

Group Covenant

Small groups are wonderful opportunities to grow in faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, alongside others in our community. An essential component of the small group experience is to operate within a sense of trust and accountability to one another. Please prayerfully consider the covenant below as a way to affirm one another in this group setting.

- I will be willing to fully participate, preparing for each meeting and being open to God's presence and to others in the group. No one will be asked to share what they do not want to share. The group will respect each person's position.
- I accept that group members have the right to their own opinions. I will respect and receive what others offer, even if I have a different perspective.
- I will respect the confidence of each group member. What is shared in this group stays in this group, unless otherwise directed.
- I will listen to and care for the members of my group.
- I will pray for our group time together and for each member of my group.

WEEK ONE - What is the Kingdom of God?

Scripture: Mark 1:1-15

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; **3** the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" **4** John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. **8** I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." **9** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." **12** And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. **13** He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. **14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, **15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you from Dr. Blount's reflections?
2. Dr. Blount describes this word εὐαγγέλιον, **meaning "good news"**. What did you think of Dr. Blount's statement that the good news is *"not just what we profess but it is how we live?"*
3. Dr. Blount describes many of the uses of the phrase "the way." He says that it is used later with "Bartimaeus who was on the way," and that the "early Christian community was called the way." And here in our passage a "way has been prepared."
 - a. What do you think it means that you are invited to be a part of this **"continuum"** that is introduced at the beginning of the gospel?" Dr. Blount claims that we "are called to be on the way." How do we do that?
 - b. What do you think about the idea that we are also called to "prepare a way for the others." How might we do that?
 - c. What does Jesus mean when he says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near"? Dr. Blount explains that the reign of God is to be a "conduit of God's" power and force in the world." He challenges us to think about how we "represent that force today?" He asks us to think,

“How can you tap into God’s future reign in this present moment and live that out?” How can we do that especially if it is difficult?

4. How does this passage inform our journey with Christ through Lent?
 - a. Dr. Blount states that “from the very beginning to the end of Mark, we see the boundary-breaking love of God.” From the baptism and the heavens being torn open to the curtain in the temple being torn in two.” Now because this boundary has been broken open we have “access to God” through Christ. Dr. Blount also argues that “God has access to us.” That God is now on the loose through us and in us.
 - i. What do you think of Dr. Blount’s comment that “God has access to us?”
 - ii. In our Lenten journey, how might we better connect with God since this boundary has been broken open?
 - iii. Where might God be sending you in this Lenten journey?