



The gospel of Mark is the earliest of the four gospels. It was written around 65 AD at which time the Christians were being persecuted under the emperor Nero. The author may be the young man mentioned in chapter 14 vv. 51-52 who witnessed Jesus' arrest and ran away naked, but the gospel is thought to rely on the input of Peter for its more intimate knowledge of the life Jesus shared with the disciples. Distinctive themes in the gospel of Mark include 1. Jesus' identification as the Son of God, 2. an abundance of miracles, especially

healings and exorcisms, given to attest the “good news,” 3. the focus, especially from chapter 8 onward, on the Way of the Cross as the pattern of Christian discipleship, and 4. the questionable character of the disciples' faith, evident not least of all in the cliff-hanger ending.

At Westminster-St. Paul's the preaching from September 2005 to April 2006 has been based almost exclusively on the gospel of Mark. The whole gospel has been read in the church over these months and much of it has been examined in the preaching. However, because the passages for each week were selected according to the themes of the Christian year, the gospel was not approached in order. Today's service is an opportunity to experience the whole story which Mark tells, recounted in its proper order, before embarking on the next preaching series, the book of Acts, which will begin May 28th.

The service this morning will take the form of a cantata, with the choir singing *The Song of Mark*, a musical rendering of Mark's gospel by the gifted Lutheran composer Marty Haugen. The narrator, Doug Peebles, will move the plot along by providing a summary of events recounted in the gospel, between the parts set to music. Familiar elements of our morning worship such as the prayers, the offering, three congregational hymns and the benediction will occur, unannounced, where they appear in the order of service. May God bless this morning's event, and be with us as we experience it. It is not a performance, but an act of worship. Nonetheless special thanks is owed to the choir and to their director, Carolyn Milke for the months spent preparing *The Song of Mark*.

Minister and Choir file in.

Narrator from the Back of the Church using remote microphone: “The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Minister prays prayer of approach and invocation from choir, using remote microphone:

Great God, we praise you this day in the gift of music, with words that you have placed upon our tongues by the Holy Spirit and Mark, his secretary. We praise you not only for giving us this remarkable story, but for the fact that it is true, and that it leads us to life. Be in our worship now, and illumine our minds by your Holy Spirit, through Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Choir/Soloists: There is life in the River (during which Jesus walks slowly from the back of the church toward John the Baptist at the front)

Narrator (from the pulpit): The gospel of Mark begins with the announcement of John the Baptist, that popular preacher of repentance, that one would come, more powerful than he, who would baptise, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself came to be baptized by John in the Jordan River and was acclaimed as the Son of God by a voice from heaven and the sign of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. He was then immediately driven out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. After the baptism and the temptation, Jesus began his Galilean ministry. Jesus’ initial message was this: “the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.”

Choir/Soloists: Follow me

Narrator: When the Sabbath came, Jesus was in the synagogue at Capernaum. He impressed the people because of the way he taught – as one having authority. He also displayed his authority over the unclean spirits by commanding them to come out of a young man who was possessed. He did not permit the spirits to speak because they knew he was the Son of God. That afternoon he healed many more people at the house of Simon and Andrew, including Simon’s mother-in-law who was ill with a fever.

The following morning Jesus went apart to pray and arising from prayer went forth to all the neighbouring towns to preach and to cast out demons, as he had been sent to do. Jesus’ ministry was particularly among the outcasts. Mark records his healing of a leper, his healing of a paralysed man, whose sins Jesus also declared forgiven, and his call to Levi, a hated tax collector to

be his disciple. As Jesus said “those who are well, have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

This choice to bring good news particularly to those on the margins of respectable society began to create trouble for Jesus with the Jewish authorities. They questioned Jesus as to why his disciples did not fast, when the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees fasted. Jesus replied that the wedding guests cannot fast so long as they have the bridegroom with them. Then he spoke of his ministry as new wine which required new wineskins in order to contain it. One day the Pharisees caught Jesus’ disciples breaking the Sabbath by plucking grain, and Jesus himself performing a work – the healing of a man with a withered hand – on the Sabbath day. Jesus answered them that the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath. By this early point in Jesus’ ministry the Pharisees were already determined to destroy him.

Jesus’ ministry nonetheless drew crowds, and all who were sick or possessed by unclean spirits came out to see him and were healed. To help him in the work of proclaiming the good news and of casting out demons, Jesus chose 12 apostles: Simon, (called Peter) and Andrew, James and John and Levi, (called Matthew), Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas, Thaddaeus, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Cananean) and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. It was these 12 who became Jesus’ spiritual family. For roughly three years he made his moveable home with them and taught them what it meant to be children of the One God and Father:

Christian Family Sunday Hymn: “O give us homes built firm upon the Saviour” (Finlandia)

O give us homes built firm upon the Saviour,
Where Christ is Head, and Counsellor and Guide;
Where ev'ry child is taught His love and favour
And gives his heart to Christ, the crucified:
A home where each finds joy in serving others,
And love shines forth, as all in Christ abide.

O give us homes where Christ is Lord and Master,
Where fathers, mothers trust God, show the Way,
Where mountains move before a faith that's vaster,
God's Word is honoured, children praise and pray
And then, O God, beyond our family circle

Show us our kindred near and far away.

Narrator: Jesus’ own family was also uncertain about the course his ministry was taking. The scribes were saying that he was able to cast out demons because he himself was possessed by Beelzebub, the king of the demons. Jesus’ family, fearing these religious authorities, would have had him “cool it” for a bit, but Jesus’ ministry took the shape it did in answer to the call of his heavenly Father, and its fervency came from the Holy Spirit, who had anointed him at his baptism. The Holy Spirit is a greater Spirit even than Beelzebub, and people should have known by the division, destruction and disarray which Jesus was causing in the kingdom of the demons that his *Holy Spirit* was far different than Beelzebub, and opposed to him absolutely. Confusing Beelzebub with God’s Holy Spirit was a serious blasphemy.

When Jesus spoke to the crowds, he would teach them by means of parables. The parables revealed truth to some people – those with an ear to hear – and concealed truth from others – those not having a teachable spirit. To make sure his disciples got it, he explained everything to them in private.

Choir: If Anyone has Ears

Narrator: Jesus used the parable of the sower to speak about the different kinds of reception his gospel would find. In another parable he compared the kingdom of God to a growing seed which surprises the farmer by the power of growth which it has within itself, and to a mustard seed which, although it is the smallest of all seeds when planted, yet grows into the greatest of all shrubs.

Much of Jesus’ teaching ministry took place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Once when he was crossing the sea in a boat to speak to the people on the other side, a storm got up and the disciples were afraid they would die. Jesus meanwhile was sleeping unconcernedly in the stern of the boat. When the disciples roused him, he commanded the wind and the waves saying “Peace, be still” and then rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. They knew then that he was no ordinary teacher, for what teacher can speak and have the wind and the waves obey him?!

When they had crossed to the other side they were met by a man who was possessed by a legion of demons. The demons pleaded that Jesus should cast them into a nearby herd of swine. This Jesus did, whereupon the swine ran headlong over the cliff and into the sea. The man amazed the townspeople

when they came and saw him in his right mind, but whether because such power was too great for them to take in, or because they blamed Jesus for destroying the swine, they asked him to leave. The man whom Jesus had delivered was keen to accompany him, but Jesus refused saying “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.”

So Jesus crossed the Sea again. Arriving on another part of shore, he was met by a synagogue leader named Jairus. This man begged Jesus to come to where his little daughter lay dying and to make her well again. Jesus began to go with him, but was delayed by a large crowd which pressed in upon him. In the crush there was one woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for 12 years and was at the end of all her resources. She knew that if only she could touch Jesus’ cloak she would be healed. Jesus knew the touch of this one needy person to be different than all the other people who were pressing against him in the crowd. He told the woman to go on her way, healed and at peace. “Daughter,” he said “your faith has made you well.” By this time Jairus’ daughter had died, so people came from Jairus’ house to tell Jesus it was too late, and he needn’t bother going. Jesus went anyway, and raised her from the dead. As in many other of Jesus’ healing miracles, he then commanded the witnesses not to tell anyone.

Jesus then returned to Nazareth, his hometown. The people had heard about the great things he had done elsewhere, but they were determined not to be impressed: “isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” they said “are not his sisters here with us?” Jesus could hardly do any works of power there, because of the people’s unbelief and he said, “Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown.” Then he went among the other villages in the area and sent out his 12 disciples in pairs to preach and do works of power similar to what he was doing. He told them to live by being dependent on the hospitality they received, and where they and their message did not receive a hospitable welcome, he told them not to linger.

Although the message which the disciples had to preach was the good news of God, its character, and especially the call for repentance that it entailed, was such that some people felt judged by it. Sometimes these people would react with murderous rage and venom. John the Baptist experienced this when he called for King Herod and his sister-in-law Herodias to repent of their adultery. Herod feared John knowing him to be a holy man, but Herodias merely hated him. She got the opportunity to do her worst when Herod promised her daughter anything that she asked for, as a reward for her

dancing. The girl not knowing what to ask for was guided by her mother and requested the head of John the Baptist on a platter. This is how John, that most holy of men and the forerunner of Jesus, met his end. It would not be the last time that the sins of the guilty would recoil on the head of an innocent.

Jesus’ life with the disciples was overshadowed by conflict with those in the seats of power, but there was also a glorious sense of freedom, such as the disciples experienced when Jesus fed the multitudes.

Choir: Bread to share (children exunt)

Narrator: After Jesus had multiplied the five loaves and two fish to feed the 5000, he crossed to Bethsaida. Then he went apart from the disciples to pray. When evening came the disciples were by themselves in the boat and again a storm arose at sea. This time Jesus came walking to them across the water and when he entered the boat the storm ceased. Still the disciples did not get it that they were as safe as houses so long as Jesus was with them. They would learn how to live confidently in the reign of God, but not until much later, since for the time being, their hearts were hardened. Arriving at Gennesaret they were immediately recognized, and Jesus healed many people.

Jesus then had a set-to with some Pharisees. They found fault with the fact that Jesus’ disciples did not wash their hands, following the rules for ritual purification, before they sat down to eat. Jesus answered that what makes a person clean or unclean is not their observance of ritual purity laws but the inner disposition of their heart. It is not what goes into a person through the mouth which can defile them, but rather it is what comes out of a person, from a heart filled with evil intentions, that defiles. Jesus thereby redrew the lines as to what was considered clean and unclean. Through his conversation with a Syrophenician woman the full force of his teaching became clear. Here was someone who was considered unclean, but Jesus shared Israel’s blessings with her. He delivered the woman’s daughter from the demon that was possessing her. After this encounter in the region of Tyre, Jesus opened the ears of a deaf man in Sidon. Tyre and Sidon were two regions of the ancient world famous for their iniquity. That Jesus was recognised and acclaimed by the “sinners” here, put to shame the upright people closer to home, who felt they had a monopoly on the favour of God.

The miraculous multiplication of the loaves and the fishes was repeated, this time providing a meal for 4000 people who came to hear Jesus.

When they came again to Bethsaida, they were met by a blind man. Jesus put spittle on his eyelids and the man was able to see the vague outlines of men. He said they looked like trees walking. When Jesus touched the man the second time his sight was perfectly restored.

When Jesus and the disciples came into Caesarea Philippi, he asked them the question of the hour: “who do people say that I am?” The answers came easily: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets returned from the dead. Then Jesus asked them “who do you say that I am?” Peter answered that he was the Messiah. Jesus did not reject the identification but rather told the disciples not to spread the word abroad. He then shared with them for the first time the shadow which overhung his ministry. “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.” When Peter heard this it did not square at all with his notion of the Messiah’s destiny, so he began to rebuke Jesus. Jesus replied: “Get behind me Satan”, for in that moment, Peter had sounded like the tempter who had wrestled with Jesus in the wilderness, and who had tried to distract him from the Father's will. Jesus went on to instruct everyone who was there as to the true shape and meaning of discipleship. It means self-denial; it means taking up one’s cross; it means resigning any sense of protectiveness for one’s own well being, and being willing even to lose one’s life for the sake of the gospel. With this intimation, we have reached the midpoint and the thematic heart of Mark’s gospel.

Hymn 211 vv. 1,3 and 5: “Take up your cross the saviour said”

Narrator: Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up Mount Tabor. There they saw him transfigured, his appearance dazzling and the figures of Moses and Elijah talking with him. Peter rashly asks whether he can build houses for these three great men of the Jewish religion and stay forever in that wonderful moment on the mountain-top. As at Jesus’ baptism, a voice from heaven declared that Jesus is God’s son and indicated that he was the one to listen to. What Peter didn’t realize was that the one who walked back down the mountain with him to pursue his appointed course into the valley of death’s shadow, was one greater even than Moses and Elijah.

Choir: So Good to Be Here

Narrator: As they were walking down the mountain Jesus told them not to publicise what they had seen until after his resurrection. This talk of resurrection made them curious. They asked him what the scribes meant when they said that before the day of the Lord came, Elijah would return. Jesus answered that Elijah had come – he was referring to John the Baptist – and that they had already murdered him. Then he spoke again about the sufferings which lay ahead of the Son of Man.

The first challenge the disciples encountered when they returned from the Mount of Transfiguration was that of a demon-possessed boy. They were unable to cast the demon from him, so they brought the case to Jesus. He commanded the demon to depart, and the boy was delivered, but the disciples were troubled as to why they could not cast the demon out. Jesus replied: “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

On the way through Galilee, Jesus spoke again about his impending betrayal and death, and his resurrection after three days. The disciples had not yet digested this message though, because what they were discussing along the way was which of them was the greatest. Which would be first in line for the rewards when Jesus came into his kingdom. Jesus took a little child and set it before the disciples. He used this example of one without status and without agenda as a sign of judgment against those who were so concerned with their position and getting their due. Jesus said “whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” That is what constitutes greatness in his kingdom.

John then informed Jesus that another man, unknown to the disciples, had been casting out demons in Jesus’ name. Jesus told them to let the man alone. Jesus’ name is powerful enough to convert any who use it, and is so blessed under heaven that anyone who serves a person for that name’s sake, will be blessed. However, there are also curses that will come upon anyone who places a stumbling block before a vulnerable person so that they cannot hear the name of Christ for the blessed name it truly is. Because God’s blessings and curses are real, Jesus’ urged his disciples to do whatever is necessary – to make whatever sacrifice they have to – to ensure that they would inherit the blessing and not the curse. As Jesus put it: “if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell.”

Jesus continued to amaze the disciples with his high expectations and hard teachings. When asked by the Pharisees whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife he answered that although the law of Moses provided for such, God’s will was for the togetherness of husbands and wives. Later he added when speaking just to the disciples that divorce and remarriage amounts to adultery. These were the expectations, greater than the expectations of Moses, which he placed on his own followers. Again when a rich man approached him and asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus referred him to the commandments. When the man asked what additional thing he had to do, Jesus challenged him to give up all his possessions and become a disciple. The man went away sorrowing for his possessions were great. Jesus then said to the disciples alone that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples again were amazed at the high expectations that seemingly no one could meet. Yet Jesus taught that the people in the best position to please God were those with nothing but their need and their openness. He blessed some children who had come to him and who the disciples had tried to shoo away, saying: “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

On the road up to Jerusalem Jesus spoke a third time about his death and resurrection. He said “See we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.” But still while Jesus was talking about his own humiliation and sacrifice, James and John were dreaming about their glorification. They took Jesus aside and asked him for the privilege of sitting, one on his right hand, and the other on the left, when he came into his kingdom. Jesus assured them that they would have a share of all that was his – including his sufferings. Then Jesus said plainly what he had been saying all along, when he spoke about the last being first and the children being the only ones able to inherit the kingdom. Jesus said that he himself came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. From this any who followed him should understand that greatness in his kingdom consists not in honoured seats or special privileges, but in the service of others.

As they were leaving Jericho, Jesus was accosted by a blind beggar called Bartimaeus, who was asking to be healed. When Jesus restored his sight, Bartimaeus at once threw off his cloak and followed Christ on the way.

At Bethphage, when they were almost to Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead into the city and bade them to bring back a colt of a donkey which had never been ridden. Jesus rode into the holy city on this colt of a donkey as the prophet Zechariah had foretold that the Messiah would do. When the people saw it, they began to wave palm branches and to spread the branches and their cloaks before Jesus and the donkey as a sign of homage: “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” they cried. “Save us, O Son of David.” Later Jesus told the crowds that the Messiah was actually one greater than David, because David in Psalm 2 calls him his “Lord.”

On the following day Jesus was hungry as he walked into Jerusalem again from nearby Bethany. He saw a fig tree but did not find any figs on it. In anger he cursed the tree saying “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” Peter was amazed the next morning as they walked by that same tree and saw it withered. Jesus said this was a sign for the disciples that they should receive from God anything for which they prayed to him with faith. He added that in prayer it was important to seek God’s forgiveness of sins, and that God’s forgiveness depended on a willingness to forgive those who had wronged us also.

Minister offers prayers of the people from choir with remote microphone: Gracious God, we thank you that you have taught us how to pray, and that you assure us, when we pray, of our petitions being heard. We would pray for the things which are on your heart, so that our wills and yours might be one. We pray then for the unity of the church and the blessing of the world. We pray against division in your body and against strife in the World – O lord, your kingdom come. We also see in Christ’s ministry so much healing and deliverance as a sign of your kingdom, and so we lift up to you those who are ill or infirm in body and mind, or troubled in Spirit. We remember those who mourn, especially this week for Marjorie Clarke and her family following the loss of Albert. We remember all who labour under any addictions, or hardships, and for the mothers into whose hearts a sword is driven by the sufferings of their children. We pray for those about to become mothers, and for all that motherhood means beyond the work of labour and delivery. We thank you for mothers who are also teachers of the your life-giving truths, and who are examples of what it means to live in the knowledge and blessing of our Lord. These things we ask in Jesus’ name, together with the forgiveness of our sins, AMEN.

Narrator: When Jesus entered the temple he was incensed that God’s house of prayer should have been turned into a market place. He stormed through and drove the merchants out. The chief priests, hearing of this, were determined to kill him, but were perplexed as to how to do it for the crowds were in awe of him. Jesus knew that the chief priests were planning his destruction, and he spoke to them in a parable about some wicked tenants left in charge of a master’s vineyard. The master sent several servants to collect the rent, but each time they were beaten. Surely, reasoned the master, if I send my own son they will respect him, but when the Son arrived the tenants killed him, whereupon the master returned and exacted vengeance upon the tenants. The chief priests realized that Jesus had told this parable against them. Still they continued to oppose him. Whenever they saw Jesus they would put difficult questions to him, in an attempt to make him lose credibility with the crowds.

They asked him by what authority he was doing the things that he did. Jesus replied with a question: “Was the baptism of John merely a human innovation or did it carry the authority of God?” They did not like to answer this for the people regarded John as a true prophet, so Jesus said he would not give them an answer to their question either.

They questioned him about whether they should pay tax to the Roman emperor. Jesus noted that it was Caesar's image printed on coins and said “give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.” Then the Sadducees, who unlike the Pharisees and Jesus, did not believe in the resurrection, posed the problem of a woman married seven times. Whose wife, they asked, will she be in the resurrection? Jesus replied that in the resurrection we shall be like the angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage. In the resurrection we shall be like the angels, willing only one thing – the magnification of God.

[Ushers come forward and get the offering plates and begin their distribution as the narrator keeps reading]:

One of the scribes was on the same wavelength as Jesus and asked him what was the greatest commandment. Jesus answered “The first is, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

When he was again in the temple, Jesus watched people bring their offerings. He noticed that the scribes, who got their offering from devouring

widows' houses, came forward with it with a great show of piety, prayed long prayers, and enjoyed the respect their high position gained them. On the other hand there was a poor widow who came forward humbly and dropped in two small pennies. Jesus realized that this woman had given more than all the others because while they gave out of their abundance, she had given her everything.

[Ushers bring the plates to the front]

Minister prays prayer of dedication from the choir with remote microphone: Lord God, we thank you for the opportunity to return to you tangible gifts of our thanks, which at the same time can be used among others in need and for the upbuilding of your kingdom. Bless these gifts we pray, and bless the givers, in Jesus' name AMEN.

Narrator: As Jesus and his disciples were coming out of the temple, the disciples remarked “what a great building – such huge stones.” Jesus answered by foretelling the destruction of the temple by the Roman army which took place in 70 AD. He also foretold the persecution his followers would face -- when false messiahs would arise and when brother would betray brother to death. He urged his disciples to be alert, for when such things happen the day of the Lord would near at hand -- just as people knew that summer was at hand when they saw the branches of the fig tree come into leaf. Using some apocalyptic imagery from the book of Daniel Jesus spoke of the day when the Son of Man would come with clouds and great glory. He said that no one knew the day or the hour when these things would occur, but Jesus urged his disciples to keep awake.

Choir: The wondrous day of our God

Narrator: Now it came to be two days before the Passover, and the chief priests were biding their time, still determined to destroy Jesus. Jesus meanwhile was at the home of his friend Simon in Bethany. When the company was at the table a woman entered the room and went up to Jesus. She broke a jar of very costly ointment over his head, an act which Jesus called “beautiful” and understood as an anointing which foreshadowed his death. The disciples scolded the woman for squandering such a costly gift when the proceeds of its sale could have been given to the poor, but Jesus told them to leave her alone. Judas at this point made the decision that he would betray Jesus, and approached the chief priest who offered him money for his wicked act.

On the day of the Passover, Jesus instructed the disciples to make preparation by finding an upper room where they could share the meal.

Choir/Soloists: Jesus sat at table with his friends.

Narrator: After supper, Jesus went out to the mount of olives with Peter, James and John, to pour out his heart in prayer to his Father. He asked the disciples to keep awake, but they could not, and three times, Jesus returned from prayer to find them asleep. In that prayer Jesus showed that he wished with all his heart to flee the terrible mission the Father had given him, but in the end he was reconciled to carrying it through: “not my will,” he said “but yours be done.”

After he finished praying, Judas came to the garden with the chief priests in tow. He kissed Jesus, thus identifying him to the chief priests as the one they wanted. The chief priests had come with a small armed mob in case Jesus put up any resistance, but there was no resistance from Jesus.

He was led away and tried before the council of the Jewish elders. Although the testimony against him did not agree, his fate was sealed when the high priest put a question to him “Are you the Messiah the son of the Blessed one?” and Jesus replied with what the elders considered a blasphemy: “I am.” Then Jesus was taken away and abused with cruel mockery and beatings. Peter meanwhile, had followed at a close distance to await the outcome in the high priest’s courtyard. A serving girl recognized him as a follower of Jesus, but Peter denied it three times. Then the cock crowed and Peter remembered that Jesus had foretold his denial and defection. Peter wept.

In the morning the chief priests handed Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman governor, since the Jewish council did not have authority to put anyone to death. Pilate questioned Jesus as to the charges the Jews brought against him. He asked him if he was the king of the Jews, but Jesus would not speak in his own defense and only said “you say so.” Pilate could see that Jesus was innocent and that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over, however, he did not want openly to oppose these powerful Jewish leaders, so he thought he would make Jesus' release the decision of the crowds. But the chief priests stirred up the crowds so that they called out for Barabbas, another prisoner, to be released, and for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate, being a man of moral weakness, gave Jesus into the hands of his enemies and he was led away to be crucified.

Choir: The crucifixion.

Narrator: When Jesus was dead the centurion who stood by the cross looked at him and said “surely this man was the Son of God.” When evening came, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who feared God, asked Pilate to give him Jesus’ body. Pilate allowed him to take the body away, and lay it in a tomb. Then the tomb was sealed with a huge rock.

Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went to the tomb to anoint the body. They wondered how they would ever get into the tomb with the big rock sealing the entrance. When they arrived however, they found that the stone had been rolled away. A young man in a white robe greeted them and told them Jesus had been raised. He showed them the empty spot where the body had been, and told them to share the good news with the disciples and Peter. Jesus would go ahead of them, and in Galilee they would see him. So they went out wondering.

Hymn 252: “He is Lord.” (choir and narrator process out singing this chorus repeatedly; minister stays at the front of the church to give the benediction).

Narrator from the back of the church with remote microphone: “All that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterwards Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.”

Benediction by the Minister: Go now and hold the light of Christ’s glorious gospel before the world. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest upon and abide with you this day and always, AMEN.