

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE

Mark 1:1-8 Places Matter

By *GrahamBlack*

As we go throughout our lives there are special places in our stories that matter as places of refreshing or reflection; it could be a beach, or a forest walk, or a bach that has meaning for you.

DISCUSSION

Go around room and describe to each other a special place you have in your life, and why that is so.

Places matter in Mark's Gospel as well. In fact, Mark makes it very clear that the most important discipleship moments, and preparation for what is to come, are in certain locations, places that enable them to confront who they are and who might this Jesus be whom they are following.

In our reading, when John the Baptist in Mark 1 gets up and proclaims to the people of Israel, prepare the way of the Lord, prepare for the next stage in your story, prepare for the new thing that God is doing in your midst. He does not do it in the place that anyone would have thought would be the place to prepare. Surely it is in the palace or the temple where God will meet us and prepare us. But John seems to have a different idea of preparing for the coming King. He does not lead them out to a place of blessing, to a place of comfort, but to a little backwater ghetto in the countryside, to the least likely place that God could ever show up.

He takes them out to the wilderness, the desert, the place where nothing is meant to grow.

And as Jesus' disciples follow him towards the cross, places matter. For Mark, he does not begin his gospel with Christ's birth but with the desert, because it is the shadow of the cross that looms over the whole gospel, Mark is preparing his readers for the unthinkable, that before new life can happen there will be death.

ACTIVITY

Mark often uses repetition to highlight the places that are crucial for Christ's disciples as they follow him. As a group go to Mark 4:35-41 and then to Mark 6:30-44 and notice what words keep getting repeated. Discuss what you think Jesus is trying to teach his disciples in those places.

(If you are picking up what Mark is doing, he is highlighting that it will be in the 'boat' and in the 'deserted place' where they are confronted with who they are, their limitations, their complaints, their emotions, and equally they will be confronted time and time again that this Jesus is not who they think he is, and their paradigms, their boxes they have put Jesus in will continue to be burst apart so that new life can spring up.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

If people are comfortable, share with each other a time where you really felt like you were in a desert place. What was going on for you? How did it impact you? What did you learn about yourself during that time? What did you learn about who Jesus is in that time?

For many the desert is a place of hunger and punishment. But for God it is where he delivers us, provides for us and reveals himself. And ultimately are the best places to prepare for the cross.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Just as the disciples had to be honest with themselves in those places, I want us to ask honest questions of ourselves as we journey to the cross:

- Where do you locate yourself at the present?
- What image would capture the place you are in?
- What is it that God is sowing in you in that place?

Those things that God is sowing in this Lenten period, are the very things that will be new life for you over the next season. They will be new not just for you but for St Pauls and the people around you. Because God sows in the desert places, in the cracks and between the stones. And the watering of God's grace brings them alive so that we might be a wellspring of life for others.

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

