



WORSHIP

(If being used in Advent)

O God, make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Let the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart
**be acceptable in your sight, O Lord,
my strength and my redeemer.**

Psalms 19.14

Saviour eternal,
life of the world unfailing,
light everlasting
and our true redemption.

Taking our humanity
in your loving freedom,
you rescued our lost earth
and filled the world with joy.

By your first advent justify us,
by your second, set us free:
that when the great light dawns
and you come as judge of all,
we may be robed in immortality
and ready, Lord, to follow
in your footsteps blest, wherever
they may lead.

Salus Aeterna

Bible Reading

*Either a little bit from today's
session or another reading*

Song

*(which may be sung, listened to, or
read as a poem)*

**1. Like a candle flame,
flick'ring small
in our darkness,
uncreated light
shines through infant eyes.**

***God is with us, alleluia,
come to save us, alleluia,
alleluia!***

**2. Stars and angels sing,
yet the earth
sleeps in shadows;
can this tiny spark
set a world on fire?**

**3. Yet his light shall shine
from our lives,
spirit blazing,
as we touch the flame
or his holy fire.**

Intercessions Collect

Almighty God,
as your kingdom dawns,
turn us from the darkness of sin
to the light of holiness,
that we may be ready to meet you
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

May the Lord make us ready for his
coming in glory. **Amen.**

Taking a closer look at St Mark's Gospel

Advent. 2020



Booklet 2



Welcome

A short course on Mark's Gospel for the Tring Team Parish

Last session, we looked at the broader question of what is a Gospel. In this session we will look at Discipleship. Mark starts his account telling us this is the beginning of the good news. Why does he do this? You don't need to tell someone in the first sentence of a book that this is the beginning of book, it is obvious, it is page one!

So, is Mark saying the book is just the beginning and the good news does not end there? The good news continues onwards in the lives of those who respond to Jesus' call to "come and follow me". If this is so, seeing how Mark portrays the disciples is important.



Opening conversation? (*Maybe think about this before you meet*)

In thinking about your personal faith which was more important in bringing you to belief, the life and teaching of Jesus, or the death and resurrection of Jesus? (*No right or wrong answers here and certainly no heresy will be recorded!*)

An invitation to discipleship

Last week we asked what is a Gospel. In an essay on Mark's Gospel the theologian Paula Gooder (we have read some of her books in the parish book group) concludes:

"It is not just a Gospel that tells you 'about' Jesus; it is a Gospel that invites each of us, its readers, to respond to him: to declare with Peter that he is the Messiah, to join with the centurion in declaring him truly to be God's son, and to listen to the call to 'go, tell' the good news of his life, death and resurrection to the ends of the earth."

Taking it out into the world

You may not have time to do this in your groups. Each week there will be a reflection by a "big name" on the text. You could read this at home.

'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' (v.38)

One of my favourite Woody Allen lines is this: 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your future plans.' The story of the stilling of the storm is hardly a barrel of laughs, but for anyone with faith, it ought at least to raise a wry smile. The disciples – not for the first time – find that their plans are about as stable as the sea that threatens to engulf them, and confronted by chaos, they quickly lose their faith. They even question the mindfulness and love of Jesus: '... do you not care that we are perishing?' But all of this gives Jesus an opportunity to say two profound things in the face of apparent annihilation: 'Peace! Be still!' and 'Why are you afraid?' Sometimes we all find ourselves in the midst of what seem like great storms. We fear we will be engulfed. Even winds and waves are against us. Yet, we sometimes need to hear the words of Jesus that invite us out of fear and into peace. Sometimes what we need to do is reach out. Our salvation is nearer than we thought; it is within sight. Just not what we expected or thought. Scottish philosopher John Macmurray tells us that the maxim of illusory religion runs like this: 'Fear not; trust in God and he will see that none of the things you fear will happen to you'. But that of real religion is quite contrary: 'Fear not; the things you are afraid of are quite likely to happen to you – but they are nothing to be afraid of.' Peace be with you.

Reflection by Martyn Percy. *Martyn is the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford. From 2004 to 2014 he was Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon. This reflection was written in 2011.*

identifying with Mark's portrait of the disciples. To be honest there are still plenty of times I don't get it and / or teach the wrong thing. I think it is meant to encourage us in our discipleship. In the end the faltering disciples are finally forgiven and their broken relationship with Jesus is restored.

Neronian Persecution

It is possibly also worth emphasising that the most likely time and place for Mark writing his Gospel was AD65-75 in Rome. This places it contemporaneously with the Neronian Persecution. The Roman historian Tacitus says Nero scapegoated the Christians for the great fire of Rome in 64AD. There is an emphasis that discipleship isn't going to be easy. No one said it would be easy. Stuff happens!

The hidden Christ

We will look at this more next week but one of the issues Mark is addressing in his Gospel is the move from proclaiming just the death and resurrection of Jesus to answering the wider "who was Jesus" question. You can imagine early Christians saying how come we didn't hear anything about him before his death? Part of Mark's answer is that not even the disciples realised who he was until his death but he will help us to answer for ourselves "**who do you say I am?**"



Discussion ideas

feel free to ask your own questions

What do you make of Frank's summary of Mark's advice to the disciples - "stuff happens, deal with it?"

Do you find Mark's portrayal of the disciples (and their lack of faith) comforting?

Does the Tring Team Parish encourage "discipleship"?

Space for your notes

Reading and listening to God's Word



Read Mark 4.35-end (from your usual Bible)

Pause, allow to seep in.

Read it again preferably from a different translation (below is the Message)

If any words or verse jumps out at you share this with the group.

Spend some time discussing what God is saying to you today in this passage

The Wind Ran Out of Breath

³⁵⁻³⁸ Late that day he said to them, "Let's go across to the other side." They took him in the boat as he was. Other boats came along. A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it. And Jesus was in the stern, head on a pillow, sleeping! They roused him, saying, "Teacher, is it nothing to you that we're going down?"

³⁹⁻⁴⁰ Awake now, he told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, "Quiet! Settle down!" The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass. Jesus reprimanded the disciples: "Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith at all?"

⁴¹ They were in absolute awe, staggered. "Who is this, anyway?" they asked. "Wind and sea at his beck and call!"



Teaching

Discipleship in Mark's Gospel

Those of you who remember the previous Team Rector, Frank Mercurio, might recollect him saying “stuff happens—deal with it”. It was Frank's view that this was essentially Jesus' message to the disciples in Mark's Gospel. Stuff will happen but I give you the tools to deal with it. The disciples however didn't always seem to get the message.

We are only sixteen verses into the Gospel when Jesus tells Simon and Andrew that he will make them fishers of men. It is clear that the idea that people will “come and follow” Jesus is central to the Gospel, it is therefore surprising that the Mark is less than kind about the disciples.

Mark's portrayal of the disciples

We the reader can hardly fail to notice the weakness, failures, and even the stupidity of the disciples. It's not just that they don't understand, Jesus even takes them aside and teaches them in private (4.34b “but he explained everything in private to his disciples”) and they still don't get it. You would have thought that the disciples having had private lessons would be well equipped to to proclaim the good news about Jesus whenever he told them to. The reality is a bit different.

They ask dim questions.

They misunderstand. Mark's Jesus uses a familiar Old Testament phrase to emphasise the hardness of the disciples hearts “*Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?*” 8.17f

Interestingly Matthew softens this in his version and he blesses those who do hear (cf Mathew 13.13-16).

They discourage people from bringing children to Jesus and are roundly told off for doing so.

They are given the power to exorcize but they are failures as exorcists (but they stop someone else who is casting out demons in Jesus' name)

When it really matters, at his arrest, they run away.

Mark's portrayal of others

Paula Gooder highlights that there:

“are a number of encounters between Jesus and certain individuals many of whom were, in different ways, outcasts from society: a man with an unclean spirit; a woman with a haemorrhage; a young girl (Jairus' daughter) who had died; a gentile woman; a deaf man and a blind man. These individuals, who had little or nothing to lose, without exception responded wholeheartedly to Jesus, often begging to be allowed to share the good news about him to everyone they knew”.

There is clearly a difference to the way in which these people respond to Jesus and the way in which the disciples do. Not all will find it easy for follow Jesus, but for some it will be automatic. Similarly at the crunch point, the arrest of Jesus, we read in Mark

“All of them deserted him and fled. A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.” 14.50-52

This represents a different kind of discipleship. Ill equipped as we are, naked even, we are called to follow Jesus.

The portrayal of the disciples as encouragement

We saw last session, that one of Mark's purposes in writing a Gospel was to explain why a victorious Christ should die in disgrace. It is therefore not surprising that the call to discipleship should come from an equally inauspicious start. We, the readers are well aware of our own weaknesses and failings, and we have had little difficulty in