

The Beginning of the Good News
A Study of the Gospel of Mark
The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas
Fall 2015

God's Beloved: Mark 1:1-15; 9:2-9; 15:33-39

Some things to think about...

The Gospel by Heart

Like all of the gospels, the Gospel of Mark was originally composed from oral testimony of the earliest Christians, and maintained by most of them in oral form, even after it was written. You could say that they “knew it by heart,” in every sense of that phrase. A clear structure in the composition of the Gospel of Mark helped Mark’s community to memorize and retain all of the stories and teachings in their proper order. The most basic framework of the Gospel is set by the three passages we are studying today, where the affirmation of Jesus as God’s beloved Son is announced first by a voice from heaven that Jesus alone hears; secondly, by a voice from heaven that addresses his disciples; and finally by a Roman centurion. The three proclamations fall roughly at the beginning, middle, and end of the Gospel.

Crossing the Jordan

The importance of the Jordan as the site of Jesus’ baptism deserves some explanation. You will recall the stories of the enslavement of the Hebrew people in Egypt and their liberation by God, under Moses’ leadership. After their courageous escape, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and received the commandments of God on Mount Sinai. By the time they were finally ready to enter into the land, Moses had died, and Joshua (whose name in Hebrew is the same as Jesus) led the people, behind the priests carrying the ark of the covenant, across the Jordan into the land that God was giving them to live in as freed people under the rule of God alone. John the Baptist’s practice of baptizing people in the Jordan during the time of Rome’s oppressive rule of Galilee and Judea thus carries with it a prophetic call to repent from the unjust ways of society (in his case, the injustice of Rome), and to live with righteousness and justice under the kingship of God alone. At his Baptism, Jesus thus looses himself from deference to Rome and to the local leadership under Rome’s thumb, and commits himself wholly to God’s purposes. For Mark, this is the beginning of the Good News.

Son of God

In the time and culture of Jesus, most fathers expected to pass their work on to their sons, particularly the eldest son. The son was expected to learn the skills and values of his father, and to enact them through his own work. To say that Jesus is “Son of God” is not just to say something about relationship, but in a very practical way to say that he goes about doing God’s work in the

world, and embodying God's values. God's pleasure in Jesus stems from the ways in which Jesus is living into the patterns of God's love, doing the work of God through healing, feeding, and freeing people from powers of destruction.

Attending to the Word...

For each passage, make a list of the characters. Where are they? What movements do they make? If you were going to turn the passage into a movie, how would you convey it? Are there any supernatural elements in the story? What is the plot of each of these passages?

How would you describe God in each passage? Does the narrator make God visible or audible? Do you want to know the God revealed in these passages? Why or why not?

Choose to be either an onlooker or one of the characters in the passage. Tell the story in your own words. Imagine that you are Jesus, and tell the story in your own words.

Making the Word your own...

What does each of these passages seem to be asking the reader/hearer to do, to be, or to become?

Name the main differences among the three stories. What do we learn about Jesus through each of these different ways of proclaiming him as God's son? How would you describe the different mood of each of these proclamations (Joyful? Poignant? Mysterious? Inspiring? Puzzling? Tragic? Awe-filled?)?