



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 3



Welcome

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

Last session

Last session looked at Mark's portrayal of discipleship. Part of this discipleship is answering the question "Who do you say that I am?" This session we will look at some of the titles used for Jesus. I was tempted to call the session "He's not the Messiah, he is a very naughty boy" which of course is the classic line from the Life of Brian. The reason the Monty Python team are able to create the character of Brian because they understand that in 1st Century Palestine people were looking for a Messiah. Do they get one in Jesus?

A little recap

In session one we saw that Mark gives us the first written Gospel. Before Mark the "Gospel" was an oral proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. There was little about his life and actions. Mark begins to answer who this Jesus was. His Gospel however is in two distinct halves: the ministry of Jesus; and an extended Passion. The turning point is Peter's confession. In session two we saw that discipleship is a big theme. But the disciples do not understand.

The Messianic Secret

In biblical criticism, the Messianic Secret refers to a motif primarily in the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus is portrayed as commanding his followers to maintain silence about his Messianic mission. Attention was first drawn to this motif in 1901 by William Wrede. Part of Wrede's theory involved statements in the New Testament by Jesus to demons who recognize his divine nature as well as to his followers not to reveal to others that he is the Messiah. Wrede proposed that the author of Mark invented the notion of secrecy to reduce the tension between early Christian beliefs about Jesus being the Messiah, and the non-Messianic nature of his ministry.

Taking it out into the world

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

'See that you say nothing to anyone' (v.44)

Who told Mark what happened at Capernaum? (He apparently wasn't there.) The early Church Father Papias, in the second century, suggests that Mark wrote down the stories Peter had told him 'accurately, as far as he remembered them, the things said or done by the Lord, but not however in order'. Scholars have debated this for years, some arguing that the material may be derived from Church communities that had already shaped it for their own purposes. And look at what happens: after the turbulent events of the previous evening – Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick – described in verses 21-34, Jesus gets up early and finds a deserted place to pray. Peter and the others pursue Jesus and hunt him out. There is a sense of anxiety and urgency. Peter tells Jesus, 'Everyone is searching for you' (Mark 1.37), and so Jesus launches out into the surrounding area. He teaches, preaches and heals. But now in today's reading we come to the twist: a man struck down with leprosy is healed by Jesus, but is commanded not to speak about what has happened. The man disobeys, and, as a result, crowds pour out into the countryside to find Jesus. Mark has a tension between the openness of the message and Jesus' deep reticence about revealing his own true identity – true historically, but also humanly true for all of us who 'pursue' Jesus. The beauty, awe, holiness and deep enigmas of the Christ are always there, yet always beyond our full understanding.

Reflection by Christopher Herbert. Christopher used to be the Bishop of St Albans. He is now retired but still helps out

Instead again and again we are told Jesus must suffer. Paula Gooder writes:

In Mark 8.29-33, Peter, finally, acknowledged who Jesus really was ('You are the Messiah') but immediately began to chastize Jesus for suggesting that the Messiah must suffer and die. He had some of the jigsaw pieces but not all of them, and with this incomplete set of pieces created the wrong picture of who Jesus was. Until they had all the pieces, even Jesus' closest followers were liable to get the wrong end of the stick and proclaim the wrong kind of Jesus.

The Hidden Christ

Mark adds to the early Christian kerygma (proclamation) the life and actions of Jesus. People must have wondered why they didn't know all this stuff about Jesus. Mark's answer, he told them to keep it a secret. Is Mark's purpose in this to move away from a Jewish Messiah idea to a new kind of God, or is it quite simply that when push comes to shove none of this matters. The only thing that matters is his death and resurrection. I will tell you about his life, but you will only understand it once you accept the resurrection. Wait until then before you start, that is the beginning of the good news...



Discussion ideas

feel free to ask you own questions

Do you have a theory why Jesus tells those who he has healed to "say nothing?"

Is it arrogant to think that we do understand who Jesus is? Do we only have a glimpse into the beauty awe and holiness of God?

Is God beyond understanding?

Space for your notes

Reading and listening to God's Word



Read Mark 1.40 to 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 Leper Mark 1.40 to end

40 A leper came to him, begging on his knees, "If you want to, you can cleanse me."

41-45 Deeply moved, Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, "I want to. Be clean." Then and there the leprosy was gone, his skin smooth and healthy. Jesus dismissed him with strict orders: "Say nothing to anyone. Take the offering for cleansing that Moses prescribed and present yourself to the priest. This will validate your healing to the people." But as soon as the man was out of earshot, he told everyone he met what had happened, spreading the news all over town. So Jesus kept to out-of-the-way places, no longer able to move freely in and out of the city. But people found him, and came from all over.



Teaching

Discipleship in Mark's Gospel

As we read Mark we notice an interesting and odd feature. Jesus does not want to be acknowledged. Mark's story is told at breakneck speed. Jesus is straight into his healing ministry in chapter one and we read:

“Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, ***‘See that you say nothing to anyone ...’***”

It is a strange instruction not least because it appears as if Mark is trying to explain who Jesus is, so why are people encouraged to say nothing?

Who then is this Jesus?

At the very beginning of the Gospel we have two titles for Jesus rolled into one. He is called Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is also addressed as the Nazarene, Teacher, Rabbi and Lord. He speaks of himself as Son of Man.

Christ / Messiah

We have become used to calling Jesus, “Jesus Christ”. We use Christ almost like a surname. However the word Christos, which means the anointed one, is the translation of Messiah. It is a title not a name. In Jewish thought the Messiah was an earthly political figure, a warrior king. The Messiah will be descended from the line of David. The title Son of David is used as well so although there is no family tree in Mark it links to that idea. However, it is never a term that is used by Jesus of himself (in Mark's Gospel) and when the term son of David is used then it is usually also associated with the blindness and lack of understanding. Peter in particular associates Jesus with a triumphal Messiah and in response is told to get behind me Satan! Mark appears to be trying to move us (or at least the early Christian / Jewish community) away from the Messiah view of Jesus.

Son of God

The other term in the opening verse of the Gospel is Son of God. Mark uses this term at various crucial points of the story. It is there in at the very beginning; at Jesus' baptism we hear he is “God's beloved Son” and again at the Transfiguration we hear “this is my son”; Mark includes the parable of the vineyard where the landowner sends his own son; at Jesus's trial we hear the question “are you the son of the Blessed” to which he replies “I am” and finally we have the Centurion “Truly this man was God's Son!”

When we see that Mark uses the title Son of God, it is slightly different from affirming that Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. It is probably important to remember that Christian doctrine and theology surrounding the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity is only fully formulated in the 4th and 5th Centuries with the great councils of Nicea 325 AD (from which we get the Creed we use in our Eucharists) and Chalcedon 451 AD. The Gospel does not give us a theological definition of who Jesus was in that way. The early Christian communities are developing their understanding and thought.

Mark might have been using a term which was familiar to early Jewish Christians, which both picks up the idea of a Messiah but also of God's suffering servant and he links this to Hellenistic ideas of a divine man / or a supernatural being. However, neither Christ (or Son of David) or Son of God (or Son of Man) is a satisfactory title for Mark. Giving Jesus a title means you are likely to misunderstand him. If you were looking for a Messiah and proclaim as such you will almost definitely be getting it wrong!

Jesus must suffer and die

Mark's Jesus has to go to Jerusalem, he has to suffer, he has to die. There is something ironic in calling his book a Gospel - in Roman terms remember a Gospel was a victorious procession - a triumph.