

What happens in the wilderness...

Notes on the Gospel reading

- Mark starts his Gospel with the line: 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus', but we don't meet Jesus straight away. We meet John the Baptist who is a messenger, just like Isaiah. Both are offering messages of hope.

- John is in the wilderness – a word that suggests somewhere hard, barren and empty, a tough place to live. But it is also free from the distractions of everyday life – a space to get ready to meet Jesus. This is the kind of space we should aim to create through our Advent preparations.

- Movement is also important in this passage. John appears in the wilderness and people from the Judean countryside and Jerusalem go to meet him. At Advent, there is call for us to move as well, from the people we once were towards being followers of Jesus.

- The movement away from the Temple in Jerusalem to the wilderness relates to John saying that real repentance will happen out in the wilderness – a reminder that if we really want to be changed, we can't settle for safe rituals. Rather, we must take a risk and be vulnerable.

Preconstruction survey

Reflecting on the journey from 'here and now' to the fullness of the 'kingdom of God', and noting things that need to be knocked down or built up for the kingdom to be built up, make a planning chart – or add to last week's timeline, if you made one – of some achievable practical steps that you might take over the coming year. A household could do this as a group activity.

FREE worship at home resources, including up-to-the-minute reflection on this week's Bible reading, available at: www.rootsontheweb.com

Questions for reflection

- ▶ Why do you think Mark began his Gospel with John the Baptist?
- ▶ If you want to tell someone about Jesus, where would you begin?
- ▶ How would you summarise the gospel in one sentence?



A prayer for others

We pray...

For those lost in valleys:

may they be lifted up.

For those stuck in the heights:

may they be helped down.

For those in barren places:

may they find shelter.

For those in rough places:

may they hear eternal words.

For those seeking forgiveness:

may they find it.

For those seeking apology:

may they hear it.

For those waiting for a long time:

may they find patience in your patience.

For those waiting for renewal:

may there be springs of growth.

Amen.

A personal prayer

God of timelessness, you speak of eternity and the things that do not fade. In all the busyness of my week, the importance of small things, may I find time for the things that will last for ever, especially loving-kindness. Call me deeper into small moments where I can find the light of love in unexpected places. Because you are always to be found in unexpected places. Amen.

Live your faith

Recalling Jesus' time in the wilderness, find/make time this week (ideally, about an hour) to disconnect from the world (e.g. turn off your phone; sit quietly or go for a walk alone). Try not to think too much; just listen for God.