

# The Gospel of Mark

## September 17, 2023

### Opening Prayer

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Collect for Proper 28, BCP 236)

### Bible Study Basics

The careful student of scripture keeps three aspects in mind: the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text.

### Behind the Text in Mark – Historical Context

- Likely, there isn't a single fact that **all** scholars would agree upon.
- Most scholars believe Mark to be the first recorded gospel, written sometime during or immediately after the Roman-Judean War that took place between 65 and 73 CE (and resulted in the destruction of the Temple). It was a tumultuous time.
- Most scholars think that Mark was written to an audience that included Jewish and Gentile readers (or listeners) – it was intended to be for everyone.
- Most scholars agree that Mark's audience faced rejection and persecution. Consequently, the gospel was intended to inspire courage in the face of opposition and danger.

### Of the Text – Literary Markers

- Mark tells the story with a sense of urgency. The word “immediately” is used 27 times (the same number of times it is used in Matthew, Luke, and John all together).
- Mark often switches from past tense to present tense to help bring the reader (listener) into the story.
- Mark's gospel is the shortest, but the individual stories are full of rich details, often not included in the other gospels.
- Because of these literary markers, most scholars believe that Mark was an oral gospel long before it was a written one. The entire gospel of Mark can be spoken aloud in less than two hours.
- Mark focused on what Jesus **did**. (action)

## In Front of the Text – Our own context and experience

- We are a Christian community familiar with the gospel message; we already know the characters and have a general understanding of what is going to happen next. Consequently, we have to listen carefully for what might strike us as new or different
- My “in front of the text” experience is not necessarily the same as yours.

## Working with the Text – The Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11 + 1:12)

**Mark 1:9** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Mark 1:12** And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

## Behind the Text

- Mark 1:1-8 provides the context required. John was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and people were flocking to be baptized by him.
- Echo of Isaiah 42:1
- Geography of the area: Nazareth in Galilee is a long way from Jerusalem and the Judean countryside.

## Of the Text

- This is the point at which Jesus enters the narrative.
- “In those days” is a little like, “once upon a time.” Settle in – the story is starting.
- “*just* as he was coming out of the water, *he* saw” provides specificity
- Mark flows straight from this scene to the next, “and the Spirit *immediately* drove him out into the wilderness.”

## In front of the Text

- How does this text bring to light, challenge, broaden, or reinforce our working theological convictions? (Where is God? What does this text say about God?)
- How does this passage challenge and nurture the spiritual life? What spiritual practices are explicitly or implicitly suggested by the text?
- How does this text relate to contemporary social and political realities and ideologies?