

Suggested Reading

This week you may wish to read the following passages from the Bible.

A Recommended Reading

Mark 3:7 - 6:6a

B Read Carefully

Mark 5:21-43 **Jairus' Daughter**
Mark 5:1-20 Gerasene Demoniac
Mark 4:35-41 Calming of the Storm

C Compare this section with:

- i, **Jairus' Daughter** **Mark 5:21-43**
= Matthew 9:18-26
= Luke 8:40-56
- ii, **Gerasene Demoniac** **Mark 5:1-20**
= Matthew 8:28-34
= Luke 8:26-39

D Further Reading

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
Paragraphs 571-576.

Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,
So that the gifts we receive from you this night
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Easter Vigil)

PFP v7 3/2025

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames



The Galilean Ministry of Jesus.

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Mark 1:1 – 3:6



The beginning of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee is dominated by three events and introduces three groups of people to us. The events are the calling of the disciples; Jesus teaching and miracles in Capernaum; and the growing hostility with the Scribes and the Pharisees. The three groups of people are the disciples of Jesus; the Crowd, the Pharisees.

Therefore, when we read the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, we should endeavour to look at Jesus through the eyes of those around him: his Disciples; the Crowd and the Pharisees. Each group asks the same question; who is this man? Their response is central to our understanding.

The Disciples of Jesus

The response of the disciples to Jesus call; *'Follow me'* is so complete, that it urges us to consider what sort of person was Jesus, that he could command such a total response from these fishermen. We are introduced to the first (and most familiar of the disciples), Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. Throughout the rest of this section of the Gospel these disciples observe Jesus, as they listen to his teaching. Following the call of Simon and also the call of Levi, Jesus' visits their house for a meal.

The central scene in this section of the Gospel takes place at Capernaum. Jesus visits Capernaum three times in this section. (*Mk 1:21; 2:1; 3:1?*) *Mk 2:1* describes Capernaum as Jesus' *home*. This has quickly become the base for his ministry. The first visit to Capernaum enables us to attempt to reconstruct *'a day in the life of Jesus.'* Very early in the morning, Jesus goes to a deserted place, so that he can be alone in the presence of his Father, to pray. Then travelling throughout the towns of Galilee, he enters the Synagogue, where he preaches and cures. The day is spent teaching and curing the inhabitants of the town. A meal may be at the house of a disciple, or sinner where he would stay. Very early in the morning, Jesus goes to a deserted place ... This may be a daily structure which serves as a background to every event in the Gospel.

The Crowd

In the Synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus proclaims the arrival of God's kingdom, accompanied by his teaching and also by curing the sick. Mark links these two actions by use of the word *'immediately'* in *Mk 1 23*. Central to this scene and this section is the question of **authority**. Everything in this section contributes to the picture of Jesus as the *authoritative* teacher and healer.

The people are amazed because *'he taught them with authority'* (*Mk 1:22*) Jesus' authority is contrasted with that of their scribes. It is an authority which we may identify with his *knowledge* of God. The reaction of the people/crowd is important to our story. (This is a major factor in Jerusalem: Hosanna = Crucify) At this early juncture we cannot identify the commitment of the crowd (to faith.) They are amazed at what they witness and ask: *who is this man?*

Next Week

The rejection of Jesus.

The negative note on which the preceding section ended is developed in the next section of the Gospel. Mark begins by giving us examples of the positive response to Jesus on the part of the people in general, (*Mk 3:7-12*) and his disciples (*Mk 3:13-19*). These are balanced by the negative response on the part of Jesus' family and the scribes. (*Mk 3:19-35*)

There follows a series of parables and explanations regarding Jesus teaching (*Mk 4:1-34*) which result in mounting opposition from 'those outside.' A group of miracle stories (*Mk 4:35 - 5:43*) reveals Jesus' power over nature, possession disease, and death. The final story (*Mk 6:1-6*) explains how Jesus was rejected by the people of his own hometown.

This section of Mark's Gospel is sometimes entitled *'the Galilean Crisis.'* This reflected the measure and nature of the opposition which Jesus encounters; and the unusual nature of its source: his own family. We may note Jesus' response to this situation: he withdraws from the region.

Within this section Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God by word and action. The parables of the kingdom comprise Chap.4, and the miracle stories Chap.5. It is my intention to study the parables of the kingdom in some detail as part of our examination of *Matthew's Gospel*. I would ask you to read this section but to concentrate upon its overall development and particularly *the miracles of Chap.5*

Next week I shall focus upon two miracle stories within this section of the Gospel. **Mark 5:21-43 and Mark 5:1-20.** (Jairus' Daughter and the Gerasene Demoniac). By examining these two miracles, we will be able to familiarise ourselves with Mark's style of writing. I would ask you to compare these passages with their equivalent in Matthew's & Luke's Gospel. This is a valuable exercise: I would especially ask you to note the length, detail and context of each passage, in each Gospel.

Characteristics of Mark

Mark's Gospel has a clear theological and geographical framework, which are important to study. Following the Prologue (*Mk 1:1-15*), the Gospel is divided into two sections: The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (*Mk 1:16 - 8:21*). The journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, the events of in Jerusalem, and the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The important scene that acts as the hinge between these two sections is Peter's declaration of faith. (*Mk 8:27-30*). In the prologue, Mark reveals to us the conclusion of the Gospel: *'Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.'* During his ministry in Galilee this is progressively revealed by the teaching and actions of Jesus. This is the *'secret of the gospel'* a particular feature of Mark. (Jesus commands all those who would reveal his identity to silence.) Peter's declaration of faith reveals the true nature of Jesus.

From this moment onwards, the focus of the Gospel changes and also its geographical setting. Jesus teaches his disciples that he must suffer and die. They must understand that to be the Messiah is to be God's suffering servant. Jesus' ministry in Galilee concludes as he resolutely takes the road to Jerusalem. The Gospel reaches its climax when Jesus is revealed to be the Son of God by the Centurion at the foot of the cross. (*Mk 15:39*)

Mark 1:1 – 15: The introduction to the Gospel

The first fifteen verses provide an excellent opportunity to reveal the riches of the Gospel of Mark and the many layers and themes within it.

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

The Gospel is neither a biography nor a documentary. It is the theological writing of the Evangelist who wishes to convince us that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews and the Son of God. This is his declaration and his aim. The importance and significance of this declaration is such that it may be compared to a crime thriller opening with the words, *'the Butler did it!'* Still, one should have to read on, to discover how, where, when, and why, the crime took place.

Ironically, it is the evil spirits who could reveal who Jesus is. *'He would not allow the demons to speak, because they knew who he was.'* (*Mk 1:34*) Jesus commands all those who would reveal his identity to silence. This is the *'Secret of the Gospel'* a particular feature of Mark. The faith of those who accompany Jesus must grow of its own will.

The Pharisees

The question of *authority* re-surfaces in the growing confrontations with the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus cures the man *'that you may know that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins on earth.'* (*Mk 2:10*)

The final passage (*Mk 3:1-6*) within this section of the Galilean ministry of Jesus reveals how skilfully Mark has woven this section together, and how everything that was below the surface comes to the fore. Jesus *'went into the Synagogue'* (*Mk 3:1*) echoing his actions at Capernaum. However, the atmosphere is very different. This is the culmination of a series of conflicts with the religious authorities. We are no longer a neutral situation (*Mk 3:5*); which in turn results a range of emotions in Jesus: anger, pity, understanding, sorrow, frustration. Jesus is *'grieved at their hardness of heart'*. Mark presents before us the humanity of Jesus, with all his emotions.

Jesus cannot stand on the fence. He knows how they will react to the cure: it results in an alliance between the Pharisees and Herodians who now *'conspire ... how to destroy him'*. Even at this early stage the battle lines are clearly drawn. The rest of the Gospel will be played out in the light of this conflict.

The Importance of the Old Testament

The Evangelists did not write their Gospels in a vacuum. They told the existing traditions and stories of Jesus life (c.f. *The New Catechism 126*) and used the most formative and definitive account of God's actions with humankind: *The Old Testament*. Before the Gospels were written these were 'the scriptures' which revealed God's intentions for mankind.

Hint: To fully understand the importance of any Old Testament reference it is valuable to read what precedes and follows it.

E.g.: Mark quotes *Isaiah 40:3* in v3 of the Gospel. On first inspection this passage refers to John the Baptist. However, to properly understand this passage we must read the *whole* of this section of Isaiah: (*Isaiah 40:1-11*)

We may know that this is the beginning of second section of Isaiah, often known as the Book of Consolation. It was written much later than the previous chapters, at a time when Israel was in exile in Babylon. God would console his people and lift their spirits in exile, rather than threaten them with destruction in Jerusalem.

Mark quoted *Isaiah 40:3*. We should note that *Isaiah 40:1 - 3* speaks of the consolation of the people; (a passage Handel famously made the *beginning* of his choral masterpiece *The Messiah*) and *Isaiah 40:10 - 11* which speaks of Lord God coming as a Shepherd leading his flock. We can now understand how this passage was interpreted to be a reference to John the Baptist, and also to Jesus the Messiah who is about to appear.

Jesus is baptised in the Jordan by John. Here Jesus is revealed to us echoing the declaration of verse one. The passage begins '*Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee*' (he is Jesus of Nazareth = humanity of Jesus.) It concludes '*You are my Son, the beloved; my favour rests on you.*' (He is Jesus, Son of God = divinity of Jesus)

Following the arrest of John, Jesus went to Galilee, and here we have a summary of his preaching. '*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand.*' (*Mk 1:15*) We have now reached Galilee where Jesus' ministry will be centred. We also have the central declaration of Jesus' preaching: that God's reign has arrived.

The Gospel of St Mark.

Structure of the Gospel.

Mark 1:1 - 15

Prologue

Who Jesus is: Jesus Christ, Messiah, Son of God.

Part One

Mark 1:16 - 3:6

Jesus authority revealed in work & word
Jesus ministry in Galilee

Mark 3:7 - 6:6

Jesus rejection by his own people
Jesus is rejected in Galilee

Mark 6:6 - 8:21

Misunderstanding of Jesus by his disciples
Jesus withdraws from Galilee with his disciples

Part Two

Mark 8:22 - 10:52

Jesus instructs his disciples on the way to Jerusalem
Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah.
Jesus explains he must suffer and die!

Mark 11:1-13:37

First part of Holy Week:
Jesus in Jerusalem: Welcomed by the crowd.
Attacked by the authorities.

Mark 14:1-16:8

Second part of Holy Week:
The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Tradition has identified Mark the Evangelist as '*John Mark, the companion of St Paul*'. (*Acts 12:12.25; Col 4:10; Tim 4:1*) Early writers declared that Mark had worked with St Peter and written his Gospel following Peter's death. This cannot be verified. The Gospel of Mark is understood to have been written in Rome about 65 AD. It is the first Gospel to be composed, and has formed the basis for the Gospel of Matthew and Luke.