



Woodcut reproduction by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794–1872).

## Lent 2

After welcome, introductions and anything else that might help people feel at home (especially those who were not present for Week 1), begin in prayer.

O God, the giver of all new life, transform our lives and renew your church, through the power of your Holy Spirit; that we might better share with others your life and your joy, through Jesus Christ who is our life. Amen.

A brief recap of the discoveries and insights that emerged from the previous week may be helpful. Do

not be afraid to allow group members to mention any learnings they experienced.

### **Onto the task at hand**

Invite a participant to read the gospel for Lent 2. Allow time for quiet reflection and then ask a participant to read the passage again. It is often helpful when the second reading utilizes a different translation of the passage.

## Mark 8:31–38

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### Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

In buzz groups of two to three people, discuss the first question (5–7 minutes, but let the volume in the room be your measure).

- 1) What is going on here? What phrase or statement grabs/intrigues you in this passage? Why?

Using newsprint, record any comments participants wish to share. The enthusiasm of the leader at this point will set the tone for the rest of the session. Encourage and engage!

### Next task

It is worth mentioning that in liturgical churches, we all too often treat scripture as if it were written

for a three-year cycle, when in fact our treatment of the written word is thematic and more than a little arbitrary. Whenever a passage begins with the word “then,” it makes sense to look at what just happened in the story. In this case, it is particularly important. Invite a participant to read Mark 8:27–30 to help clarify where our passage fits into the broader context of Mark’s story.

## Mark 8:27–30

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### Peter’s Declaration about Jesus

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

In small groups (let the number of participants determine the optimal size of groups but never more than eight people), discuss the following question for about 10 minutes.

- 2) When these passages are linked together, what new insights or understandings emerge?

Once again, record the highlights from the participants’ conversations—they will tell you what was important to them. Remember, it is not the leader’s place to cast judgment. Just record and continue to encourage, excite and engage.

A couple of brief historical notes may be useful to help trigger new thoughts and open up new understandings.

It is noteworthy that this conversation took place while Jesus and his disciples were on the road to Caesarea Philippi, which was the place where Herod the Great (ever the accommodator) had a temple built in honour of Caesar Augustus. Bear in mind that Caesar was also referred to as the Son of God, King of Kings, Prince of Peace (Pax Romana) and Saviour, to mention only a few imperial titles. Also worth noting is that the expression “the good news” was most commonly applied to the power of Rome... the good news of the ascent of a new emperor, the good news of another victory for Caesar’s armies, the good news of the peace and economic prosperity under Roman rule, which is to say under the power of Caesar (John Proctor, *Mark’s Jesus: The Message and Meaning of Mark’s Gospel*). Put that information beside the first sentence in Mark’s gospel: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus and his followers are heading to Jerusalem, the very centre of the Roman oppression of Israel and a religious and political establishment that was in collaboration with Roman rule for its own self-interest. The lines are being drawn...Caesar’s world or God’s world. He would, through word and action, challenge the domination culture of the day, showing a preferential care for the poor and the victimized. He was not going to Jerusalem as a tourist! The implications for him and his followers are disturbing, frightening perhaps, but fairly clear. His words to them were difficult to hear and harder to accept. Yet...

In the same small groups, discuss the following questions for 10 to 15 minutes:

- 3) What new insights emerge when this historical information is put alongside our passage for today?
- 4) What does this add to our understanding of how Jesus saw his mission and ministry?

Once again, record the insights and highlights. By now the group will be quite comfortable with the process.

It is worth noting that in the Greek New Testament, originally there were no chapter divisions. Once again, important linkages get lost because of arbitrary decisions around chapters and structure. With that in mind, look briefly at the account of the Transfiguration that follows.

## Mark 9:1–7

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And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

### The Transfiguration

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

With the whole group, discuss what is added by linking all three bits of scripture. Perhaps reading them in sequence might help participants put it all together. Once again, record and encourage. Ten minutes should be more than enough time. (Note: Normally the verses speaking about the Transfiguration are looked at as affirmation of who Jesus is, validating his identity of God’s Son, but the

words “listen to him” are also a divine imprimatur of all that he has been telling them—the hard words are true!)

Once again, take the time to draw out any wisdom that emerges. It is amazing to discover the insights that will come from the most unexpected places.

Now it is time to bring it home and look at what all of this says to us in our context. In small groups, take 20 to 30 minutes to discuss the questions below.

Jesus asked his followers, “Who do people say that I am?” Alyce McKenzie, professor of homiletics at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas Texas, writes these challenging words in her commentary on Mark 8:

It is vital that we twenty-first century Christians take the pulse of those outside the Church, who they think Christ is and who they perceive Christians to be. If, as many studies suggest, the view outside looking in, is that Christians are judgmental and unloving, then the Church needs to ask itself, what can we do about the aspersion this casts on the identity of Jesus whom we allege to follow?

- 5) If Christ’s reputation suffers because of our stunted discipleship, then what are we going to do about it?

Barbara Brown Taylor, professor, author and theologian, writes:

The deep secret of Jesus’ hard words is that the way to have abundant life is not to save it but to spend it, for life cannot be shut up and saved any more than fresh spring water can be put in a

mason jar and kept in a kitchen cupboard. Oh, it will remain water, and if you ever open it up, you can probably still drink it, but it will have lost its essence, its life, which is to be poured out, to be moving, living water, rushing downstream to share its wealth without ever looking back.

You can try to save your own life. You can try to stockpile it, being very, very cautious about what you say yes to, being very, very careful about whom you let into your life, frisking everyone at the door and letting only the most harmless people inside...

You can live that way, but do not expect to enjoy it very much, or to accomplish very much, and do not expect to be missed when your safe, comfortable life finally comes to an end and no one notices you are gone.

*Ouch!*

- 6) Jesus, in calling his disciples to take up their cross and follow him to challenge those who would challenge and oppress God’s people, was clearly calling them out of their safe and comfortable lives to take a stand and make a difference. If we claim to be followers of Jesus, we need to follow. What do you believe you/the church are called to do and be in your context?
- 7) What action do these scripture passages demand of us as we leave here?

Draw the session to a close by recording the answers to the final questions and then affirming the group for its hard work. Conclude with a time of prayer for one another, the church and the needs that are all around us.

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