

Mark 1:35-45 - What does Jesus do?

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Date: 09 February 2025

Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is from Mark 1, verses 35 to 45. We're on page 1003 in the Church Bibles.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed, Everyone is looking for you.

Jesus replied, Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come. So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, If you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man.

I am willing, he said. Be clean. Immediately, the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning.

[1 : 10] See that you don't tell this to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them. Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.

As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet, the people still came to him from everywhere. That's great. Thank you, Natasha.

Keep your Bible open. We're going to be working our way through that passage together this morning. And let me pray as we come to God's word. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we pray now as we come to your word that you might still our hearts.

There's lots of hustle and bustle in our morning service, and it's great because we love the fact there are lots of people here and lots of children running around. And we're grateful to you for all of those things. But we want now to listen carefully to your word to us.

We want to make the most of this opportunity that we have. We want to pray for your blessing and your help for me as I speak, all of us as we listen. Bring glory to your name, we pray in Jesus' name.

[2 : 31] Amen. Amen. I think perhaps one of the most important things that any church leader can do is to point past themselves to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's really important, isn't it, that anybody with any level of responsibility in the church, whether that's a leader in the church, whether you're helping out in Sunday school, you're teaching the children in creche, whether you're leading a small group Bible study, whatever it is that you're doing, that you are actively pointing in your words and your deeds, cast yourself to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We want to say to people, think about him, not me. Listen to what he says, not what I say. Consider his words and his ways.

Jesus is the head of the church. He is the leader. He is our king, our shepherd. And that's why at the start of our church merger, we have been essentially taking a very slow walk through the beginning of Mark's gospel.

We're doing that because we want to remind ourselves right at the outset of our life together as a church is that, listen, Jesus is in charge of all this. Jesus is the one who we should be looking to, thinking on, pondering.

[3 : 51] He is the one that we need to listen to. We are here for his glory and not for ours. I don't think really there's a better way for us to start our merged church life together than to take an unhurried look at the person of Jesus.

It's the foundation of everything else. And I want this morning just to show you essentially three things that Jesus does in our passage. So you'll notice that Jesus prays. You'll notice that Jesus preaches.

And you'll notice that Jesus purifies. He prays. He preaches. And he purifies. And I just want to take each of those in turn and we'll consider them together.

Firstly, Jesus prays. Look down at verse 35 again. Very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed.

Now notice, just look at the words because Mark wants you to be very clear on exactly what's happening here. Notice he says that it's early. But it's not just early. It is very early.

[4 : 56] Literally something like it is muchly early morning. Right? And it's not just muchly early morning. Look down again. It is what? Still dark.

It's before dawn. And here's the image for us at the outset of our passage. Jesus is there. He's exhausted. Right? He's had a busy day responding to the needs of Capernaum.

If you look back at verse 33, the whole town turned up at the house and he has met all of their needs. And then he's gone to sleep with the rest of the disciples in the house. But now we find he's woken up, got up, left the house to a solitary place, leaving the others behind to pray.

So here it is. It's probably, I don't know, 4, 4.30 in the morning. Jesus is on his knees praying to his Father in heaven. What would you get up at 4 a.m. for?

Maybe work. Right? Some of you have to do that, don't you? An international flight. Crying baby, maybe. A sports game in a different time zone.

[6 : 06] I know some of you have done that. A box set that you can't stop watching. But here we find Jesus, and it's not because he can't sleep, right? It's not insomnia. Nor is it the demands of somebody else placed upon him.

No, it's not that at all, is it? Jesus, in a deliberate action, wakes up early, very early, while it's still dark. Leaves the house and goes to a quiet, barren place to pray.

In other words, that desire that you or I might feel to watch a game or to catch a flight or to get to work on time. Jesus had that level of desire to speak to his Father in heaven.

To have communion with his Father. Now I know, and you know, because you've maybe heard this preached before. This is what happens now at this point in the sermon, isn't it? Lots of preachers saying, Why don't you do that?

You complete waste of space as a Christian. Why are you not up at 4.30am praying in the wilderness? But of course that's not really the application of the passage, is it? Because the application of the passage is not about you or me.

[7 : 11] It's about Jesus, isn't it? And actually Mark wants us to notice something about him. He's not trying to beat us with a stick. He's trying to show us something important about who Jesus is. He's painting a portrait.

What he wants you to know is that Jesus, while fully man, still his desire to be with his Father is greater than his urge to sleep. So that even after an exhausting day, Jesus got up early and was on his knees with his Father.

Now let's not rush through, right? Let me just show you some of the implications of what Mark is saying here. I think there are, I mean there are at least three. I've got three. Notice this.

I think this implies that Jesus and the Father know something that at this stage is still hidden from the other disciples. You know that, don't you? You know when two people sneak off for a private conversation, it's because those two know something that you don't know?

That's why they do it, isn't it? There's a plan. And that's what's going on here. It's why in verses 36 and 37, if you look down at them, when his disciples wake up and they realize Jesus is gone and they're concerned that he's lost the plot, they go and find him and they go, everybody's looking for you.

[8 : 22] Have you gone crazy? We've got work to do in Capernaum. There's more people here who want to see you. There are loads of people with stuff for you to do, Jesus. And what are you doing out here in the wilderness?

But that doesn't cut it for Jesus, does it? Because he's not here to do the will of the people, but the will of his Father. The will of his Father has not yet been fully disclosed to the disciples, even though the Father and the Son know what it is.

You could perhaps put it like this. You know, God has a surprising plan. A surprising plan that the disciples are yet unaware of. And their idea that they could tell Jesus what to do and tell him off for praying was ludicrous, wasn't it?

They're missing the point. In fact, Mark underlines this in a way that you might not notice initially. The word translated there, solitary place, is the same word that he's used already for desert or wilderness.

It's the same word as in Mark 1, verse 13, where Jesus is being tested. So Jesus has, if you like, retreated to the wilderness of testing. He's gone behind enemy lines in the midst of a company of people who have a plan for his glory that doesn't involve the suffering of the cross.

[9 : 29] He's gone there to pray, to speak to his Father, the author of the true plan, the one who really knows that the plan for the Son is to go to the cross, not to receive the glory of the people of Capernaum.

I think we can put it more deeply and more clearly than we've been doing so far. I said to you before, didn't I, that Jesus' desire to pray was greater than his desire to sleep. I think it's more than that, isn't it?

It's more like Jesus' desire to accomplish his Father's plan was greater and more significant than his desire or his right desire for the human instinct to sleep.

If you like, to Jesus, salvation mattered more than sleep. Let me just ask you whether you've ever reckoned with that this morning. That Jesus here, by the fact that he retreats and prays, is pointing to the fact that there is a bigger reality in the world than human satisfaction and desire.

There is something more important in the world than a good night's sleep. There's something more important in the world than a good meal or even to be with your family or even to live a comfortable life, to accomplish academic or business success.

[10 : 47] There's something more important than the city of your dreams or marrying the man or woman of your dreams. There's a bigger plan in the world than just the satisfaction of human desire.

What is it? It's seen in the plan of the Father and the Son to send Christ to the cross for the salvation of the world. Now, it doesn't mean that any of those other desires are wrong.

It mustn't mean that we shouldn't, under any circumstances, acquire those things either, does it?

But it does mean that God the Son in human flesh is about something bigger and greater than just human desire and satisfaction.

The second implication is this, though, I think, that Jesus, in his humanity, enjoys communion with the Father. So not only are they in on a secret plan, but also that Jesus loves to spend time with his Father.

We try to be really clear in these early weeks in Mark's Gospel that Mark is just perpetually underlining the divinity of Jesus, right? He's the Son of God. He's God in flesh. But what's also really clear is that Jesus is an ordinary man.

[11 : 54] He sleeps, eats, works, and rests like the other disciples. And yet, for the man, Christ Jesus, his joy in communion with the Father trumps this natural desire for sleep.

He wants to pray. It's rather like in John 4. I don't know whether you know the story in John 4. His disciples go off to find some food to eat. And they come back, and Jesus isn't really interested in food anymore.

And he says, no, in some ways, I've got something better than food. My food is to do the Father's will, he says. And of course, we know that this is right, don't we? We know that the highest joy that even we experience is not just acquiring stuff, is it?

You know, the great joy of a lovely meal is not just the food itself. It's the person you're eating it with. You're enjoying their company. Love, friendship, communion, if you like, is the highest human good.

It's to enjoy the blessing of being with one another. You know, even an introvert who loves their own company still does not want to be alone or in a loveless friendship or a cold marriage.

[13 : 04] And here, Jesus the man seems to enjoy that kind of communion with his Father in heaven. It's extraordinary, isn't it? It seems, in fact, that that communion that he enjoys with the Father in heaven is actually the fuel for his ministry.

Three times in Mark's Gospel, at points of testing and difficulty, we find Jesus retreating into a place of prayer, coming with his Father away from everyone else to enable him to face what's coming.

Same idea in Mark 9, when the disciples are frustrated that they've not been able to cast out a demon, and Jesus tells them, this kind can only come out by prayer. Prayer is the fuel for Jesus' ministry.

Communion with God is where the power and the strength flow from. This is so challenging to me, right? Think about it like this. Jesus, the perfect man, the saviour of the world, God in flesh, the one with the power to heal, the one who can cast out demons, the one who can walk on water, the one who can calm the storm, the one who can feed the crowd, he is not first an activist.

Notice that. He's not up early in the morning to engage in manic activity. Instead, he's praying, on his knees, communing with his Father in heaven.

[14:26] Think about what that means for the Christian life. It means, doesn't it, that the goal of the Christian Gospel is not to set you about manic activity, for you to do just a little bit more than is humanly possible.

No, instead, the goal of the Gospel, the goal of the mission of Christ is to invite you and I, through his blood on the cross, into a relationship with the Father in heaven that is rich and deep and the fuel for our lives.

You know, in enjoying communion with him, the Father through the Son by the Spirit, is more life-giving, more strength-giving, than even a good meal or a good night's sleep.

If you're not a Christian this morning, what you need to know is really that, essentially, becoming a Christian is rather like being adopted. In fact, that's the word the Bible uses. We are adopted into the family of God.

We get to share in what we see going on here. It's an invitation to join a new family, a family whose communion is so deep, so rich, so refreshing, so life-giving, you would wake yourself up at 4am, even if you were exhausted, just so you could enjoy it and delight in it.

[15:42] I think the third implication here, though, is that the agony of the cross will not be mostly physical. It's easy, isn't it, for us to imagine the physical suffering of Christ on the cross, and I know that it's a good thing for us to know that and to see it and to think in it.

You know, the nails in the wrists and in the feet, the crown of thorns pushed onto his head. The idea that Jesus is breathless and essentially dies by suffocation in his own blood as he hangs naked on the cross.

It's an awful form of human torture, isn't it, the cross? It's unthinkable. But this verse here shows you that's not actually the greatest suffering of the cross at all.

Instead, to see the pain of the cross, you need to see the severing of this communion between the Father and the Son, as in the darkness at the middle of the day, Jesus cries out in a loud voice, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus, bearing the sins of his people, is now unable to access the presence of his Father. The Father, for the first time in eternity, is hostile to his Son as he's clothed in the stench of our sin and dies for its punishment.

[16:50] God in flesh cut off from his Father in heaven. Now, of course, that's the secret of the Father and the Son here in Mark 1. It's the wilderness that the wilderness is pointing to, isn't it?

And the agony of the cross is that it severs the very thing that brings Jesus strength and joy and courage and purpose. The communion with his Father, which is at the centre of who he is, is broken at the cross.

And why? So that you and I might enjoy it. It's incredible, isn't it? Jesus is clothed in our sin and cut off from his Father so that you and I might be clothed in his righteousness and enjoy communion with the Father.

We get what Jesus had because he takes what we have. He is put out so that we might be brought in. And Jesus prays here so that you and I might pray now.

Jesus prays. That's the first thing to me. Jesus prays. Second is that Jesus preaches. I know we looked at this with the kids, but there is a double emphasis on this in verse 38. Look down at verse 38. Jesus replied, let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also.

[18:00] That is why I've come. So he travelled throughout Galilee preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. Here it is. You see it. This is why I've come, verse 38.

Preaching is what I'm doing. It's who I'm about, right? Everywhere. I need to go everywhere. Even as he drives out the devil's opposition in verse 39. Of course, this is a massive surprise to the disciples.

They thought they had a good thing going in Capernaum. You know, Peter's mother-in-law's in the kitchen cooking up the food. People are coming to them. They're not having to go anywhere. Sick people turning up and being healed.

Fame and fortune was theirs, right? They got it sorted. They got the program sorted. But Jesus says, no, no, no. That's not why I've come. I've come to preach and I've come to preach everywhere. Let's leave. I've got to go. Again, and I know we mentioned this with the kids, but this is so important.

You can know you've understood Jesus. Not because you like the idea of him. You know you know Jesus. Not when you've had some kind of emotional experience of Jesus.

[19 : 02] You know, don't you, that's the route to shallow Christianity. It might not even be Christianity, but it's extreme. If the predominant dynamic of your Christian life is feeling around for Jesus in some kind of emotional experience, maybe in singing songs or in going to a place where you think you might sense his presence, if that's what your Christian life is like, you haven't met the Jesus of Mark's Gospel because the Jesus of Mark's Gospel is a preacher and you know you've met him when you listen to him and you listen to what he says.

You know, it's the point of Mark, isn't it? We don't scabble around in the dark for Jesus. We don't hope that if we attend the right kind of service with the right kind of vibe, we'll meet him somewhere in our guts. No, that's the road of all sorts of dire mistakes.

Instead, Jesus is a preacher who demands, listen, listen to me, says Jesus. And that was the case even when you could reach out your hand and touch him because he was there.

And why do you think that's the case? Why do you think the saviour of the world has come as a preacher and not a therapist or a magician or a spirit? Why do we meet Jesus in listening to his word and not sitting in silence, waiting to hear his voice somehow in our heads?

Well, surely that's because it explains, doesn't it, that the problem in the world is not the absence of spiritual experience. You know that, don't you? The problem in the world is not the absence of spiritual experience.

[20 : 32] You can get spiritual experiences all over the place. You can get it watching Liverpool Football Club right now. Believe me. Right? Probably not watching Arsenal, but you could definitely get it watching Liverpool.

The problem in the world is not the absence of sort of deep spiritual, emotional experiences. No, the problem in the world is that we have turned our back on God and what he says.

and the saviour comes to preach God's word that we might listen to him. You know, by nature, we block our ears to his word.

We say, well, we don't want to listen to you. I know, okay, God, you've got some ideas about what my life is for, about what this world is about. But to be honest, frankly, I'm just going to listen to myself. And Jesus comes and preaches and says, repent, listen up.

I've got a message. Let's just think about this for a little bit longer. I want to just grapple with this. If Jesus self-identifies as a preacher, a preacher for whom it's more important that people across the region hear his message than it is that people are healed in one particular city.

[21 : 42] If that's the case, there's something really surprising going on in these early chapters of Mark. I don't know whether you've noticed it. The surprising thing, if Mark says, listen, Jesus is a preacher, before anything else, he's a preacher.

He can heal and that's important. He has power over sickness and he has power over death. He has power to conquer Satan. But he's here as a preacher with a message that you've got to listen to. What would you expect the contents of Mark 1-3 to be?

Surely you'd expect them to be just transcripts of Jesus' sermons, right? But what happens as you look down at chapters 1-3 of Mark's gospel? Well, you notice there's hardly anything of Jesus' preaching in Mark 1-3.

It's not really until you get to Mark 4 that you're given any sustained account of what Jesus is actually saying and teaching. Yet still, right here at the beginning, Mark is telling you that Jesus is a preacher. Why would he do that?

Why say preaching is the thing and listening is the priority and then not say what's being preached? Well, let me give you two reasons for that. The first reason is that Mark wants you to see that Jesus is no ordinary preacher.

[22 : 44] Jesus is a preacher with authority. You know he's said that already, don't you? You've noticed that before. In chapter 1-22 and again in chapter 1-27 we are told that Jesus is a teacher

with authority, a preacher of authority.

Jesus' sermons are not like a kind of TED talk that gives you a few interesting facts or a management book or a GCSE revision guide or whatever. Jesus is preaching not just a few things that you might need to know of which you would otherwise be ignorant.

No, Jesus is preaching and his preaching is powerful. And you know that because all of these miracles in Mark 1 flow out of the preaching of Jesus. In other words, it is the presence of God's word that leads to the absence of sickness.

It is the presence of God's word that leads to the absence of demons. It is the presence of God's word that leads to the calling of the disciples. This is where the third P comes in if you can remember by praying, preach and purify.

Okay? Here Jesus makes people pure. Notice this with me. He cleans and cleanses. If you look down at verses 40 to 42, you see that Jesus meets a man with leprosy. A man with leprosy, verse 40, came to see him and begged him on his knees, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

[24 : 02] Jesus was indignant, probably with the disease. He reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. Immediately the leprosy left him and he was clean.

Now, the point here, the distinction that Mark is wanting to make is that leprosy is no ordinary disease. Okay? Leprosy is a skin disease that needs not only healing, but it needs purification. Leviticus in the Old Testament was full of rules and regulations about what to do with someone with a contagious skin disease. A contagious skin disease excluded you from God's people, put you out of the temple and meant that you could not worship with God's people anymore.

You had to be outside of the camp. And Jesus here does the scandalous thing of doing what? Touching the guy with leprosy.

The thought was, if you touch someone with that kind of uncleanness, that not just the leprosy itself as a disease was contagious, but the uncleanness itself was contagious. If you reached out and touched the person, you would not only probably be infected with leprosy, but you would receive their ceremonial uncleanness.

[25 : 12] So Jesus here was being crazy. He was doing something that no one would ever dream of doing. And he reaches out and touches the leper. But what happens? It's incredible, isn't it?

Jesus reaches out, touches him, and says the words, be clean. And the leper is infected with the cleanness of Jesus.

It's astonishing. The point to you and me is, as we read Mark's gospel, is Jesus' word is able to make people clean. Jesus' word can do what temple worship could never do.

The leper is not only healed, but made fit for God's presence. He is made clean. The unclean who are kept away and excluded and untouched are brought in now by the words of Jesus.

And verse 44, they have to go to the priest to be accepted back into the fold of the people of God. See, this is why there aren't long transcripts in Mark 1-3, because Mark is not starting by recording the detail of Jesus' preaching, but showing you the miraculous effect of his preaching.

[26 : 25] This is his introduction, if you like. Let me show you that the messages of Jesus have life-changing power. Let me show you. And over and over again he shows it to you.

This is why this instruction to listen to Jesus is so life-giving this morning. You see, if being a Christian is sort of feeling for Jesus rather than listening to Jesus, you miss out on this power, because it is listening to the word of Jesus that has the power to do what no other religious action or activity could ever do.

Because Jesus' word can drive out and clean us. Jesus' word can forgive sin. Jesus' word can bring you into an eternal, beyond death, kingdom full of truth and goodness and wholeness and healing. You'd be a fool not to listen to that kind of word. But here's the second reason I think that we're not reading transcripts of Jesus' sermons even though he's come as a preacher. This I think is mind-blowing.

Because Mark's conviction is that as he records the events of Jesus' life, he is preaching the words of Jesus to you. That's what he thinks. In other words, Mark thinks that as you read his account of what happened, you are not reading just his words, but you are reading the word of God carried by the spirit of God.

[27 : 48] You are reading Jesus' words. Mark is writing what Jesus is saying to you. So that our job as we read Mark's book is not to kind of work our way through it and try and discern where the words of Jesus are in Mark's gospel.

No, we're to read Mark's gospel as the word of Jesus, listening to it. Mark isn't writing to tell you about God's word, right?

He is writing God's word. He is preaching to you. And we saw that, didn't we, in the very first week. He knows he's writing like a new Genesis 1 account.

In the beginning, a new creation story about a new kingdom, a kingdom of life and forgiveness and healing and glory to God instead of this creation story of darkness and death and destruction. and he believes that as he writes, you are reading under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit God's words. I think this is perhaps one of the most important lessons about the application of the Bible for us this morning.

[28 : 56] It's difficult, isn't it, sometimes with the historical documents of the Bible to go, well, that's all very well and it means it would have been great to be there when Jesus was preaching. Imagine that. But actually, what we're realising now is that it's not so much that it was cool to be there then, but it's really cool to be here now.

You know, Mark is not really a biography of Jesus. I know that that's sometimes how we talk because it kind of explains a little bit about what it is, but Mark is not a biographer. Mark's a preacher, right?

He's a prophet. He thinks that you engage with Jesus, you meet Jesus as he walks off the pages of this book into your life. Let me say, this is why God's written word is always at the centre of the gatherings of God's people.

It's always at the centre of our worship services. God's word will be the content of the songs that we sing because the musicians are not here to kind of hype us up for some kind of emotional experience outside of the truth of God's word.

No, they are here to help us enjoy and express the beauty and the wonder of God's word and God's truth as we sing to one another to the glory of his name. It's why we believe in preaching because we believe that the spirit of God who inspired these words has been at work today when these words are read and considered.

[30 : 14] It's why our church is kind of both hopefully historic but also contemporary. we meet here today, we meet here now, we don't all dress as if it's still the 19th century. We don't talk like that, we don't read a Bible version that's full of words that are written like they were written by someone hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

We're contemporary, we're based here and now in 2025 but we're also historic because God has been preaching this same book for centuries and we stand on the shoulders of men and women who have heard it before us.

And so the invitation each week here as we come to church is come and meet with God. Come here and meet with God. Hear from him. Come and be fed by him.

Come and listen to him. Let me finish with a little story about myself and how this kind of came home to me. I can remember clearly when I started to learn this about God's word and how it worked.

I was a student at university in Sheffield. I was a Christian when I went to university but I was really a baby Christian and I was the worst kind of baby Christian because I was a baby Christian who thought they were a mature Christian.

[31 : 26] That's the worst kind of baby Christian. It's okay to be a baby Christian if you know you're a baby Christian but if you think you're a mature Christian what you actually are is a bit of a fool. That was me at university.

I thought I knew a lot more than I did. And I went to church which was a little bit different to the church I'd been to back home and it was very ordinary though really in lots of places. It was very straightforward and ordinary.

It was a parish church just outside Sheffield. But at the centre of the services was a pastor who would just open up the Bible and explain it. I don't think I'd ever really experienced anything so ordinary really.

And I remember sitting there thinking as he preached about I could have seen that. Like what's the big deal here? But as I went week by week slowly but surely my life was being changed.

And I had this new hunger for God's word that I'd never experienced before and I'd go back to my room at university and would just read and read and read and read. Couldn't get enough of it.

[32 : 30] And slowly but surely the things that I was really interested in and keen on and wanted to do with my life they were being shaped and transformed. How? By a very very ordinary process.

of someone standing up and explaining God's word. It turns out that God does extraordinary things through ordinary means in our lives.

And that was my experience and I hope and pray that's our experience as a church that as God's word is opened up week by week you find that God is doing something extraordinary in your life.

Growing your love for him. Your trust in him. Your experience is the greatest of this great communion with Father, Son and Spirit that is greater than any other desire you might have as you too take this message to the world that others might hear this great news that Jesus speaks today and you can hear him if you will open a Bible and listen.

Let's have a moment of quiet as we think and ponder in our hearts and then I'll pray for us. Let's have a moment to the world and thank you for your love for you and thank you and thank you for your love for you loving Heavenly Father thank you that you speak to us today that these words that we have read are not simply what Jesus did in the past but are what you are saying to us today.

[34 : 26] Thank you that your word today carries the same power as it ever did the power to bring life the power to make clean the power to heal the power to bring people into your eternal kingdom and so Lord we pray please make us good listeners we ask that we might have tender hearts which are hungry to listen to what you say to us that we might listen carefully for the glory of your name
Amen Amen