

Walking With Jesus, Following His Ministry

For forty days, we will walk with Jesus on a Lenten journey (daily, Monday through Saturday, beginning with Ash Wednesday) as he carries out his ministry. As we travel, you will be invited to read a daily scripture from the Bible, using, where possible, the Gospel of Matthew along with an option from another Gospel. This interactive map, <https://www.understandchristianity.com/timelines/chronology-jesus-life-ministry/> can be used if desired, to show where Jesus travelled. Each day, a question(s) will be posed for you to consider and reflect upon.

Day 1: Jesus began his ministry by travelling from Nazareth to Capernaum, a distance of 50 miles. In Jesus time, Nazareth was a small agricultural town of about 300/400 people. Secluded and rural, it was located on a ridge overlooking both the Jezreel Valley and the Beit Netofa Valley. Imagine the views if you were standing looking out across the valleys.

Have you had a similar experience? Have you had opportunities to look out over a vast landscape? What feelings did it invoke in you?

Day 2: The journey from Nazareth to Capernaum is known today as the Jesus Trail: a hiking trail which can be walked either independently or as part of a tour group and takes 4/5 days. The trail connects biblical sites from Jesus' life, including Sepphoris, Cana, and the Mount of Beatitudes

Have you ever walked a famous route or visited a landmark? If so, was it all you hoped it would be? If not, is there one trail or landmark you would like to visit?

Day 3: Capernaum is a town sitting on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is the largest freshwater lake in Israel. It is approximately 53 km (33 mi) in circumference, about 21 km (13 mi) long, and 13 km (8 mi) wide, and is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth. Most of Jesus' ministry was around the Sea of Galilee.

Spend a few minutes today listening to the sound of water lapping. There are many YouTube videos you can listen to. Select your preferred one or click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw32XIVdHCU>.

How do you feel after listening to the sound?

Day 4: Matthew 4: 18-22, Mark 1:16-20

Jesus chose his first disciples while walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He saw two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once, they left their nets and went with him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and at once they left the boat and their father and went with him.

Why do you think Jesus chose fishermen as his first disciples, and why do you think these two sets of brothers left everything behind and followed without question?

Day 5: John 2: 1-12

Jesus attends a wedding in Cana, turning water into wine, which is the first recorded miracle of Jesus. You can see this story in LEGO animation by clicking here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QofEoaTeo&list=PLpBU0jNzMgFhq2VKZuP6GXUn2Tarmq0KA&index=9>

Today, you are invited to reflect on the concept of miracles. Do you believe in miracles? Can we find miracles in the ordinary today?

Day 6: Matthew 5:3-12, Luke 6:20-23.

Jesus climbed a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee (known today as the Mount of Beatitudes), where he delivered the Sermon on the Mount (containing the Beatitudes), which many believe was Jesus' blueprint on how to live a faithful and spiritual life.

Read the Beatitudes today. Is there one that stands out to you, that resonates in your life or the world today?

Day 7: Matthew 6:7-14, Luke 11:2-4

As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us the words to the Lord's Prayer, which Christians throughout the world still say today.

Here, at RUC, we use the traditional Lord's Prayer and The Lord's Prayer, a Paraphrase, found in Voices United page 916. Do you enjoy saying this different version? Is there one part of the Lord's Prayer that you find particularly meaningful to say?

Day 8: Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 5:12-16

This is the first recorded event of Jesus healing someone. A man with leprosy knelt before Jesus and said, "Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean." Jesus replied, "I do want to, be clean!" At once, the man was cured.

How important do you think the man's belief that Jesus could cure him was? Do you think having a strong positive belief helps when battling health issues?

Day 9: John 3:1-13

Jesus met with a Jewish leader named Nicodemus one night. Together, they discussed Jesus' statement that to see the Kingdom of God, you must be "born again." Nicodemus was eager to understand what Jesus meant.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone where you exchanged views, and it led you to a greater understanding of the topic, or perhaps made you change your point of view?

Day 10: John 4: 5-30

Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Sychar, Samaria and asks her for a drink of water. Shocked, she replied, "How can you ask me for a drink. You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman."

As we know, Jews and Samaritans never mixed and had a distrust of each other, as well as females not being allowed to mix with males unaccompanied. Have you ever had an interaction with an "other"? How was the experience?

Day 11: Jesus travelled from Sychar in Samaria, back to Cana, a distance of approximately 40 miles, which would have taken 3/4 days on foot. The topography involves journeying North through Israel's central hill country with varied terrain before descending into the greener, lower-lying Galilee region.

Today, you are invited to think of a journey you have taken in the past that involved changing landscapes and terrain. What was the most enjoyable thing about it, and what was the least enjoyable?

Day 12: John 4: 46-54

A government official, whose son was sick, approached Jesus in Cana, asking him to go with him to heal his son. Jesus said, "Go, your son will live!" On his way home, a servant met the official with the news that his son would live. The fever had left him at the exact time Jesus said the boy would live.

Has there ever been a time in your life when someone has said something with such certainty that you knew it would happen?

Day 13: Jesus travelled from Cana to Jerusalem, a distance of approximately 110 miles, which would have taken Jesus many hours over several days to walk. It is thought Jesus made the trip from Galilee to Jerusalem at least nine times during his 3-year ministry.

Have you ever made the same trip several times? If so, did you find something new to look at or places to stop at each time?

Day 14: Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4: 35-41

While crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and the disciples were caught up in a storm that appeared out of nowhere. Strong winds suddenly started to blow and rock the boat, and waves began to come over onto the deck. Terrified, the disciples woke Jesus, who was sleeping, saying, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" Jesus then commanded the wind and the waves to be still, and it was so. He then asked the disciples, "Why are you frightened? Have you still no faith?"

Have there been times in your life when your faith has been shaken? When challenges buffeted your life. How did you manage to still your doubts?

Day 15: Matthew 9:1-8, Luke 5:17-26

Jesus was in Capernaum, and crowds gathered to hear him speak. Four men brought their paralyzed friend, wanting an opportunity for him to meet Jesus in hopes he would be healed. Unable to get through the crowds at the door of the house to see Jesus, the man was lowered by his four friends through a hole in the roof which they had made. You can see the full story using Lego animation by clicking on the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gActzbqpiQ8>

Have you ever experienced a moment when a friend has supported you and had your back? Have you ever been the friend who has offered that support?

Day 16: Matthew 9: 20-22, Luke 8: 43-49.

In Capernaum, Jesus was walking when he felt a hand touch his cloak. It is described in Matthew's gospel as follows:

A woman who had suffered from severe bleeding for 12 years came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If only I could touch his cloak, I would get well." Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, "Courage, my daughter! Your faith has made you well." At that very moment, the woman became well.

Have you ever found the courage to try something or stand up for your beliefs because of your faith?

Day 17: Matthew 10:5-15, Luke 9:1-6

Jesus gave instructions to the 12 disciples, sending them out to preach and heal, taking no money with them. In each town, they were to look for someone to welcome them into their homes and extend hospitality to them.

Have you ever experienced some unexpected hospitality? Have you ever offered hospitality to a stranger? Do we, as a faith community, do a good job of extending hospitality to all?

Day 18: Matthew 13: 1-23, Mark 4: 1-20

This is the familiar parable of the Sower. A man goes out to sow corn; some seed falls on the path and is eaten by birds, some land amongst rocks and can't grow strong enough roots, so when the sun comes up, the plants wither. Yet more lands by thorns which choke the young plants, and some landed in good soil, where plants grew strong and produced corn. Jesus then explains that this parable illustrates how different people hear the Message about God's Kingdom.

How often do you read parables? Do you find them a useful tool to help deepen your understanding of Jesus teachings?

Day 19: Matthew 14: 13-21, John 6:1-12 or <https://freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-5000/>

The story of the feeding of the 5000 is one of the most well-known stories from the Bible. When a huge crowd was fed with only five loaves and two fish, which a boy had brought. The food was blessed by Jesus and distributed throughout the crowd from baskets that never emptied.

Do you find it interesting that a child, not an adult, provided the food? Do we sometimes forget the importance of children to Jesus?

Day 20: Matthew 14: 22- 32, John 6: 16-21

Jesus had sent the disciples to the other side of the lake whilst he prayed alone. When evening fell, the boat was far out on the lake, being buffeted by strong winds. Just as dawn was breaking, Jesus walked out onto the water towards the disciples. When they saw him, the disciples were afraid, fearing it was a ghost. Jesus told them, "Don't be afraid." Peter wanted proof it was Jesus and said, "If it's you, Lord, order me to come out on the water to you." Jesus told him to come, but as Peter started walking to Jesus, a strong wind came up. Afraid, Peter began to sink and begged Jesus to save him. Jesus reached out and grabbed him, saying, "How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?" This story is also available in LEGO animation; click here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GV4kefA0Uq0&list=PLpBU0jNzMgFhq2VKZuP6GXUn2Tarmq0KA&index=1>

Do you think it is possible to go through life with complete certainty, or do you think having doubts is part of human nature?

Day 21: John 6: 25-59

Only in John's gospel can you find the words spoken by Jesus, "I am the Bread of Life." This phrase is used in two communion hymns: More Voices #194 Bread of Life, Feed my Soul, and More Voices #197 Bread of Life, Broken and Shared. You can find our Lenten worship from March 2023, where we read and reflected on this passage (and also sang MV #194) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtuLps1ZJ3g&t=847s>.

Today, the question is, what does "Bread of Life" mean to you?

Day 22: Luke 10:25-37

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one familiar to all Christians. When Jesus was asked, "Well, who is my neighbour?" Jesus told the parable of a man (by implication, a Jew) on the road to Jericho who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead. A priest and a Levite ignore him and pass by without helping him. A Samaritan, whom Jews had a hatred of, came upon the injured man and stopped, bound the wounds and took him to an inn to recover.

A few years ago, the book "Revisiting the Parables of Jesus" by Lisa López Smith was selected for the RUC book study (and is definitely worth a read). This book revisits select parables in an updated setting. In her book, López Smith revisits the Parable of the Good Samaritan, as follows:

Dr. Robert was a recognized expert in morality and how to live a faith-filled life. He had many articles and books on the subject, ranging from how to dress to raising God-fearing children. He sourced his information only from the Scriptures and had strict guidelines to define the parameters of good living. He went to hear the Teacher speak, and when it was time for questions asked, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was told to "love your neighbour as yourself." He then asked, "Well, who is my neighbour?" This was the response:

A woman was beaten up in an alley between a gentrified part of town and an area run by drug lords. Bloodied, she was crumpled up against a dumpster. A pastor passed by the alley on his way to a photo op with a local politician at a shelter. Hearing moans, he went to take a look and saw the woman with torn clothes and dirt on her. *Clearly, this was someone who made bad life choices*, he thought, and he walked on. A youth group worker then passed by. He was meeting someone where no one from his church would see him. He shrieked when he saw her, and she half turned. *I have to get out of here*, he thought, *I can't be here if the police come*, and he left. Marie, a blend of strong masculine features framed by a woman's hairstyle, was walking past when she saw the older woman by the dumpster. Ignoring broken glass and used needles littering the alley, she knelt and tended to the woman's bleeding forehead using her beautiful scarf. She noticed the woman was wearing a cross and thought about the religious folks who

frequented anti-gay groups and picketed against Pride events. None of that mattered to Marie. She drove the woman to the hospital and then went to the pharmacy and bought everything needed for a hospital stay. She paid for a room upgrade and sat with the woman, holding her hand, until visiting time was over. She then left, letting the nursing staff know how to reach her should the older woman need anything else.

After finishing the story, the Teacher asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the beaten woman on the street?"....

Here is today's question: Is society too quick to judge people by their clothes and appearance? Do you think social media has a part to play in that? Are we really prepared to love our neighbour, no matter who they are?

Day 23: Jesus and his disciples travelled from Bethsaida to Caesarea Philippi, a distance of about 25 miles. The journey probably took 2 to 3 days and would not have been easy, as they would have been walking uphill from sea level to 1,150 feet above sea level.

Have you ever experienced a long uphill climb? How did you feel as you were climbing?

Day 24: John 8:12-20

In this passage, only in John's Gospel, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."

Have you ever been afraid of the dark? Have you ever been outside as the day breaks? How did you feel when light arrived?

Day 25: Matthew 16: 13-20, Mark 8: 27-30

Jesus was near the town of Caesarea Philippi when he asked the disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied with the names of some of the prophets, but Jesus responded, "What about you, who do you say I am?" It was then that Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered, "Peter, you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church."

Thinking about our faith community of RUC, what do you feel are the foundations upon which we built and continue to build our ministry?

Day 26: Matthew 17: 1-8, Luke 9: 28-36

Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain with him. When they were alone, a change came over Jesus; his face shone like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white. Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus, and God's voice came from a cloud, saying, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased- listen to him!"

Have you ever felt God was talking to you, or sending you signs? Were you open to receiving those signs and God's invitation?

Day 27: Matthew 18: 10-14, Luke 15:1-7, continuing with verses 8-10

The teachers of the Law started grumbling at Jesus, saying, "This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them," and in response, Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep, and in Luke's gospel, also the parable of the lost coin. Focusing on the celebration of finding the one lost sheep and the one lost coin Jesus used the parables to illustrate the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than the ninety-nine who do not need to repent.

Have you ever lost anything special to you? Did you find it, and if so, how did you feel? If you didn't find it, do you still think of it?

Day 28: John 11: 1-44

This passage tells the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. In verse 25, we hear these familiar words: Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and all those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" You can watch the LEGO animation of the story of Lazarus by clicking here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh7XYTkB5NY>

How much comfort do these words bring to your life?

Day 29: Matthew 23: 34-40, Mark 12:28-34

Jesus was asked by a teacher of the Law as to which was the greatest commandment. Jesus responded, saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second most important is to love your neighbour as you love yourself."

What does the phrase "love your neighbour as you love yourself" mean to you? Do you think humans, in general, are good at loving themselves?

Day 30: Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4

Jesus watched as people dropped money into the temple treasury, the rich making a big show of it. A poor widow came by and dropped two copper coins, all that she had, into the treasury without show or fanfare.

Can you think of people in our community, and the world, who give with compassion and empathy, not for the admiration of others, but to support those in need?

Day 31: Luke 19:1-9 <https://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-as-zacchaeus/>

Zacchaeus was a tax collector, rich and disliked by the people. A short man, he wanted to see Jesus, so he climbed a tree to get a better look. Jesus, passing by, stopped, looked up, and told Zacchaeus to come down. Then Jesus invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus' home. From this interaction, Zacchaeus' life was transformed.

Have you ever had a transformational experience? If so, spend a few minutes reflecting upon it.

Day 32: Matthew 20:17-20, Mark 10: 32-34

For the third time in his ministry, Jesus speaks about his death, detailing all that is about to unfold.

Have you ever been in a situation where you know there is a chance that something unpleasant or difficult may happen, but you don't avoid it and meet it head-on?

Day 33: Matthew 21: 12-17, Mark 11:15-19

Jesus went to the Temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling, overturning tables and stools. He referred to scriptures where God said, "My Temple will be called a house of prayer." The blind and crippled came to Jesus in the Temple and were healed.

Thinking about RUC, do you feel we keep our space "sacred"?

Day 34: Matthew 26: 6-13, John 12: 1-8

Jesus went to the home of Lazarus in Bethany, where Martha helped serve the dinner, and Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume.

Have you ever made an extravagant gesture, or has someone made an extravagant gesture to you?

Day 35: Matthew 26:26-30, Luke 22:14-20

Jesus and the disciples shared a Passover meal. Breaking the bread, Jesus said, "Take and eat it, this is my body," and taking the cup, Jesus said, "Drink it, all of you, this is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

Communion is one of the sacraments we celebrate in the United Church of Canada, which is open to all. What feelings do you have when receiving the bread and the wine? Do you think of the Last Supper of Jesus when you receive it?

Day 36: Matthew 26: 36-39, Luke 22:39-46

Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want."

How do you pray? Have you ever tried different ways to pray, e.g. a body prayer or a loving-kindness prayer? Do you pray outdoors? Does it feel any different from praying indoors?

Day 37: Matthew 26: 69-75, Mark 14: 66-72

A servant of the High Priest recognized Peter as he was sitting outside the courtyard and said, "You, too, were with Jesus of Galilee." But in front of everyone, Peter denied Jesus not once, not twice, but three times. Peter then remembered Jesus' words, "Before the cock crows, you will say three times that you do not know me."

How difficult do you think it would have been for Peter to acknowledge he was one of Jesus' disciples? Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel comfortable saying that you are a Christian?

Day 38: Matthew 27:11-26, Mark 15:2-15

Jesus is brought before Pilate for questioning, but he refused to give a single answer. As it was Passover, Pilate could pardon one prisoner whom the crowd asked for. The crowd, whipped up by the priests, demanded that Barabbas be set free and Jesus crucified.

What role do you think Pilate played in the crucifixion of Jesus? Could he have refused the crowd's request? Have there been times when you have been swept up in a crowd?

Day 39: Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-39

On Friday, Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha, where he was crucified. At about 3 o'clock, Jesus cried out, saying, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" and shortly after, he breathed his last.

At RUC, we have a service on Good Friday. Have you ever attended it (or one at another church) or watched it online? What feelings did it evoke?

Day 40: Matthew 27: 57-66, Mark 15: 42-47

Jesus was buried, and a guard was placed at the tomb entrance to make sure it was secure. This was in response to Jesus telling the chief priests, when he was alive, that he would be raised to life after three days. They didn't want anyone to steal the body.

For many years, RUC held a vigil in the sanctuary throughout the night of Holy Saturday, where at least one person sat and prayed, keeping watch. Did you ever take part in the vigil? Would you like to take part in a vigil?

Throughout these 40 days, we have walked with Jesus and completed our Lenten journey together. We hope you have had opportunities throughout to meditate, reflect, and perhaps look at some of the scriptures anew.

To see the story of Easter in LEGO animation, click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2Fa52A-3kc>