

Suggested Reading

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

A Recommended Reading

Mark 8:22 - 10:52

B Read Carefully

Mark 8:27 - 30	Peter's faith
Mark 8:31 - 9:1	1st prediction of the Passion
Mark 9:30 - 37	2nd prediction of the Passion
Mark 10:32 - 45	3rd prediction of the Passion
Mark 8:22 - 26	Blind Man
Mark 10:46 - 52	Blind Man (Bartimeus)

C Further Reading

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
Paragraphs 436-440, 711-716

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



Jesus and his disciples

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Mark 6:6b - 8:21



This section of the Gospel focuses on Jesus' disciples and particularly the relationship between *discipleship and faith*. The disciple's faith is challenged and found wanting. At the heart of this dilemma is their failure to understand the significance of the miracles of the loaves and fishes. These miracles are the focal point of this section. They also reveal the increasing importance of the mission to the Gentiles. Jesus leaves Galilee behind to travel to Tyre and Sidon as well as the countryside on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee.

The mission of the twelve begins when they are given '*authority*' and are sent out to preach a message of repentance. Sandwiched between the commission of the disciples and their return, is the account of the death of John the Baptist. It is related as if in flashback, by Herod Antipas. John's death should be read in the context of discipleship. It also underlines the fact that while the disciples are away Jesus does nothing without them.

Two themes dominate the account of the death of John the Baptist. (*Mk 6:17 - 29*) Firstly, the troubling question of Jesus identity: is he Elijah, John the Baptist or one of the Prophets? (A description repeated later at an important moment, *Mk 8:28*). Secondly, the cost of discipleship: John is the forerunner of Jesus.

The return of the disciples leads seamlessly into the first multiplication of the loaves and fishes. (*Mk 6:30 - 44*) This account takes place on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are heavily involved - they seek to send the crowds away. They are encouraged to feed the crowd, and to go and see how many loaves there are. The disciples are given the task of distributing the loaves and collecting the scraps.

Mark helps us to understand the significance of this miracle by alluding to some of the important moments in the Old Testament. Jesus is the Shepherd who cares for the sheep. This is the fulfilment of *Ezekiel 34:12-16* when God would shepherd his people. *Psalms 22: 'The Lord is my Shepherd ... fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose ... he has prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes.'* The Feeding of Five Thousand and the abundance of scraps is greater than the feeding by Elisha. (*2 Kings 4:42-44*) The presence of the people in companies and the reference to a '*deserted place*' (*Mk 8:4*) would remind the reader of the Manna in the desert, (*Exodus 16:12-35*) a reference made explicit in *John 6:31-32.58*.

The account of Jesus' walking on the water is linked to the preceding passage by Jesus' immediate insistence that the disciples travel in the boat while he would send the crowds away. Its conclusion emphasises the link. Their failure to recognise Jesus walking on the water is related to their failure to understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves.

Next Week

Jesus the Messiah.

'Do you still not understand?' (*Mark 8:21*) This final question summarises the frustration of Jesus at the disciples' lack of faith. It also points forward to the next part of the Gospel, in which the disciples will have to struggle with the mystery of the Cross as an essential aspect of Jesus' identity. The Gospel develops the theme of *Faith and Discipleship*, which includes one of the most important scenes in the Gospel:

Peter's declaration of faith (*Mark 8:27 - 30*). This scene acts as a hinge which divides the Gospel into two parts. Peter declares his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. However, the disciples have to learn what kind of Messiah Jesus is. From this moment Galilee is left behind, and Jesus begins to travel towards Jerusalem.

Next week we will accompany Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. It is along this road that he seeks to teach his disciples, the true understanding of the Messiah as one who will suffer and die. On three occasions Jesus predicts his passion. These can be understood to be important signposts on the way, which challenge the faith of the disciples.

This section of the Gospel begins and ends with the cure of a blind man. This hints at the spiritual blindness of the disciples who struggle to understand the prediction of the passion. I would like you to study Peter's declaration of faith in detail, also the cure of the blind man which precedes it. (*Mark 8:22-26*)

The threefold prediction of the passion will help us to examine the faith of the disciples. Consider their faith in the context of the last section. This section has a Cure of the Blind Man almost as a pair of bookends. How do these scenes symbolise this section? What lessons might they teach us about faith and discipleship?

The Ministry of Jesus in Mark's Gospel



In Chap.7 Jesus travels outside the boundaries of Galilee, this journey marks the close of the Galilean ministry and the growing preoccupation with the mission to the Gentiles. These episodes help us to understand the significance of the second multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

The insistence of the Syrophenician Woman results in Jesus' decision to cure her daughter. This insistence is motivated by her knowledge of Jesus' reputation, despite his declaration that the people of Israel are the chosen people. Jesus takes a circular route which avoids Galilee and brings him to the eastern (Gentile) side of the Sea of Galilee. His cure of the deaf mute fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah and wins the unrestrained praise of the people. We may contrast this with their earlier insistence that he leave the district. (*Mk 5:17*)

The Feeding of the Four Thousand has many parallels with the Feeding of the Five Thousand. However, there are differences: the Old Testament parallels are stressed to a greater degree than previously. The role of the disciples is not as significant. The fish are mentioned much later, almost as an aside. This account emphasises the loaves, which has obvious Eucharistic implications. Both of these accounts anticipate the Last Supper. Jesus *took, blest, broke and gave* the loaves. (*Mk 6:41, 8:6*)

The number of baskets is an important difference. Following the Feeding of the Five Thousand there are twelve baskets full of scraps. This takes place on the Jewish side of the lake. Twelve baskets may symbolise the twelve tribes of Israel. After the feeding of the four thousand there are seven baskets full of scraps. This takes place on the Gentile side of the lake. Seven baskets may represent the Gentiles. There were believed to be seventy Gentile nations. In the *Acts 6:1-7* seven deacons are appointed to look after the Gentiles.

In the light of the previous passages, we may understand this multiplication to be a separate miracle for the Gentiles. It may represent their growing admiration of Jesus, and the fact that they are no longer restricted to the scraps which fall from the table. Mark's Gentile readers would understand that they are united with their fellow Jewish-Christian disciples during the celebration of the Eucharist.

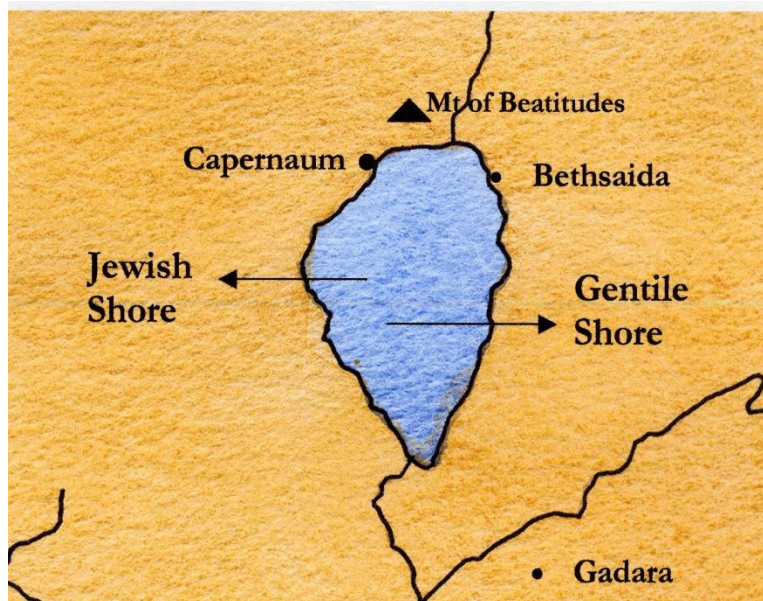
Mark draws together many of the themes within this section into the final passage. The Pharisees demand a sign from heaven. Jesus refuses to enter

into dialogue with them. As the disciples will soon learn, every miracle of Jesus is a *sign*. The Pharisees would not be able to recognise these signs because of their hardness of heart. However, Jesus expects his disciples to be aware of their significance. Their failure is the source of his frustration. While the disciples continue to understand these miracles only in terms of their physical consequences: the alleviation of hunger; Jesus looks beyond this to its spiritual significance.

Jesus asks them seven questions, condemning their lack of understanding. To them has been given the secret of the Gospel (*Mk 4:11*) enabling them to see and understand. Their failure places them in the same position as those 'outside' for whom the growth of the kingdom is a mystery.

The miracles are signs which reveal the person of Jesus, and his power. They fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah, (*Isaiah 25:6-10*) and enact the heavenly banquet which the Messiah would bring. Walking on the Waters, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God. Their failure to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, is rooted in their failure to understand the miracles, which unite the Jews and Gentiles under one shepherd, Jesus the Messiah.

The Two Shores of the Sea of Galilee



Galilee

