

## The Gospels as our Stories as Well as His

WORDS BY WHICH WE DISCOVER  
THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE

[The Bible tells us of God's interaction with the world from its beginning/creation. The four Gospels tell us of God's interaction with the world through Jesus. Acts tells us of God's interaction through the Spirit in the life of the Church. Sometimes one author, such as Paul, will have varied descriptions of his experiences. There was little attempt to make the experience or description of God all the same, for God was experienced and responded to people who are not all the same. This variety enriched the life of God and ours. The following is a type of poem which enables people to become aware of what might speak to their heart and mind about God in their life. There is no punctuation and no single way of arranging words for we want you to discover how God's story fits into your story.]

GOD  
HAS BEEN IN OUR WORLD  
SINCE THE BEGINNING  
ENGAGING THE WORLD  
IN ITS PROCESS

GOD (CHRIST/SPIRIT) HAS BEEN  
IN OUR WORLD  
SINCE OUR BEGINNING  
GRADUALLY WE DISCOVER  
CHRIST IS THERE  
AND WHAT HE'S LIKE.

WE TALK, BUT MOST OF ALL  
WE RELATE

AND GRADUALLY  
COME TO KNOW HIM  
AS COMPANION AND FRIEND

AS HE MAKES OUR WORLD  
A PLACE  
WHERE WE CAN BE AND LIVE  
HE POINTS TO ABOVE  
WHERE ALSO HE AND WE BELONG

WE FEEL AT HOME

GRADUALLY  
THE MYSTERY OF LIFE  
OPENS ITS DOORS  
AND HE SAYS  
I WILL BE HERE AND THERE  
FOR YOU.

WE CAN'T FIX ALL  
OR KNOW ALL  
OR CONTROL ALL

BUT THERE IS PEACE  
WHERE NO UNCERTAINTIES OVERWHELM  
AND BANISH HOPE

AND ALL WE HARDLY KNOW  
SEEMS PROFOUND

FOUR STORIES OF HIM  
WE HAVE  
IN THEIR RICHNESS  
TO FILL FULL OUR NEED

AND THERE IS OUR STORY  
SO THAT WE KNOW

WHAT HE WOULD BE  
FOR US.

WE NEED NOT  
ALL TO KNOW  
CONTROL  
PROVE  
HOPE

BUT IN HIS EYES  
ALL TO SEE

WHATEVER  
WE NEED  
IN HIM  
IS THERE.

COME, MY FRIEND,  
YOUR HAND UPON MINE  
WE WALK  
THE VALLEY OF PEACE  
AND POSSIBILITY

IN A WORLD  
WE SHARE.

## ***The Gospel of Mark: HIS STORY AND OUR STORY***

Each Gospel is composed from the tradition about Jesus available to and selected by the writers and their religious communities. At some stage this tradition was translated into Greek since Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic as their primary language and all of our Gospels are in Greek. It is important to remember that Jesus' ministry covered a period likely not more than 1 ½ years, and though there were crucial events which needed to be included in any Gospel and there was a memory of the basic outline of Jesus ministry, yet the short period his ministry occupied also limited the length and details of the stories about him. All of the Gospels include a long "Passion Narrative," the story of events from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the resurrection – which included not only narrative but important elements of teaching. In Mark this amounts to six out of the sixteen chapters for a period that covered one week of time. This was likely the first type of narrative constructed, before any of the Gospels, and it was used as a background story for the Lord's Supper to remember what Jesus had done (I Cor. 11:24-25) and as a narrative which supplied Baptism, the union with Christ in his death and resurrection, with historic roots and provided a paradigm for the adult Christian's experience of Baptism (e.g. Rom. 6, Col. 3:1-11).

The presentation of Mark here highlights interpretive dynamics though space does not always allow a presentation of the reasons for these interpretations, some of which may be open to question. However, the nature of Mark necessitates such a treatment. Mark preserves the tradition about Jesus which existed in the church at Rome and states it without much in the way of interpretive comment. Undoubtedly the church was aware of the way this material should be understood. Tradition sees the origin of Mark in the preaching of Peter which all in the Roman Christian community knew but was now in danger of being lost with Peter's death. Thus they preserved what they knew and they knew how to understand it and its understanding was likely transmitted within the community as an oral tradition. But for us, who do not have this oral tradition, some of the Gospel only becomes clear through careful study and a little detective work.

**It is interesting to note in chapter 16 that at least two additional endings, with their own variants, were added to Mark providing information on the resurrection and the post resurrection period which the Gospel did not include. These additions might be called interpretive additions by later Christians seeking to clarify the Markan tradition.** Matthew did the same thing: he interpreted and modified the Markan tradition for his purposes when he wrote his Gospel using Mark as a primary narrative source. One has only to compare similar material in the two.

**The additions and modifications in Mark 16 point to the possibility of this happening in the rest of the Gospel in its early history before the Gospel was a part of a canon of sacred literature.** But other possible changes are not so clear from the manuscript tradition. Thus one has to use theological, literary and historic principles to decide what in Mark was original and what was later addition.

A literary principle is that wherever there is interpretation or comment, this is likely later since Mark does not tend to do this. As example there is Mark 4. The interpretation of the Parable of the Sower in 13-20 is one of the few places in Mark where there is such a bold interpretation of something in the text. When the interpretation is added, it gives an explanation of the parable but also limits its possibilities. Ignore this interpretation and see what is now possible by reading the parable without 13-20 in mind. It is quite possible that Jesus did not give interpretations to his

parables, using the parable as a form of story to draw in the listener and have him or her ponder what this story means. Without the narrowness of the interpretation God may take the listener in various directions. Vs. 33-34 are also a possible later tradition. This argues that Jesus spoke only in parables, something we know he did not do, and then legitimizes the interpretation in 13-20 as part of Jesus' regular practice of interpreting to his disciples that which outsiders would not understand. It would also seem to come to terms with the problematic 10-12 which has Jesus purposely speaking in parables so that the outsider will not understand.

**An important theological principle is Jesus' reinterpretation of the Kingdom and his Messianic mission in the light of the Isaianic Suffering Servant, his rejection of the use of power and his affirmation of the Kingdom's presence though its presence cannot be seen in traditional terms: manifestation of power, conquest of opposition, establishment of God's order, often accompanied by a powerful coming of God or a heavenly figure.** This reinterpretation seems to wind its way through the Gospel. In Mark the kingdom of God (the presence and rule of God) is portrayed as seed (4:26-29) and “mystery” (4:11 “secret” is not a correct translation). Jesus rejects the use of power and assumes the role of a servant (10:35-45). He speaks often of his suffering (e.g. 8:31-38) and in the cleansing of the Temple says: "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*?' But you have made it a den of robbers." Jesus quotes from Is. 56:7 and “for all nations” is in the Isaiah passage, but it is only included in Mark. “Robbers” is a contemporary term for “revolutionaries”. Thus Jesus criticizes the exclusion of Gentiles from the Temple. The business of the Temple was set up in the Court of the Gentiles, the only place in the Temple where Gentiles could go. Jesus says that they have made the Temple a symbol for revolution. To some extent this emphasis can also be found in other Gospels, but nowhere else is it so thoroughly developed as in Mark – perhaps with the exception of Paul (see I Cor. 1-4, Paul’s discussion of the weakness and foolishness of God) and I Peter. **Thus wherever the narrative presents Jesus as moving in a triumphalist direction with prediction of eschatological details, this can be considered possibly a later addition.** Such may explain the seeming contradictions within Mark 13 where Jesus will not predict but predicts. A serious historical question is whether the original author or the actors within the text, could have had the detailed knowledge of the suffering of the post-Jesus church which is put into the mouth of Jesus in vs. 9-13.

Another historical question is that of the historical context reflected by the Gospel. The Gospel of Mark was likely written about 64 CE, around the time of the rising opposition of Rome to Christianity in Rome, the capital. In 64 the city of Rome burned and the emperor Nero blamed Christians. Consequently Christians experienced the first persecution at the hands of Roman government, though this was yet a local persecution. Tradition assigns the location of the Gospel’s origin to Rome and sees Mark (an associate at times of Paul and Peter) as its author who depended on the preaching of Peter for information. It is interesting that I Peter seems to reflect a similar historical situation and was likely written from Rome at about the same time. A major theme in I Peter is suffering and the author explicitly discusses the relationship of Christians with the Roman state (2:11-17). In this difficult time it became important to see how the teaching of Jesus would help Roman Christians deal with suffering and develop an approach to Roman authority. Thus while one cannot imagine Jesus' own context being receptive to his teaching about suffering and God's kingdom, one can see its relevance to the time of the Gospel and later and one can understand that there is a struggle reflected in the text between understanding suffering as mission and triumphalism which avoids suffering and seeks conquest over the world.

As the use of the parable is an oral or literary device to draw the listener into the story and thus an experience of life with God, so at the end of the Gospel Mark concludes with a story with

which the readers can identify as reflecting their context. The women at the tomb were told by a “young man” that Jesus had risen, but no resurrection narratives are included and they had not yet experienced the resurrected Jesus. This is Mark’s way of saying that his readers have also heard the story from a preacher (young man); and they also must at first believe without seeing. They needed at first to believe only from the story that was told them.

**Though I have called attention to several later interpretive additions to the text, I do not feel that I can presently analyze the whole of the text of Mark to produce a suggested original version.** The time is not available. I do hope that I have presented adequate argumentation that such interpretive additions did occur and to leave this with the reader as an interpretive question. Thus the Gospel of Mark, as with the New Testament as a whole (see my article on The Nature of the New Testament), is a living tradition providing both the original materials and the insights of the ongoing Christian community about their meaning. Thus the interpretive task is a rich process introducing us not only to meaning but the struggle for meaning amidst various options.

*The Gospel of Mark also seems to have been developed and molded by a desire to indicate parallels in the life of Jesus to the life of the believer.* The comments previously made on the Passion Narrative indicate this as an intent for the earliest form of our Gospel tradition. It seems that John also uses an organization principle of arranging materials in order of their meaning, and thus creating some striking geographical and chronological dislocations in narrative order. Striking is the location of the Cleansing of the Temple in John 2. Of course the Gospels must tell the story of Jesus and so therefore cannot merely indicate events and experiences parallel to those of the believer. But it helps to understand the Gospel to know that this is a major concern. Thus to hear Jesus' story is also to hear many resonances with my story or his or her story, and we would miss part of the Gospel's meaning if we do not listen for this and explore this. I have located themes relevant to my and your story in frames on the right edge of the page.

## THE GOSPEL OF MARK: OUTLINE

JUDEA  
1:2-13

- 1:1 Title: The “Beginning” (the Greek word “beginning” may mean beginning in time but also can mean “fundamental content”) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- 1: 2-11 John the Baptist and Jesus; Jesus' Baptism by John **(The word “Isaiah” may be a later addition or the portion of vs. 2 from Malachi may be a later addition, since all of the quote is not from Isaiah as the present form of the text indicates.)**
- 1:12-13 The Temptation of Jesus (The details in Luke and Matt. are not here and so one may identify in a more general way with Jesus' experience. Following his Baptism which identified him as beloved son, he is thrust by God into the wilderness which is a paradigm of the world and what he will face in the future: God is there, Satan is there, beasts and angels are there, and the isolation of the wilderness makes all the questions his.)

My story also begins with my Baptism into Jesus death and resurrection and the awareness that I am God's son or daughter, as the heavenly voice indicated to Jesus. To be baptized raises questions about many other things in my life and when I think of this or when I try to live out my baptism I am tried and tested as Jesus was in the wilderness. But I also discover that God's Spirit cares for me in the wildernesses of life and I do not need to be afraid. Mark does not give details for Jesus' temptation because to leave out the details helps us to better enter Jesus' experience. Satan for persons in Jesus time represented all that was wrong with the world and all that would keep persons from being God's son or daughter.

## GALILEE

1:14--9:50

(with mention of  
some activity  
north of Galilee)

1:14-2:17      The Kingdom (God's desire to exercise His Rule) announced and enacted  
  
(as was customary with the O.T. prophets, Jesus does a number of things to demonstrate his  
message besides announcing his message; Mark 1:16-39 is a sample day in the life of Jesus in  
which he does a number of things related to his message; this section includes a series of  
miracle stories which are often included in groups)

1:14-15	Kingdom (Rule, Presence of God) Announced
1:16-20	Some disciples called
1:21-28	Capernaum Synagogue-Unclean spirit cast out
1:29-31	Simon's (Peter's) mother-in-law healed
1:32-39	Many healed, but Jesus' main purpose is to preach, not heal
1:40-45	Leper healed
2: 1-12	Paralytic healed and his sins forgiven
2:13-17	Levi (Matthew ?) called and Jesus fellowships with sinners and tax collectors (to show in whom He is interested)

What does Jesus' message mean? In 1:14-2:17 we are given a brief summary of his message and mission (the kingdom, rule, presence of God is announced) and then we have a number of stories which demonstrate what it means. This is sometimes called a "sample day in the life of Jesus." It's interesting to note that in 1:32-39 Jesus primary purpose is to announce the kingdom, the presence of God, not merely to get involved in many healings.

What are the possibilities for you in these stories?

2:18-3:6 Controversies  
 2:18-22 His disciples don't fast - Jesus is bringing something new  
 2:23-3:6 Keeping the Sabbath - 2 incidents - "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."

Controversy;  
 resistance to the message where the new confronts the old. Even Jesus family had difficulty with what he was doing. What is your resistance?

3:7-3:30 The Attack Against Satan's Kingdom and Authority (which was necessary to the coming of God's Rule or Kingdom)  
 3: 7-12 Exorcisms (unclean spirits cast out)  
 3:13-19 Commissioning of the 12 to preach and exorcise  
 3:20-30 By whose power does Jesus cast our demons? What is the source of his authority?

3:31-35 Opposition of Jesus' Family (Jesus statement here presupposes that his family did not comprehend what he was doing. In 3:10-21 the "friends" who thought he was beside himself according to the Greek text may have been his family.)

4: 1-34 The Problem of Understanding and Accepting the Kingdom as Present in Jesus  
 4: 1-9 Jesus tells a parable about a generous sower and about the problem of understanding (the seed falls on different types of soil) to people who are having difficulty understanding the parables he is telling them.  
 4:10-12 Jesus tells his disciples that they have to accept the "mystery of the Kingdom" before his parables become understandable. (The term "mystery is the correct translation of the Greek word, not "secret".) The mystery is that the Kingdom is already present in Jesus and that it will not involve the national restoration of Israel as hoped, but that it involves a restoration of relationship between God and humanity and a life of service (not power and prestige). Jesus had used the parables with the crowd not only to communicate his understanding but to limit the response of people to those who accepted his approach. His illustrative parables only became clear to those who accepted His views. He did not want to draw to himself contemporary groups looking for a political Messiah. For this reason Jesus uses the parables as a means to keep his Messiahship secret. Mark 4:12 is a quotation from Is. 6:9-10 (where the response of people to Isaiah's mission is described) and its proper translation is highly debated. At first it sounds like Jesus does not want people to understand. Vs. 12 should be translated "so that they may indeed see but not perceive and may indeed hear but not understand; *unless* they should turn again and be forgiven." They need to turn and accept a new point of view.  
 4:13-20 Explanation of the parable of the sower (**likely a later addition**)  
 4:21-25 Jesus intention is not to hide his message (one doesn't hide a lamp), but one must have ears to hear and understand. One needs to be responsive to Jesus' reinterpretation of the contemporary Jewish ideas.  
 4:26-32 Two parables of the Kingdom emphasizing Jesus' reinterpretation of the Kingdom: it begins small, grows slowly and mysteriously, but eventually the fulfillment comes.

4:1-34 The Mystery of the Kingdom: God sows it but it doesn't seem here unless we change our idea of what is to be expected. A new point of view is needed to see what is here.



4:33-34 Concluding statement about Jesus' use of parables with the crowds to which he spoke. It is indicated that to his disciples he privately gave the explanations. **(This passage would seem to be a later addition, along with 4:13-20).**

4:35-43 Mighty Works of the Kingdom (A collection of miracle stories)

4:33-41 Jesus stills a storm

5:1-20 Gerasene man with unclean spirit healed

5:21-43 Jairus' daughter made alive and woman with flow of blood healed

A collection of miracles. Such collections existed in the early church. Do they illustrate things about Jesus's message? In Mark Jesus plays down miracles though he performs them.

6:1-29 Responses to Jesus

6: 1-6 Problems in the Nazareth Synagogue - Jesus' townspeople take offense at the hometown boy. He did no mighty work there.

6:7-13 Jesus sends the Twelve on a Mission

6:14-29 Response of Herod Antipas to Jesus' Activity - and the story of what happened to John the Baptist. The speculations raised about who Jesus is anticipate Peter's confession (8:27-30)

Reactions to Jesus which anticipate the debate with James and John (10:35-45) and the Confession of Peter (8:27-38).

- 6:30-8:26 The Feeding Miracles - Jesus enacts Exodus history (Moses' feeding the multitude in the wilderness) and also anticipates the great Messianic Banquet (when the Messiah will gather together with all God's people at a banquet when the final age in history arrives). 8:14-21 is the key to this section for in it Jesus explains that the number of baskets of food remains gathered up had special significance. Jesus, as the prophets of old, is enacting and dramatizing His message.
- 6:30-44 Feeding of the 5,000
- 6:45-52 Sea trip to Bethsaida - Jesus stills the wind
- 6:53-56 Many healings
- [7:1-8:10 Jesus takes his disciples on a mission into Gentile areas – in Matt. Jesus tells his disciples not to go to Gentile areas]
- 7:1-23 What truly defiles a man (remember that Jews were not able to have fellowship with Gentiles because of their laws on cleanness)
- 7:24-30 Daughter of Greek (Syrophenician) woman healed. Jesus reflects back to his disciples their attitude towards the Gentiles.
- 7:31-37 Deaf and dumb man healed in the Decapolis
- 8: 1-10 Feeding of the 4,000 This seems to be a feeding of those who were not Jews, while the Feeding of the 5000 was primarily for Jews.
- 8:11-13 Pharisees seek a sign
- 8:14-21 Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. Leaven (old dough soured for raising the bread) represents the influence of the ideas of the Pharisees and Herod (or Herodians). The Pharisees sought a political Messiah and asked for a convincing sign of his power and authority while Herod was all too willing to compromise with the Romans. This seems to criticize too narrow and too broad a view.

Here Jesus seems to be expressing the idea that he has the proper "bread" (see John 6:32, 35) and that when what he has to offer is accepted there will be gathered up not only the twelve tribes of Israel (symbolized in the 12 baskets gathered up from the Feeding of the 5,000) but also people from all nations (7 baskets are gathered up from the Feeding of the 4,000 and 7 is the complete number). The Feeding of the 4,000 which symbolizes and dramatizes the feeding and gathering up of all nations is preceded by a discussion of what defiles a person and the healing of several Gentiles, all of which pointed up the mission beyond Israel to all nations.

8:22-26 Blind Man at Bethsaida

6:30-8:26 is a long section focusing around the meaning of two feeding miracles and stressing that Christ includes all in his mission, even the Gentiles. He even leads his disciples on a unique experimental mission among the Gentiles. If this is historical it means that the mission to the Gentiles was given earlier than the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) and earlier than the Gentile mission which develops in Acts. It was always Jesus intention to be inclusive. *He came for all, not only the good and the righteous and the pure.* The emphasis on food in the feeding miracles becomes a reference to Holy Communion in John 6.

Jesus can bring in-sight.

- 8:27-9:29 Climax of the Gospel
- 8:27-30 Peter's confession of Jesus as Christ, Messiah
- 8:31-33 Jesus says the Son of Man must suffer, be killed and rise again. Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus tries to make sure His disciples won't understand Him as a political Messiah, but Peter has difficulty accepting this. Jesus reasserts this idea several times from this point on. Jesus' prophecy of his resurrection must be seen in the light of the O.T. theme of the vindication of God's faithful servant (e.g., Is. 52:13ff and 53:10)
- 8:34-38 Disciples also may have to suffer
- 9: 1 Promise of the Kingdom in Power (this may refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Acts 2)
- 9: 2-13 Transfiguration - Jesus is revealed to be what Peter confessed. Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus here may represent Jesus' fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Jesus' statement that the prophecy of the returned of Elijah (Malachi 4:5) has already been fulfilled must refer to John the Baptist as its fulfillment.
- 9:14-29 Healing of an epileptic boy - This story points out the ability of Jesus in contrast to the failure of the disciples to heal the boy. An important issue dealt with here is that of faith: the father says, "I believe, help my unbelief."

A time to confess.  
 The Gospel climaxes in Peter's Confession of Jesus, his misunderstanding of Jesus, Jesus' clarification, and then the Transfiguration. This is the moment when the reader is called to faith and to reflect on whether she or he is ready to come to terms with Jesus and his understanding of God and life. As to "she", Mark has no difficulty placing women in crucial places (see chapters 5,7,14,16) The role of women in the church is treated more extensively in John and Luke.

- 9:30-10:52 Teaching - It is at this point in the narrative when Jesus' activity in Galilee comes to an end and he goes to Jerusalem that Mark includes a good deal of teaching material. The historical and chronological setting of this material is vague (except for 9:33, 10:1 and 10:46). Luke does the same thing at this point in his Gospel by inserting his great interpolation (9:51-19:27). Having presented the essentials of Jesus' significance and ministry (with the exception of the last climactic moments of his life in Jerusalem), it is natural that some aspects of Jesus teaching would be presented here. Moreover, much of the material here directly relates to his going to Jerusalem by speaking of the nature of his mission (and that of his disciples) and his coming death.
- 9:30-32 Another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection
- 9:33-37 Nature of discipleship pointed out when some discuss who is greatest.
- 9:38-41 Disciples ask about a man who does Jesus' work but doesn't belong to their group.
- 9:45-50 Eliminate the cause of sin - maintain your flavor (saltiness). The statement about cutting off parts of the body is hyperbole and not intended to be taken literally.
- 10:1-12 Divorce
- 10:12-16 God's Kingdom belongs to children
- 10:17-31 Some will have difficulty entering God's Kingdom (the rich), but with God it is not impossible.
- 10:32-34 Another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- 10:35-45 James and John request special privilege in the Kingdom, but Jesus points out that the great are those who serve. It is in this way he understands his mission. He is to be a servant as are his disciples (the idea of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 40 and following is probably reflected here).
- 10:46-52 Healing of blind Bartimaeus. The blind man acknowledges Jesus as Messiah, Son of David, about which Jesus makes no comment.

Various things to think on.  
 This section has a number of stories which deal with various subjects. They don't seem as if they necessarily belong together in some order but each story has its message. What unifies it to an extent are the predictions of Jesus death and resurrection leading up to the debate with James and John which is a climactic moment. As the healing of a blind man symbolically preceeds Peter's Confession so here the healing of a blind man follows the debate with James and John.

## JERUSALEM

11-16

- 11-16 The "Passion Story"      Triumphal Entry through the Resurrection  
The oldest part of the Gospel narrative.
- 11:1-13:37 Christ Confronts Jerusalem for its Moment of Decision
- 11:1-11      The King of Peace enters. Jesus seems to plan an entry into Jerusalem which will portray His nature and mission. Matthew (21:4) makes reference to Jesus doing this in fulfillment of a prophecy (Zachariaiah 9:9) about a King of Peace, and this may very well have been Jesus' intention. Interestingly Mark portrays Jesus' intentionality by having Jesus enter Jerusalem in the "Triumphal Entry", look around the Temple, go back to Bethany for the night, and return on the next day for the Temple cleansing. In Mark this is no impulsive action.
- 11:12-26      Cursing of fig tree and Temple cleansing. - Jesus calls Israel's attention to her mission to the world and God's judgment if she fails. 12-14 deals with the cursing of a fig tree. this is not an act of anger, but a dramatization of the fate of Israel if she does not bear fruit. Remember that this is not just a religious issue, but revolution was already underway which led to the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. vs. 15-19 deal with Jesus driving the money-changers and sellers of animals out of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple compound. This is the part of the Temple where Israel should be ministering to the Gentiles ("My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all nations*.") 20-26 are the sequel to the cursing of the fig tree. Peter, frightened called Jesus attention to the death of the tree and his words imply the question, "What will happen to Israel?" Jesus replies, "Have faith in God." These incidents precipitate the decision on the part of the Jewish leaders to get rid of Jesus (vs. 18).
- 11:27-33      Jewish leaders question Jesus' authority to do what he did.
- 12:1-12      Parable of the vineyard. - Tenants (probably referring to Israel) are judged for the rejection of the owner of the vineyard's right to receive fruit from it and their abuse of his servants and son. [It is important to remember that such materials reflect Jesus' historic conflict with Jewish leaders and the conflict between Christianity and Judaism which began later. We should be careful that such does not become the basis for present anti-Jewish attitudes.]
- 12:13-40      Series of Controversies
- 12:12-17      Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar?
- 12:18-27      A question about the resurrection by Sadducees who don't believe in it.
- 12:28-34      The two great commandments.
- 12:35-37      Jesus denies Davidic descent of the Christ (Messiah) which then disavows political hopes in connection with the restoration of David's kingdom.
- 12:38-40      Criticism of the Scribes.
- 12:41-44      The widow's mite - an example of total dedication

13:1-37

The Little Apocalypse - This passage begins with Jesus' prophecy about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This then seems to be identified with the coming of the end of the world when the Son of Man will return in glory. Various signs are mentioned which will indicate the nearness of the end. This is called the Little Apocalypse because it seems like a small piece of Apocalyptic literature. **Some scholars suggest that vs. 5-31 are not totally from Jesus but that this was an Apocalypse based on some sayings of Jesus which circulated in the early church prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE or were added in the revision of the Gospel indicated by the ending, chapter 16.** Verses 32-37 seem to militate against the type of prediction of the end that 5-31 seem to suggest and may better reflect Jesus' true attitude. The basic question involved here is how much of this passage really reflects his thinking. Jesus' discussion of the Kingdom in Mark 4 does not seem to fit well with what is expressed in 5-31.

#### The Final Drama and Conflict

#### The Moment of Decision

All of Jesus' previous debates with his contemporaries come to a focus in this last week of his life. This time also involves the establishment of Holy Communion, his death, and his resurrection. All this is placed in the context of the expected end of the world, so what is struggled out here is a cosmic struggle. After having moved through these foundational stories, he promises to again lead his disciples into the world as a shepherd leads his sheep.

In the Moravian tradition this time is experienced through the Readings for Holy Week which is a harmony of the Passion Narratives of the Gospels. However, as a harmony the intentionality and strategy of any individual Gospel is lost and this is then provided through the selection of passages now brought together into a narrative.

- 14:1-42 Preparation for Jesus' Death
- 14: 1-2 The plot against Jesus
  - 14: 3-9 Anointed for death
  - 14:10-11 Judas' arrangement with the priests
  - 14:12-25 Last Supper - It is mentioned that Jesus is to be betrayed. Here Jesus institutes a means of remembering his death and offers a pledge of their being together again in the future.
  - 14:26-31 Peter protests his loyalty
  - 14:32-42 Jesus prepares himself in the garden of Gethsemene
- 14:43-15:20 Arrest and Trial
- 14:43-52 Judas' betrayal and Jesus' arrest - some think the young man mentioned in 51-52 may have been the author of the Gospel.
  - 14:53-65 Trial before the high priest - Jesus is accused of saying He will destroy the Temple and for the first time openly accepts the title of Christ (i.e. Messiah - previously he had tried to keep this from becoming known by the general public). This also leads to an accusation of blasphemy (which may have been made on the basis of his statement about the coming Son of Man - the Son of Man could be a divine figure while the Messiah was usually understood to be a man.,)
  - 14:66-72 Peter's denial of Christ.
  - 15:1-20 Jesus' trial before Pilate - Jesus' being called "King of the Jews" would have to do with the question of whether he was the Messiah of royal (Davidic) lineage.
- 15:24-41 The Crucifixion - The rending of the curtain of the Temple in vs. 38 may be symbolical as it was this curtain, between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, that separated Israel from the immediate presence of God.
- 15:42-47 The Burial
- 16: 1-8 The Resurrection - The Gospel of Mark, in the form in which we now have it, ends at 16:8. There has been much speculation as to whether the end was originally longer and contained an account of Christ's resurrection appearances as do the other Gospels. The early church felt that something was lacking in ending the Gospel at 16:8 and composed *two different endings* to round off the account of the resurrection. The content of the most familiar and longer ending is most likely derived from the other Gospels. The shorter ending has very little to say.

He's alive! They told me so. But I still have to discover it in my experience of life. It is said he will go before me. Since he is before me, if I do not follow I can not discover that he is really there. All Jesus' reinterpretation of the Kingdom and his mission, including his rejection of power and his suffering, must define the nature of the One I seek in my experience and journey.

The ending of Mark as it stands includes the arrival of the woman at the tomb on the 1st day of the week to anoint Jesus' body. There they find the stone door of the tomb rolled back and a young man (angel -?) who tells them that Jesus has risen. He tells them to report to the disciples (with perhaps a special gracious mention of Peter because Peter has denied him or because Peter had assumed a special position in the group.) They are to tell the disciples that Jesus is going before them to Galilee as he said. The reference to Galilee is puzzling as we have little record of Jesus' appearance to His disciples in Galilee after his resurrection. In the light of Jesus' own statement concerning this in 14:27-28 it basically

means that after his resurrection Jesus (the Shepherd) will again lead (go before) his sheep (disciples). A Palestinian shepherd led his sheep rather than driving them ahead of him. It could mean that Jesus would eventually lead his disciples back to their home (most were from Galilee) and the location where they had carried on most of their ministry. 16:6-8 in its present form would mean that the disciples should first go to Galilee and that Jesus would then meet them there. This does not fit well with Jesus' own statement in 14:27-28 nor does it fit well with what we know of the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels of Luke and John. Can it be that **vs. 6-8 were edited** by the early church to refer to an appearance of Jesus immediately in Galilee in order to supply the lack of a resurrection appearance in the original ending? If you remove the words "there you will see him" in vs. 7 these verses would agree with Jesus' statement in 14:27-28 and would mean that the man (or angel) at the tomb tells the woman to remind the disciples of Jesus' promise that He will soon again be at their head and lead them.

**Additions to the original text:** It seems clear that 9-20 are additions to the original text which ended at 16:8 and that there may have been other modifications and additions. The addition of this not only provides information on Jesus resurrection missing in original Mark, but describes acts of amazing power which accompanies those who believe. Theologically this additions seem to move from the Jesus who suffered as Son of Man to the possibilities of power at a time when Christians were persecuted by Nero (64 CE) and perhaps in the early stages of the Jewish War [the Jewish War has to be in its early stages for the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE) are thought to be the same event (see the Little Apocalyp in Mark 13) and not separated from each other as in the later Gospels].

The absence of information about resurrection appearances of Christ in our earliest Gospel should not disturb us as there is an account which antedates the Gospel of Mark by at least 10 years in I Cor. 15.

**The evidence of editing or additions to the original text in Mark 16 causes one to raise the question of the possible editing of the rest of Mark.** One may not be able to indicate this by textual variants but rather inconsistencies in the text which interrupt flow or seem to be inconsistent with the presentation of Jesus which seems to have belonged to the original stages of the material: e.g. the interpretation of the parable of the sower in Mark 4 (Jesus does not usually interpret his parables and the views in the interpretation seem to be somewhat at variance with the meaning of the original parable which focuses on the generosity of the sower and not the resistance of the soils) and the indication that Jesus only spoke in parables (16:33-34) which just is not true.



## Mark's Easter

Interesting Implications of Its  
Two Endings

Slow  
the door  
rolled back  
and once again  
disclosed  
world and life.  
It had been  
so short a time  
since life slipped  
beyond his grasp  
while on the cross  
he hung.  
As when the Baptist  
held him  
in water's mysteries,  
he wondered  
what would be,  
so now -- .  
So now  
what is to be?  
What future  
would the world  
and heaven hold  
for him.  
And then it  
dawned,  
as he had known,  
death held  
no final word.  
Again he'd lead –  
to Galilee?  
Perhaps.  
As shepherds

gather, lead  
their sheep,  
he'd still be there  
for them and God.  
And then  
he heard  
the women,  
coming  
to complete in love  
his death.  
They must not  
see him yet.  
His absence,  
as well  
his presence,  
must here be met.

Amazed  
they stared within  
and entered  
to meet  
a man  
in white.  
"Be not afraid.  
The crucified  
is risen.  
Tell his friends:  
again  
he'll go before them."  
And fear filled hearts  
and minds  
and from the tomb  
they fled  
to hold a while  
in silence what they hoped.  
Ending One  
And here the story  
ends for now.  
Those who read may know  
a witness has been born(e)  
for all who've  
not yet seen.

And we,  
as they,  
must  
decide  
its  
truth.

Ending Two

The man in white  
gently smiled.  
He knew  
they'd soon  
discover  
the truth.  
But  
it would take  
time  
and all  
could not be  
now.

[Two endings are justified by the Gospel's three endings. The first ending assumes that the ending of the Gospel at 16:8 is a literary device of the author, leaving the reader at the point of the women in the narrative, needing to decide on the basis of the preached message. The second ending could assume that what happens at the tomb is a device of Jesus who is the young man in white as in the Transfiguration narrative.]

