

Saint Elizabeth Roman Catholic Church

Presentation: September 9, 2014

An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Welcome & Introduction

1) Opening Scripture Text: *Mark 15/37-39*

Jesus gave out a loud cry and breathed his last. The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last, he said: "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

2) Introductory Comments

Gospel as a Literary Form

1) Understanding the Meaning of the Term:

- *gospel* = "good news" [in Greek: *euangelizein/euangelion*] – primarily referring to a proclamation or announcement, not a written document
- usage in Greco-Roman times, Old Testament & Letter of Paul

2) A Working Definition:

Gospel is the proclamation of the message of salvation in Christ and the narrative of those events in Jesus' ministry by which that salvation is effected (Mark 14/9); it is not a biography, but preaching about Jesus, grounded in Jesus' own preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1/14-15). The gospel is not merely a recitation of past events, but an active proclaiming of the Christ-event which invites the hearer to make a commitment to follow Jesus.

Three Stages in the Formation of the Gospels [Sancta Mater Ecclesia, PBC, 1964]

- 1) **Age of Jesus** (27-30 or 30-33 AD): the words and deeds of Jesus in his public ministry + the events of his Passion, Death & Resurrection (see John 20/30-31; 21/25).
- 2) **Age of the Apostles** (30/33-65 AD): the first disciples' preaching about the Risen Jesus, who "interpreted his words and deeds according to the needs of the hearers" and "handed them on in the light of the fuller understanding they enjoyed [after the Resurrection]" = *faith perspective*.
- 3) **Age of the Evangelists** (65-100 AD): the writing of individual gospels by the sacred authors, who "out of the material they received, selected those items which were adapted to the varied circumstances of the faithful as well as to the end which they themselves wished to attain; these they recounted in a manner [wording, context and sequence] consonant with those circumstances and to that end." = *principle of intentional selectivity* (see Luke 1/1-4).

The "Backward Growth" of the Gospels

- 1) **Primitive Kerygma** – the direct proclamations of the Death & Resurrection of Jesus, as seen in 1 Cor 15/3-4; 11/26; Acts 2/22-24; 3/13-15; 4/8-12; 5/29-32; 10/34-43 + expressed in the Memorial Acclamation at Mass ("Christ has died...).
- 2) **How did Jesus die/rise?** – the formation of a coherent Passion Narrative (Mark 14-15; Matthew 26-27; Luke 22-23; John 18-19) + various post-Resurrection appearances (Mark 16; Matthew 28; Luke 24; John 20-21).

- 3) **What led to Jesus' death?** – presentations of the public ministry of Jesus, beginning with the Baptism of John (Mark 1/1-15; Matthew 3/1-4/17; Luke 3/1-4/15; John 1/19-34).
- 4) **Where did Jesus come from?** –development of the Infancy Narratives (Matthew 1-2 + Luke 1-2) and the “Logos Prologue” of John (Jon 1/1-18).

A Guided Exercise in Attentive Reading: [see handout sheet]

General Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

1) Background Information

- **title** – “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [*the Son of God*].”
- **author** – who is Mark and how is he related to Peter and/or Paul?
 - traditionally- an Aramaic speaking Jewish Christian; to modern scholars, more likely an unknown gentile Christian in Syria or Italy.
 - traditional association with Peter (1 Peter 5/13) as attested by Justin martyr (135 AD), who refers to this gospel as “Peter’s memoirs” + Papias (140 AD) who calls Mark “Peter’s interpreter” - many modern critics don’t accept this patristic identification.
 - uncertain relationship to the “*John who is called Mark*” who traveled with Barnabas & Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 12/12; 12/25; 15/37), and who is called a cousin of Barnabas (Col 4/10) and a coworker of Paul (Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4/11).
- **date** – ultimately uncertain, but most likely after the death of Peter & Paul in 64 AD (as attested by Irenaeus of Lyons in 180 AD) and before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, as suggested by the Old Testament imagery used to describe the ruin of the temple without specific reference to the fall of Jerusalem itself (Mark 13/5-37).
- **setting/place of composition** – scholars suggest an Italian setting (based upon Mark’s use of Latin terms to explain Greek words in 7/26; 12/42) or at Syrian Antioch, evidenced by the author’s interest in the temple and Jesus’ kingship.
- **audience** – a gentile Christian community of uncertain location, as evidenced by Mark’s use of translations to explain Aramaic expressions (3/17; 5/41; 7/11; 7/34; 15/34) and his explanation of unfamiliar Jewish customs (7/3-4; 14/12; 15/42).
- **sources** – possibly the preaching of Peter + living oral traditions of early Christians (note events where Peter is absent such as 7/24-30; 14/53-65; 15/1-16/8) + possibly an early written form of the Passion Narrative.
- **relationship to the other canonical gospels** –
 - Mark shares with Matthew & Luke a basic agreement in order, many common features and sequential series; for this reason the three are called **synoptic gospels**.
 - Mark has a total of 661 verses, only 4% of which are unique to Mark; there are 330 verses in common with both Matthew & Luke, another 300 verses shared by Mark & Matthew, and only 10-20 verses shared by Mark & Luke without Matthew.
 - Outside of the Passion Narrative, Mark shares little in common with John; recall that the four gospels are most closely aligned in the Passion Narratives (suggesting a written narrative prior to the gospels?) and most diverse in the Resurrection Accounts.

2) Structure and General Content

- 1/1-15: prologue- the mission of John the Baptist + opening of Jesus’ preaching about the

kingdom.

- 1/16-8/26: Jesus as a teaching and healing messiah, whose words and deeds carry unique authority, with transition story of the blind man at Bethsaida (8/22-26).
- 8/27-10/45: Jesus as the suffering Son of Man, with Peter's profession, the Transfiguration, three announcements of the passion and the necessity of a suffering discipleship, ending with another transition story, the blind man at Jericho (10/36-52).
- 11/1-13/37: Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, closing with an apocalyptic discourse (13/1-37).
- 14/1-16/8: the Markan passion narrative.
- 16/9-20: the "longer ending" with several Resurrection accounts, accepted by the church as inspired despite the mixed manuscript evidence (refer to Colledgeville Commentary).

3) Some Points of Importance

- *Mark's portrait of Jesus* – a powerful healer, teacher and preacher of the kingdom of God + a master who calls his disciples to follow his model of service + a suffering messiah & Son of Man who gives his life for others (Mark 10/45); note the movement from powerful miracles to suffering and death.
- *Mark's portrait of the disciples* – the disciples are often confused and fearful, flawed heroes (4/13; 4/40; 7/18; 8/21) who want to follow Jesus but are unable to surrender all, who are torn between loyalty and survival.
- *Key Message* – just as the disciples are called to be alert to the Lord's coming and to be ready to suffer, so Christians must be prepared to suffer for their faith and to expect persecution while awaiting the return of the Lord in glory – a "theology of the cross."

4) Summary Note:

The Gospel of Mark offers the early church a message of encouragement, affirming that both the disciples' weaknesses and their opponents' hostility are both under divine authority and within the divine plan for salvation. As Jesus triumphs over human conflicts with the religious/political authorities and the greater cosmic conflict with the powers of evil (1/24; 3/22-27; 5/7). "*The Son of Man has come to give his life as a ransom for many.*" (10/45)

Questions and Comments

Closing Prayer: John 20/30-31

Now Jesus did many others signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.