

SESSION 4: FEATING AND FASTING

COMMIT - DAY 1: ONE WHO HAD AUTHORITY

Mark allows us to hear the questioning going on in the minds of the scribes: “Why does this man speak like this?” (Mark 2:7). Jesus knows the thoughts, questions, and confuse reactions of the scribes to his claim of forgiving sins, and Jesus challenges them. By disclosing that he know their thoughts, Jesus further reveals his divinity.

Scribes and Pharisees

“The scribes mentioned in the Gospels are scholars and teachers of the law of Moses, literate men in the largely illiterate society of Jesus’s day. Many of the scribes Jesus encounters are also Pharisees, influential religious leaders who believe that strict adherence to the Mosaic law is the way to hasten the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus’s “new” teaching and interpretation of the law challenges their worldview leading to increasing conflict and outright condemnation of Jesus as a blasphemer against God.”

-St. Joseph Edition of New American Bible Dictionary

Jesus asks the scribes which is easier: to forgive sins or to heal a physical ailment (see Mark 2:9). Why do you think Jesus asks this question? How does the answer further reveal his divine authority?

In response to the scribes, Jesus declares: “But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.... I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home” (2:10-11). The word “rise” is the same word that will be used for Jesus’s Resurrection. Saint Mark tells us that the paralytic gets up immediately and leaves, giving witness to the new life that Jesus has granted him through the forgiveness of his sins. Paradoxically, the “easier” or verifiable miracle of physical healing becomes the proof of Jesus’s authority to do more “difficult” – that is, to forgive sins.

This story about the paralytic is the first instance where Jesus refers to himself as the Son of man, a name that he will increasingly use as he approaches Calvary. When the scribes hear this title, they recognize the reference to the Old Testament apocalyptic Book of Daniel, concerning the time of the Jewish captivity in Babylon. In Chapter 7, Daniel, one of the exiles from Jerusalem, has a terrifying vision. He sees that after a long period of suffering under four conquering kingdoms, God will vindicate his people and send a messiah, one like a “son of man,” to save his people.

Read Daniel 7:1-14. Where does the vision take place? From whom does the son of man receive his authority? What is given to the son of man?

COMMIT - DAY 2: JESUS OUR BRIDEGROOM

As Jesus's divine authority continues to be revealed through his actions and words, tension mounts among the Pharisees and the scribes in opposition to him. The Pharisees consider themselves the guardians of the Jewish Torah and seek to preserve a distinct Jewish purity and culture under Roman occupation. Most view Jesus as an imposter, or worse, a blasphemer, who implies that he is divine and assumes the role of God himself in forgiving sins.

Further, Jesus proceeds to unnerve the scribes and Pharisees when he eats with tax collectors and sinners (see Mark 2:16). This is almost too much for them, as table fellowship in their Jewish culture is an important means of acknowledging relationship. How can Jesus, a rabbi and teacher eat with these sinners given their unscrupulous reputations? The scribes seek to sow discord between Jesus and his followers by questioning them about why Jesus keeps such disreputable company. However, when Jesus hears the comments, he rebukes the scribes, saying that he has come for sinners, not the righteous. He has come to bring mercy to all who desire it.

Opposition continues to intensify, and the scribes and Pharisees now try a new strategy to create division between Jesus and his followers. They note that Jesus's disciples are not fasting according to traditional practice, as John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees do. The Jewish Law called for fasting on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:29), but common Jewish practice included fasting to mourn the destruction of the first Temple and the loss of God's Spirit from the Temple. In addition, the disciples of John and the Pharisees adopted a stricter regimen of fasting. John's disciples fast as a sign of repentance, while the Pharisees fast two days a week as a sign of increased piety and devotion.

Look up Exodus 25:8; 40:34-35; and 2 Chronicles 7:1-3. What do these passages tell us about God's presence with his Chosen People?

Look up Ezekiel 10:18-22. What does Ezekiel witness? Why does God pass judgment on his people in this way? See Deuteronomy 31:16-22.

According to the early Christian writing from the second century known as the *Didache*, Jews traditionally fasted on Mondays and Thursdays to mourn the absence of God's Spirit from the Temple. The Pharisees hoped that by these pious acts, they could hasten the return of God's presence with his people. Now they encounter Jesus, whose followers do not practice this act of devotion. As their teacher, Jesus is regarded as responsible for their behavior and draws the ire of the Pharisees.

Once again, Jesus surprises them with his response, a rhetorical question: "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (Mark 2:19). With this response, Jesus reveals something deeper and surprising about his identity. Look up the following passages. What insight do they provide you about Jesus's reference to the bridegroom?

Isaiah 54:5 _____

Isaiah 62:4-5 _____

Hosea 2:19-20 _____

COMMIT - DAY 3: LECTIO: THOSE IN NEED OF A PHYSICIAN

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

“And as he sat at the table in [Levi’s] house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came to call not the righteous, but sinners.’” Mark 2:15-17

To whose house has Jesus gone to eat: With whom is he dining: How are they described at the end of the first sentence?

What is the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees toward Jesus? To whom do they communicate their concern?

In contrast, what is Jesus’s attitude toward all those he meets, including the scribes and Pharisees?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

But the good instructor, the Wisdom, the Word of the Father, who made man, cares for the whole nature of His creature; the all-sufficient Physician of humanity, the Savior, heals both body and soul. “Rise up,” He said to the paralytic; “take the bed on which thou liest, and go away home;” and straightway the infirm man received strength. And to the dead He said, “Lazarus go forth;” and the dead man issued from his coffin such as he was ere he died, having undergone resurrection. Further,

He heals the soul itself by precepts and gifts – by precepts indeed, in course of time, but being liberal in His gifts, He says to us sinners, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.”

- Clement of Alexandria - *The Instructor*, Book 1, Chapter 2

The scribes and the Pharisees are concerned with following the letter of the Laws because, for them, strict adherence to the rituals is the path of true holiness. They have eyes to see, but see not” (Ezekiel 12:2) that Jesus’s mission is a mission of mercy and healing. Jesus has the authority and power to make clean what is unclean, as was evidenced by his healing of the leper (see Mark 1:42). Christ is the divine healer who has come to set the captives free (see Luke 4:18) and to call them to repentance and to turn away from sin (see John 5:14; 8:11). Take a moment to reflect on when you have encountered the divine healer. Did you receive a physical healing or a spiritual healing? Through whom did Jesus bring you that healing?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditates on today’s Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God’s grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God’s prompting of you heart in today’s prayer.

COMMIT - DAY 4: PRIESTLY PRIVILEGE

In Mar 2:23-28 Jesus and his disciples are crossing through a field of ripe grain apparently in a hurry to get to the next town. Although the disciples are hungry, they do not stop to eat, so the disciples pluck some of the ripe grain to appease their hunger. Ordinarily, it is permitted for a traveler to pick some grain by hand from a neighbor’s field if no raping tool is used (Deuteronomy 23:25). However, it is the Sabbath when no work is permitted. The Pharisees immediately accost Jesus and accuse his disciples of breaking the Law. They display no mercy to the hungry disciples and use the strictest interpretation of the Law to accuse them. According to the Pharisees, the simple act of picking a few heads of grain to stay their hunger is akin to reaping, a clear violation of the prohibition against work.

The Pharisees seek any means of discrediting this new movement and its leader and once again attempt to drive a wedge between them. In an effort to trap Jesus into either rebuking his disciples or defending their apparent breaking of the Law, the Pharisees stand as the accusers, emulating the works of the Satan.

Look up the following verses. How is Satan described?

John 8:44 _____

1 Timothy 3:6-7 _____

1 Peter 5:8 _____

1 John 3:8 _____

Revelation 12:9 _____

Based on these verses, how would you say the Pharisees take on the role of Satan?

In contrast to these accusers, Jesus stands as the defender and deftly avoids the trap by neither affirming nor disputing the Pharisee's claim that handpicking grain amounts to work. Instead Jesus replies with a question of his own: "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry?" (Mark 2:25).

To what incident is Jesus referring? See 1 Samuel 21:2-6.

On what day of the week does this incident with David occur? See Leviticus 24:5-9. What is significant about this incident, and how does it help Jesus's disciples?

Jesus concludes by exclaiming, "So the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Again Jesus uses veiled language to make his claim of divinity and assert his authority from God, the Ancient of Days (see Daniel 7:9), who created the Sabbath. Jesus has been given the priestly authority to supersede even the Law of Moses. He has the authority to establish his Kingdom on earth, to forgive sins (see Mark 2:10), and to fulfill and reveal the full meaning of the Sabbath.

Take some time to reflect on how you and your family observe the Lord's Day, Sunday. Do you take full advantage of the Sabbath rest: What obstacles hinder you from a more purposeful observance of the Lord's Day? What can you do to improve?

COMMIT - DAY 5: TRUTH AND BEAUTY

The Calling of St. Matthew

By Caravaggio, 1599-1600, located in the Contarelli Chapel in the Church of St. Louis of the French, Rome, Italy

In a small church near the Piazza Navona in Rome stands a famous painting by the baroque artist Caravaggio. Many pilgrims visit the church, not just to admire the beautiful masterpiece, but for a more important spiritual purpose: to enter the mystery of what it means to be a disciple.

The painting depicts the gospel account of Jesus inviting Matthew the tax collector to follow him. In Carravaggio's portrayal of this scene, Jesus enters the world of Matthew and his tax collector friends. Light pours through a window behind Jesus, the Light of the World, is entering the darkness of Matthew's life. He looks Matthew in the eye. He points at Matthew. He calls, "Follow me." What will Matthew do?

(see the painting on next page – I also inserted the "inspiration of St. Matthew – in the same church that Tim Gray mentioned).



The Calling of St. Matthew
By Caravaggio, 1599-1600, located in the Contarelli Chapel in the Church of St. Louis of the French, Rome, Italy



The inspiration of St. Matthew by Carravagio