

Online Bible Study
Fall, 2018
The Gospel of Mark

A 10-Week study based upon *A Journey With Mark*, ed. Marek T. Zabriskie
(Forward Movement, 2015)

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| 1. September 23-29 | Ch. 1 & 2 |
| 2. September 30- October 6 | Ch. 3 & 4 |
| 3. October 7-13 | Ch. 5 & 6 |
| 4. October 14-20 | Ch. 7 |
| 5. October 21-27 | Ch. 8 & 9 |
| 6. October 28-November 3 | Ch. 10 |
| 7. November 4-10 | Ch. 11 & 12 |
| 8. November 11-17 | Ch. 13 & 14 |
| 9. November 18-24 | Ch. 15 |
| 10. November 25-30 | Ch. 16 |



Introduction

Our reading is guided by *A Journey With Mark*, ed. Marek P Zabriskie [Forward Movement, 2015), and some of the meditations are drawn from that book. This is one of a series in "the 50 Day Bible Challenge," founded by Marek Zabriskie, designed to encourage the daily reading of Scripture.

The Gospel of Mark is the earliest gospel, and it also the shortest. Scholars generally agree that it was probably written before 70 CE - just a generation after the ministry of Jesus. Scholars agree that the writers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke drew upon it. These three gospels are called the "Synoptic Gospels" based on the Greek meaning "able to be seen together." [The Gospel of John, of course, takes a very different approach to the "good news" of Jesus' ministry.]

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark begins not with the birth of Jesus, but with his baptism. The opening line sets the tone and theme for this Gospel: *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" The central theme of this gospel is that Jesus' ministry demonstrates the fulfillment of God's promise of a Messiah who would initiate the kingdom God: It marks the *beginning* of the realm of justice, compassion, and peace. The unique opening of this gospel points to this theme: it calls attention to the *ministry* rather than to the *person* of Jesus. There is also a singular sense of urgency in this gospel: the word for *immediately* occurs over 40 times: Paradoxically, the long-awaited "good news of Jesus Christ" arrives abruptly, recognized only by those who have patiently prepared themselves but disrupting all their plans and expectations.

The central argument of Mark's gospel is a response to the question of Jesus' identity: If Jesus was the Messiah, why was he not more famous? Why didn't *everyone* recognize him when he was alive? In our reading of the gospel, we will focus on three ways in which Mark responds to this question:

1. The "messianic secret" – In Mark's gospel, Jesus repeatedly commands people not to tell about the healings they have experienced or witnessed. At the same time, the people who do recognize Jesus are the poor and marginalized who live outside the religious and political center in Jerusalem. On the one hand, Jesus makes it clear that he wants people to see God at work through him, not to call attention to himself; on the other hand, those who do intuitively recognize him do not have the authority to be credible witnesses.
2. The disciples are portrayed in this gospel as less insightful or reliable than in the other gospels. They repeatedly show that they do not understand the meaning of Jesus' teachings. As a result, on the one hand they would not have been credible narrators, and on the other hand the "messianic secret" is a narrative device through which the reader knows more than they do. The implicit message is that, as the

Kingdom of God grows, our own understanding deepens. From that perspective, it makes sense that they would not understand what Jesus was teaching.

3. Because its purpose is to portray the realm of God emerging through the ministry of Jesus, this gospel lends itself to political interpretations perhaps more readily than do the other gospels. The episodes of healing can be seen as acts of political rebellion, and Jesus' teachings point toward an alternative socio-political order. Indeed, the fact that his first public act is to heal a man possessed by a demon in the synagogue at Capernaum, on the Sabbath, (1:21-28), signifies the institutional implications of his ministry. The story of Jesus according to Mark is the story of institutional transformation, not just of personal enlightenment and healing. Jesus may not look like the king that the people expected, but his ministry reveals the Rule of God. The Kingdom is here, albeit unfinished.

At the very center of this gospel is the question to which we return over and over again: ***Who do you say that I am?*** (8:29) Jesus has many different titles in this gospel, and despite its brevity we see him through a multitude of shifting, contrasting perspectives. Our own answer to this question changes as we ourselves grow and change. My own response to this question has been guided by Albert Schweitzer, who ends his book *The Historical Jesus* as follows:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

Week One: Chapters 1 & 2 Passages for Reflection

1:1: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1:9-11: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, *You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*

1:13: He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

1:23-27: Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who

you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him." And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching -with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

2:16-17: When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

2:21-22: "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

Week One Meditations:

"Baptism is . . . a commitment to walk in solidarity and compassion with others, sharing their hopes, tears, joy and pain."

- Christopher Duraisingh, quoted by The Rt. Rev. Fred Hiltz (*A Journey With Mark*, p. 3)

As Christians we can be imprisoned by our religion, and Jesus seeks to free us from it. Jesus offers us unbounded love, free from the shackles of an inherited religion that says that you are not good enough to belong because you haven't earned God's love. We as a community must be freed and unbound from the ties that bind us. You and I both know our own hearts. We know how hard it is to welcome others freely.

Jesus invites us to reach that part of our heart that believes in God's unfailing love. He invites us to be welcoming and accepting of others with abandon. We are invited to live lives in communities where the Holy One of God is present and alive and proclaimed. Most of all we are invited to proclaim with our lives the unbounded love of Jesus. We are invited to unbind one another from our self-made religious shackles and follow Jesus.

- The Rev. Andrew Doyle (*A Journey With Mark*, p. 10)

O Father of us and of all time, be merciful as we struggle to be Church even as Church is changing and shifting around us, and even as there seems to be no cohesion among us. Show us the way, Father, to understand Christ as Lord of the sabbath every day of our lives. Amen.

- Phyllis Tickle (*A Journey Through Mark*, p. 20)