

The Gospel of Mark Popularity Breeds Contempt

Interpreting the Text:

1. The Gospel of Mark begins not with the story of Jesus but with the story of John the Baptist. What effect does starting the Gospel in Jesus' adulthood have on Mark's portrait of Jesus?
2. Mark's account of Jesus' life is rapidly paced and action packed, "like a kid telling a story" as Dr. Hilton says. How does this storytelling impact the way we understand the way Jesus lived and interacted with others? Do you find this Gospel easier to read, or more challenging given the pace of events?
3. In 1:24, we are told that the demon recognizes that Jesus is "of God" before the disciples do. What role do the demons play in this story, and in Mark's Gospel so far?
4. Why do you think Jesus instructed the man who was healed of leprosy not to tell anyone (1:40-45)? What effect would this have had on Jesus' mission?

Applying the Text:

1. Early in Mark's Gospel, we have conversations about demons and healing miracles. How can we tell these stories in a way that is sensitive about physical and mental disabilities? How can Jesus' healings invite a conversation about agency, consent, and varied abilities?
2. Put yourself in the first audience of the story about the man with a shriveled hand in 3:1-6. How have the first two chapters of Mark's Gospel prepared you to hear this paragraph in 3:1-6 more intelligently? What might you know about the way Jesus works that the man with the withered hand doesn't?
3. In 2:27, Jesus says, "The Sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath." Have you ever seen rigid enforcement of well-intended rules do harm? How does Jesus' response here indicate how the author feels about the Pharisees? What kind of God does Jesus' saying portray?
4. Jesus gathers a number of followers in these early chapters saying, "come and follow me." What can we learn about evangelism from the calling of the fishermen (1:16-20) and Levi, the tax collector (2:13-17)?

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