

Discussion Notes

September 20, 2015

The Gospel of Mark 14.26-52

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Mark's story about a strange man

- At the center of Mark's story is Jesus, an unusual character (to put it mildly), unlike any character we've seen before or since.
- We've been listening to what Mark has to say about him. Who is he and what has he been up to?

So Far in the Gospel of Mark

- Jesus arrives on the scene announcing that *something* has happened – that God is up to something.
- He calls this Good News. A change in regime has happened and is now unfolding.
- 1500 years prior the Israelite's ancestors were enslaved by the Egyptians, but God liberated them via a great Exodus. In Jesus' day they found themselves oppressed by another empire, Rome, and so the people like the sounds of what seems like another Exodus.
- As Jesus preaches this Good News, this onrushing liberty, he does the miraculous. Signs are accompanying his words. Perhaps God is on his side. Perhaps all this talk about emancipation is actually possible.
- Strangely, however, Jesus doesn't want people to spread the miracle stories around. He doesn't want to be known by them, or followed because of them. He doesn't use miracles to coerce allegiance, nor does he use them to exhibit power or demand attention.
- Reading further into Mark it seems that Jesus isn't too bothered about politics or the Romans or becoming a revolutionary.
- Power plays, control, dominance, freedom fighting – we sense none of this from Jesus.

- Jesus tells people that their sins are forgiven, which is something only their God can grant them.
- He gathers twelve disciples around himself – the same number of tribes in Israel. He also locks horns with the religious elite as they take offense at his teaching.
- Then, Mark says, things get very odd. *Jesus starts doing unexplainable things.*
- He calms a storm at will. He heals people who seem to be possessed by evil spirits. He makes food almost come out of thin air. He walks on water. He emits what can only be described as heavenly light. He does things, specific things, not only things a god could do, but things the Israelite God has done in the past according their holy book.
- Jesus' disciples become not only in awe of him but afraid of him. This is no ordinary Rabbi.
- Mark says that as his disciples compute the magnitude of his power they begin to dream of what that might mean for a fight against the Romans, and the power they might wheel in this new Kingdom Jesus speaks of.
- But Jesus insists that if they really want to be a part of this new Kingdom they had better start acting more like helpless children than military generals.
- A tension emerges: though Jesus is obviously powerful he seems determined to use his power differently. *In fact, he seems determined not to use it.*
- As the story moves on, things get stranger. Jesus couples his teaching about the onrushing Kingdom with talk of his immanent death. His disciples don't like that sound of that one bit.
- He continues to upset the religious order of things, condemning the practices of the elders, all the while befriending and blessing people outside their religion.
- Even more confusingly, he then rides in the capital city like a king, under the anthems of the people - "He saves us! He saves us!" they shout.
- The religious elite doesn't like this for two reasons: one, they don't like that the people are nearly *worshipping* Jesus, and two, they're worried about the

Roman's reaction to what looks like a brewing revolt. They vow to finish him off for good.

- And toward the end of the story Mark tells us that Jesus sits down to a meal with his disciples – the Passover Meal. The very meal that commemorates the Exodus from Egypt 1500 years prior.
- Only Jesus says they aren't eating this meal to commemorate the past, but to explain what's about to happen. This meal isn't about Moses and Pharaoh and God's liberation.
- This meal, says Jesus, *is now about him and what he is about to do next* – which is die.

The Third and Final Act

- “God has come, and he's not what you thought he was like.”
- No more is this statement true than in the last third of Mark's story. The last part of this story should absolutely through us for a loop, because Jesus acts like no human ever had and no human ever has since.
- Over the course of the next few chapters Mark will intentionally and hauntingly bring his story to a close.
- Everything in the story has been leading up to this – to answer these questions:
 - If Jesus the Israel's God come amongst them, as Mark is trying to show us, then what is God like? What has God come to do? How does God bring about his Kingdom?
- And so the scene is set and the curtain goes up with Jesus and his disciples having finished dinner and on their way to a garden by night.

14.27-31 The discussion en route to Gethsemane

- Throughout Mark's story we've seen Peter, along with the rest of the disciples, continually getting it wrong. They think they understand Jesus but they don't.

- They want to be great and powerful, they want to make a power play, they want to dominate, they want to control – but Jesus is going a different way.
- Peter’s final failure is just around the corner – even though he assures Jesus it is not. That’s the great irony of Peter’s story – that even in his perceived strength he is actually powerless.
- *Peter stands for us all.* The book may have been written under the direction of the Apostle Peter. Perhaps Peter wishes us to learn from his mistakes.
- It is this first scene of the Final Act that reminds us that we have nothing to offer *and Jesus must carry it all.*

14.32-42 The Garden decision

- Notice Jesus’ prayer – we learn it in the Matthew and Luke.
- It’s so easy to miss the meaning here based on familiarity or interest in some of the theological questions that might emerge.
- Three senses emerge from this dramatic and heart wrenching scene in the garden.
 - The first is the deep anguish and distress Jesus feels. He looks weak, he sounds worried. His disciples arrogantly proclaim they’re ready to take on any army for Jesus, and here’s their great leader crying on his knees in the moonlight.
 - The second is the choice Jesus makes to do to the cross. Jesus’ next twelve hours aren’t going to be forced on him. He’s choosing the way of weakness, suffering and abuse. He’s choosing to be conquered, not to conquer.
 - The third is Jesus’ suffering. It’s here in the garden that he sides with the afflicted, the needy, the troubled. In the garden we meet a God who embraces his own suffering and loneliness to free us from ours. In the garden we meet a God who doesn’t side with the powerful and conniving, but the fragile and poor. A God who doesn’t side with the bombastic politician but the forgotten refugee.

- No army, no angels, no short cuts, no easy route. He chooses the way of weakness, turning all of history its head.
- *Jesus chose the cross because he loves you.* He looks at you in your suffering, your pain, your weakness and says “I am with you. I feel what you feel. And I’m going to do something about it.”

14.43-52 Betrayal and Abandonment

- We don’t know why Judas betrays Jesus. It’s possible he’s trying to force Jesus into a corner and get the revolt going.
- The story turns quickly. Did you catch it?
- At one moment the disciples proclaim their allegiance to Jesus, “we’ll die with you”. They then fall asleep at his greatest hour of need, and bolt at the first sign of trouble.
- But notice also *whom the disciples side with when they’re confronted with the swords and clubs.* In their defense of Jesus, who do they act like? What do they do? They pull out swords! They respond with violence and power plays, all for the cause of the very one who wants nothing to do with that sort of thing.
- The final scene in the garden holds a mysterious mention of a young man who runs away naked. Some think this might be John Mark, the author, which is possible.
- And so Jesus is left alone in the hands of his persecutors. What we are left with is what we already noted about Peter. The disciples think they are strong but they’re really weak: naked, running, scared. Jesus is perceived to be weak, but in this selfless weakness we begin to see God’s strength.
- “Our attention is focused mercilessly on this one figure: as he is progressively set apart from group after group, authority after authority, friend after friend, it becomes clearer and clearer that he alone has to carry the whole meaning, the whole theological and spiritual weight of what is going on...He must, through what he does and suffers, establish what the voice of God and the presence of God might mean in this world.” – Rowan Williams

- This is going to get more and more clear as the story moves on.

Conclusion

- We must pay attention to the way of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

- What did you take away from the passage and teaching on Sunday?
- What makes Jesus' actions and ways so different from the disciples'?
- What kind of un-learning do we have to do in order to follow Jesus? What kind of learning?
- How does the way of Jesus challenge you as you live day to day?
- What comfort do you take from Jesus' sufferings? What does Jesus' sufferings say about God and who he is?