

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 1/6/19

Monday – Read Mark 1:14-15. **Repent and Believe.** Jesus' ministry began after John the Baptist was arrested. His first sermon declared the Good News that the kingdom of God is about to appear. Like John before him, Jesus called people to *repent* which means *to turn away from sin and to turn towards God*. Jesus calls people to experience the conversion and newness of life that he brings into the world. He calls us to turn around, to shift the direction of our lives, to look, listen, and give our full attention to the kingdom which is arriving. This kind of repentance leads us to believe Jesus' Good News. To see this Good News we must believe. Take some time to do a self-inventory. What sins are present in your life. Ask God to give you the strength to repent of those sins and do God's will.

Tuesday – Read Mark 1:16-20 and I Kings 19:19-21. **Follow Me.** You might think that one of these first disciples would have asked Jesus, "Well, who are you?" Or you would at least think they would say, "Fine, but where are you going?" They asked none of that. They just stumbled after Jesus. Discipleship is following Jesus without exactly knowing who he is or precisely where he is going. Just as Elijah called Elisha to follow him, Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. And immediately, they left their jobs, their homes, and their families to follow where Jesus led and fish for people. Will you follow Jesus? Spend some time praying for people who do not have a church home. When will you invite that person or persons to worship with us?

Wednesday – Read Mark 1:21-45. **Two Days with Jesus.** Over the next two days, Jesus teaches what it means to follow him. In a little more than 24 hours, he models the very ministries he will eventually send them to do. Jesus goes to the synagogue and teaches with authority. He casts out unclean spirits. He heals many people in the house of Simon and Andrew. He goes out to all of the neighboring towns to preach his Good News to all of the people. Then, he healed a man of leprosy so that he could re-enter society. When you follow Jesus, he leads you to minister to many people in many places that you never dreamed you would go. As you pray, consider how Jesus is leading you to minister to the people in your life. How will you serve in our church's ministry in 2019?

Thursday – Read Mark 2:1-12. **The Faith of Friends.** Only Mark tells us that this story took place at Jesus' house. Jesus has the power to heal, and these men knew they needed to bring their friend to Jesus to be healed. When they got to the house where Jesus was they could not find a way through the crowd, but they did not let that stop them. They carried their friend up on the roof and dug through it so they could lower their friend to Jesus. Jesus was impressed by the faith of these friends, and he healed the man. We all need at least four close friends who will serve as our stretcher bearers. Do you know how you find stretcher-bearers? You become a stretcher bearer for someone else. Members of our Care Committee visit our homebound members and comfort grieving families when we have a funeral. Through their caring acts of ministry they bring people to Jesus. What would you be willing to do to bring your friends to Jesus? Contact Rev. Michael Carpenter if you would like to serve in our Care Ministry. Ask God to help you bring your friends to Jesus.

Friday – Read Mark 2:13-14. **Jesus Calls Sinners.** Levi was part of the most hated profession of the day. He was a tax collector. Israel was occupied by the Romans. The Romans would offer tax franchises for sale. Some Jews would renounce their Jewishness and buy these tax offices. They would over tax their own people and then send some of it off to Rome and put most of it in their own pockets. It was legalized extortion. Any Jewish person who renounced his citizenship and joined this racket was despised by his fellow countrymen. They were considered traitors and sell-outs. But Jesus didn't see Levi this way. He saw one of his "sheep" in need of his inclusive love. Jesus not only loved Levi; he also invited him to follow him. How do you see people who are caught in sin? Do you see them as awful people, or do you see them as people in need of Jesus' love, grace, and forgiveness? Pray for those who are caught in sin, addiction, and harmful systems.

Saturday – Read Mark 2:15-17. **Party Person.** Following Jesus made Levi think, "Every one of my old buddies would be better off if they came to know Jesus as I have, but how is that ever going to happen?" So, Levi decided to throw a party and invited all of his old friends along with Jesus and the disciples to attend it. Levi was hoping some friendships might form and that some spiritual sparks would get ignited that might turn into something. He knew that the single greatest gift you can give to another person is an introduction to the God who loves them. Would you be willing to host a party to help some of your friends form relationships with people in our church? Ask God to work through you to introduce someone you know to Jesus.

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12.

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