

# The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(The Anglican Church in Limpopo Province)

Bishop: Martin Breytenbach

E-mail: [martin@stmark.org.za](mailto:martin@stmark.org.za) Web Site: [www.stmark.org.za](http://www.stmark.org.za)



P.O Box 643  
Polokwane, 0700  
South Africa

31 January 2013

Ad Clerum: Lent 2013

To All Clergy  
Copies to all Churchwardens  
Copies to Diocesan Organisations

*Please share this with God's people in your parish!*

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is a bit late to wish you "Happy New Year", but I do pray that God will be with you and guide you throughout the rest of 2013. Thank you for your partnership in the Gospel – it is a privilege and joy!

I read some interesting reflections on Lent in the recent Johannesburg Diocese Ad Clerum. Joan Chittister (a Benedictine nun) said: "Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been and are not. Lent is a grace to grieve for what we should have done and did not. It is the opportunity to change what we ought to change but have not – Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now. It summons us to live anew."

Have a good Lent, and take some time to draw closer to God both for your own life and for your ministry.

## Studying the Bible

One of the things I enjoy most is reading, studying and meditating on the word of God in the Bible. As the psalmist says:

*This is my comfort in my distress, that your promise gives me life. (Psalm 119:50)*

Why not set aside some special time to study and meditate on the Bible this Lent – preferably with a small group of people who want to get to know God better.

Getting to know the Bible, studying it in groups, making disciples by using it, preaching from it are enormously important for us in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist. That is why we have put such emphasis on things like:

- ✦ Rooted in Jesus – where we make disciples who can make disciples by learning from and memorising Scripture.
- ✦ Langham Preaching – where we have been taught how to prepare and preach expository sermons. As a result, Shearsby Mupfudzapake and a team have been preparing training material for our Licensed Preachers.

Recently I came across a very helpful approach to Bible Study in groups, which I want to share with you. It is a

method of doing "contextual Bible study" which is being developed by Ms Bongi Zengele, a PhD candidate at the University of KZN.

We learnt about at when I attended a course for Bishops on "Advocacy" – where God calls us to stand up for justice and the values of the Kingdom of God in our public life. Now, I have attended many "contextual" Bible studies in the past, but this approach was the most accessible and easy to implement that I have experienced.

Firstly, some background. The human writers of the Bible all lived in particular contexts: historical, economic, political, geographical, social... In these contexts they saw God at work and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote about it.

When we read the Bible we are reading from our particular context, and that inevitably influences how we understand it. There is no such thing as "context-less" Bible reading. The value of "Contextual Bible Study" is that it recognises that fact and uses it to hear what God is saying through the Biblical text.

Here is the approach that Bongi Zengele taught us:

### 1 Introduction

This is a practical way of interacting with people in their own context using the Bible. There is no fixed formula or a set method, but rather it is a process to embark on together.

As we look at our present context through the Bible, we find that God is challenging the "status quo". It is most helpful if we do this with ordinary people, particularly those who are poor and marginalized (like many of the writers of the Bible!).

When we read the Bible in this way, we begin to see things from a different point of view. We start to re-interpret our faith for today, and to address the issues that we are grappling with today. This can give new power to all of us, especially those who are not influential or powerful:

*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame*

*the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. (1 Corinthians 1:26-27)*

We should not be surprised when God speaks to us and challenges us to take action and bring about change in church or society. So, this is not an academic exercise, it is about hearing God speak to us where we are and then acting in obedience and the power of the Holy Spirit.

## 2 The Process

Remember that Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1-4) who speaks to us through the written words of the Bible. So begin by committing yourselves and your study to him, and inviting him to speak to you.

Here are some simple questions and steps to guide you through the process.

### 2.1 Read the text

First you have to choose a passage from the Bible. Why not start by using one of the passages from the coming Sunday's lectionary. I prefer to choose a narrative (story), which you are most likely to find in the Gospel for the day. By the way, it is wonderful to preach to people who have studied the passage in advance – they get so much more out of it, and it keeps the preacher on his or her toes!

Get several people to read the text in different languages and translations. Then you can take a moment in silence for people to think about what they have heard.

### 2.2 Ask: What is the text about?

We are not looking for any deep or profound answers here. Just get a few people to tell the story in their own words. What happened? Give a summary of the most important points as the group sees it.

### 2.3 Identify: Who are the characters in the text and their roles?

Who did what, to whom, where and how? What kind of people were they: rich, poor, powerful, powerless, adults, parents, children, women, men, slaves...? Here we are getting a feeling and some understanding of the dynamics at work between the people, and their relationships.

### 2.4 Ask: What does the main character do and say?

You may need to discuss who the main character is in the text! And why did he or she do and say those things? How did the others respond to it? Don't try to get too "theological", just share what you can see in the text.

### 2.5 Ask members of the group to tell of similar experiences they have had in their context.

Here we are getting to the heart of the study. We are beginning to look at how the Bible text relates to our lives here and now. Throughout this study it is important to respect one another and listen to what the others are saying. They may be sharing experiences that were deep,

joyful or painful to them. Resist the temptation to give advice or draw conclusions.

### 2.6 Together name the challenges brought about by this story.

At this point the group must be prepared to think critically and theologically. Are there important values of the Kingdom of God in the text? Are there things in our church or community that need to be challenged? Could God be calling us to do something about them?

### 2.7 Finally ask: What will we do now as a response to this study?

God may lead you to offer to do something in the church, or to take some action to improve the community, or to challenge something that is wrong in our society, or to help someone in need... The possibilities are endless. But the important thing is that God's word must lead us to obedient action.

Talking and making plans are not enough. Without the love and power of the Holy Spirit we will not be able to do anything of lasting value – or we will become distracted from God's calling. So commit the whole thing to God and ask him to send the holy Spirit upon you to inspire and guide.

## Rooted in Jesus...

Continuing our focus on the Bible and making disciples, remember that we are running a **Rooted in Jesus Training Conference from 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> March** at Mater Dei near Mokopane. We will be led by a team of international RinJ trainers, all of whom come from this Diocese!



Remember also that we have been given a special subsidy for up to 2 youth leaders per parish – so that they only have to pay R360 each. The cost for all others is R600.

Have a blessed Lent as you follow Jesus into the wilderness to seek and serve God – and may God refresh you spiritually so that you can be a blessing to your people.

Yours in Christ,

*†Martin: St Mark  
the Evangelist*

†Martin: St Mark the Evangelist