

Preparing for Blessing

Tom Yacomeni

Mark 1:9-22

As we begin 2026, I hope you are feeling excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. I hope you are looking forward to seeing all the wonderful things the Lord is going to do among us in the coming year.

2026 – bring it on.

As you know, I love January. I love the space and calm after the festivities of Christmas and the New Year, even after being made to have Christmas dinner outside this year. Would I rather have been on the sofa by the fire? Yes. But memories were made. Job done.

I enjoy getting back into the swing of things, but I have to admit the prospect of 2026 feels like a mixed bag. In August I turn 55, which according to the William Carr's Alms-house Trust here in Weston officially makes me "aged" – something Mims is keen not to let me forget.

On the plus side, we have several family weddings to look forward to, the World Cup starts in June, and we will welcome a new curate to the staff team. We have exciting guest speakers and special events lined up in the life of the church. There is much to look forward to.

Yet globally, the outlook feels bleak. Our screens are filled with explosions, fire and carnage across the world. Warnings of war, climate change, biohazards and uncontrolled AI increase daily. It feels like the four horsemen are approaching, and the adults in the room either seem to be adding fuel to the fire or checking out altogether.

But the good news is this: **the church was born for such a time as this.** There are over a billion followers of Jesus across the world. All it takes is for us to rise up and shine light into the darkness and say, *there is another way. There is a narrow path to peace without exploitation.*

The good news of God's kingdom is here today, just as it was when Jesus began his ministry in Galilee two thousand years ago. It may have felt dark then, and it may feel dark now, but the kingdom of God is advancing. As Jesus said, "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

On New Year's Day, as I prayed about this year of blessing, I was drawn to the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins with this:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'
(Matthew 5:3)

If you feel poor in spirit, or gloomy as you look at the world, that is the place to start. God's blessing begins when we acknowledge our need of him. When we say, *Lord, we need you*, that is when the doors of blessing open.

Blessing is not decorative icing on a cake. It is placing the weary pieces of our lives into the hands of the Master, allowing God to reshape us and fill us with his light, courage, hope and assurance. That blessing then spills into our community.

This is the pattern Jesus adopted at the start of his ministry. In Mark chapter 1 we see how Jesus prepared to change the world. He began by coming to be baptised in the River Jordan. He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not need John's baptism for forgiveness of sins, yet he chose it to model three things: commitment to God's will, assurance of the Father's call, and empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

As he came out of the water, heaven was opened. The Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven:

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11)

That gentle reassurance of God's love is the starting place for changing the world. Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear those words for ourselves?

You are my son.

You are my daughter.

With you I am well pleased.

That is the start of blessing. That is the start of a year of blessing.

After this, instead of heading into celebration, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days of testing, hunger and danger. That does not sound like blessing, yet it is where we learn what blessing truly is.

We pray, **"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"** (Matthew 6:13), yet here the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. Why? Because the safest place is being alone with the Lord. What we are in private defines us.

Jesus endured testing, temptation and threat, but he overcame. Mark tells us that angels ministered to him. If you are in a wilderness season, angels can minister to you too – often through encouragement, laughter, kindness and timely words.

After the wilderness, Jesus returned to find that John the Baptist had been imprisoned. Injustice and grief followed testing. Yet Jesus did not succumb to gloom. Instead, he recognised the urgency of the moment and launched his ministry, proclaiming:

“‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:15)

When life looks darkest, the call becomes more urgent.

Mark’s Gospel is full of urgency – *immediately, at once, without delay*. There was no time to lose. Jesus then went out to recruit a team. He called ordinary fishermen – Peter, Andrew, James and John – unschooled men, but men with patience, stamina and strategy.

Jesus saw their grit and called them:

“‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’” (Mark 1:17)

And immediately, they left their nets and followed him.

As the world grows darker, our task becomes more urgent. We are called to develop strategies of kindness and care, to share the life and message of Jesus, and to bring people from darkness into light.

This year of blessing is not only about generosity, though generosity matters. It is also about clarity – clarity about the hope we have in Christ. Jesus is the only adult in the room worth following.

Jesus prepared for ministry by being filled with the Spirit, finding God in solitude, gathering a team, and teaching with authority. He began in Capernaum, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy:

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;” (Isaiah 9:2)

The kingdom of heaven is the presence of Christ among us, now and in the future. God knows the solutions to the world’s problems. We must be humble enough to seek his will above our own.

2026 can be a year of enormous blessing – not just for us, but for our community and beyond – if we rise up and declare that Jesus is the only one worth following.

If we sincerely pray,

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,”
(Matthew 6:10)

that is what will change the world.