopelessness. There is a stigma about leprosy, so those who have leprosy (often, their deformities are visible and impossible to hide) become 'marginalised'. In other words, they are pushed to the margins of society. They are feared by others, because they are different, and wrongly assumed to be 'cursed'. This all occurs just at the time they need encouragement, help and a sense of belonging. We have all probably been ill at times, and know how much we need others to be supportive at such times.

NLT aims to 'be there' for those who are affected by leprosy, and to help provide what they need. Consider what the ultimate need is of people: to be made well physically, but is there anything else?

Mark's Gospel – Study Notes for Small Groups

Week 5 – Being Alone

Mark chapters 11-15

("...to give his life as a ransom for many")

About one-third of Mark's gospel recounts events of the last week of Jesus' life: the 'Passion' story of his betrayal, suffering and death. (This compares with one-seventh of Matthew and Luke being taken up with these last few days.) Because of this, some scholars have even described Mark's gospel as "a Passion narrative with a long introduction"! Mark's narrative slows down considerably from the fast pace of chapters 1 to 10 (where the word 'immediately' occurs over 40 times), which indicates the importance of events in these later chapters.

To discuss:

How can we **slow down** in an increasingly fast-paced world? What can we do to gain perspective on life, rather than rush through it relentlessly?

Jesus is increasingly alone

Dr. Rowan Williams in his book 'Meeting God in Mark' makes the observation that Jesus is left more and more alone in Mark's Passion narrative. The story begins with crowds around him as he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (**11:1-11**); then the disciples run away from him (**14:50**), Peter denies that he knows him (**14:66-72**), the Sanhedrin condemns him (**15:1**), Pilate and the soldiers reject and abuse him (**15:2-20**), and he ends up alone on the cross. His last recorded words are "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**15:33**).

Loneliness today

Research suggests that there may be an epidemic of loneliness in the UK today, especially among the elderly. It is estimated that

more than half of all people over the age of 75 in England live alone, and 5 million older people say that television is their main form of company. It's been suggested that loneliness is "as big a killer as obesity and as dangerous as heavy smoking", increasing the risk of premature death by around 30% (taken from a study published in the 'Association for Psychological Science' journal in March 2015).

To discuss:

(a) What is it like to be lonely? Is it really an 'epidemic' and a 'killer' today? Is the situation worse than it used to be?

(b) What can we do to help lonely people? How can we cope with loneliness ourselves? How does/can the Church help?

Read **Mark 1:35**. Jesus deliberately chose to be alone to pray, on many occasions. Is there a difference between 'loneliness' and 'being alone'? Do we actually need less 'loneliness' and more 'solitude'? It has been said that "*loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self*" (May Sarton, American novelist, 1912-1995).

A few quotes to think about:

"Online communities are an expression of loneliness"

(Joanne Harris, author, b.1964)

"The pain of loneliness seems to be part of the mortal experience, but the Lord in his mercy has made it so that we never need deal with the challenges of mortality alone"

(Sheri L. Dew, author, b.1953)

"As much as we complain about it, there's part of us that is drawn to a hurried life. It makes us feel important. It keeps the adrenaline pumping. It means I don't have to look too closely at my heart or life. It keeps us from feeling loneliness."

(John Ortberg, evangelical Christian author, b.1957)

"Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty"

(Mother Teresa, 1910-97)

"Loneliness expresses the pain of being alone and solitude expresses the glory of being alone"

(Paul Tillich, German theologian, 1886-1965)

"Friendship needs no words – it is solitude delivered from the anguish of loneliness"

(Dag Hammarskjöld, Swedish diplomat & author, 1905-61)

"While the resurrection promises us a new and perfect life in the future, God loves us too much to leave us alone to contend with the pain, guilt and loneliness of our present life"

(Josh McDowell, Christian apologist, b.1939)

"The dominant feeling of the battlefield is loneliness"

(William Slim, Governor General of Australia, 1891-1970)

"Reading - the best state to keep absolute loneliness at bay"

(William Styron, novelist, 1925-2006)

"Loneliness is the universal problem of rich people"

(Joan Collins, actress, b.1933)

Reading through the Passion story's key events

A suggestion: select two or three of the events in Mark chapters 11 to 15, and discuss these as a group; the others can be looked at later individually. Do read the whole story through at home.

The Triumphal Entry - Mark 11:1-11

Jesus clears the Temple - Mark 11:15-19

The Last Supper - Mark 14:17-26

Gethsemane: Jesus Prayed - Mark 14:32-42

Betrayed and Arrested - Mark 14:43-52

Jesus was tried - before the Sanhedrin **Mark 14:53-65**, and before Pilate **Mark 15:1-15**.

Denied by Peter - Mark 14:66-72

Jesus was Mocked - Mark 15:16-20

Jesus was Crucified - Mark 15:25-41

Jesus' Burial - Mark 15:42-47.