

The Gospels: Mark

Mark

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – July 5, 2020

6th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Mark 1:1-15, 3:7-12, 8:27-30, 15:33-37, 16:1-8

Reflection: Psalm 3

Greeting: May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Let us celebrate the love of Christ that brings us together in God's care. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: O Lord our God, help us this day. Help us live a life more and more like the example set for us in Christ Jesus. Help us to see with new eyes so that we may strive to be more and more like our Risen Savior. Guide us in all that we are and all that we do, that we may serve you, Lord, that all be for you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 3

O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying to me, "There is no help for you in God." Selah

But you, O Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah

I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me. I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Rise up, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.

Deliverance belongs to the Lord; may your blessing be on your people! Selah

(Psalm 3 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 3 and we hear of God's strength. God the defender in times of trouble. God the sustainer in times of struggle. That God will keep us and deliver us from evil. How do you see yourself as delivered by God? Do you see God as your shield? As the one who gives you restful sleep? How do you share that idea with others? How do you help others to experience the peace and love of God in their lives? How do you share God's blessings with God's people?

Prayer: God, our King and Creator. Help us to never forget the wonderous things you have done. Help us to celebrate you even amid troubles in our lives. Let us always turn to you and your steadfast love that endures forever. Let us always call up the Father who guides us. Help us to always seek the Holy Spirit that leads us. And let us always celebrate the salvation of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. May praise always be on our tongues and love in our hearts. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the Common English Bible. All of our readings come from the Gospel of Mark today. We begin with chapter 1, verses 1 through 15.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah: Look, I am sending my messenger before you. He will prepare your way, a voice shouting in the wilderness: "Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight."

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!" (Mark 1:1-15 CEB+)

Next, we turn to chapter 3, verses 7 through 12.

Jesus left with his disciples and went to the lake. A large crowd followed him because they had heard what he was doing. They were from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the area surrounding Tyre and Sidon. Jesus told his disciples to get a small boat ready for him

so the crowd wouldn't crush him. He had healed so many people that everyone who was sick pushed forward so that they could touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down at his feet and shouted, "You are God's Son!" But he strictly ordered them not to reveal who he was. (Mark 3:7-12 CEB+)

And now, chapter 8, verses 27 through 30.

Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

They told him, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets."

He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him. (Mark 8:27-30 CEB+)

We continue with, chapter 15, verses 33 through 37.

From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani," which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?"

After hearing him, some standing there said, "Look! He's calling Elijah!" Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, "Let's see if Elijah will come to take him down." But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

(Mark 15:33-37 CEB+)

And finally, chapter 16, verses 1 through 8.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

(Mark 16:1-8 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I planned this series some time ago. I had been working on the idea of it before everything got turned upside down and shaken. I felt like it might be a good time to come back to the idea. I wanted to spend four weeks to look at the four Gospel accounts. I'm starting with Mark. This might seem out of place, since Matthew comes first in the printed version. But I'm

starting with Mark for various reasons, including Mark's length and being the earliest written. I also felt Mark was a great way to introduce this series. I wanted to look at each of the four Gospels as their own story, their own book if you will. Part of the issue with reading all of the Gospel accounts together, we often read them as one story where we have to smooth out the wrinkles and connect the dots. We want them to fit together like a puzzle. In our rush to do this, we often don't think about what each account says and how it is being said.

Now, I feel I should say something about the author. We don't much about any of the Gospel authors. We don't actually know who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Mark's name is attached to it now, but we don't know exactly when his name was put on the account or who Mark was. Mark is often tied to the John Mark of Acts, but the truth is that we don't have any evidence to back up that claim or any others about Mark. That isn't to say they can't be correct, but we don't have any evidence inside or outside the Gospel itself. The writer of Mark doesn't declare his name or relation to the story. According to scholars, Mark is the earliest of the Gospel accounts. He seems to have written for a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. Mark can feel a little less polished than the other Gospels accounts and can be overlooked because of style and length. Mark was not written in the best of Greek either.

I chose the various readings for today because they help to highlight the message of Mark and show off some of the unique features of Mark's Gospel. One of the interesting aspects is the brevity. Mark is short and to the point. There is no account of the birth of Jesus, and there seems to be very little concern about it. Everything picks up with the beginning of the good news, and Jesus goes to get baptized. We get a familiar story as we find with many of the stories in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are known as the synoptic Gospels, as they often have the same general flow and share many events. But one of the things with the way that Mark opens is that Mark packs in a handful of events in a short section of scripture. We are introduced to John the Baptist. He baptizes Jesus. Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness and then begins his public ministry. Which is the familiar story that we get, but it is covered in just 15 verses. There are many more details in other accounts, but Mark seems to be eager to get on with the story. Mark seems to be interested in Jesus ministry more than anything. For Mark, you often get Jesus and what he is teaching. Mark is very to the point, and in lacking detail it sometimes leads to you having to come to your own conclusions.

The account is also filled with some things that feel a little odd when we read them. They might leave you wondering "why" after you read them. One of the things that can seem off is that Mark includes multiple accounts of Jesus trying to keep his profile low. We see it in chapter 3. Jesus is out and people are being healed, but when the evil spirits shout out "You are God's Son!" he gives orders that he shouldn't be revealed. We see this again in chapter 8, in the exchange between Jesus and the disciples. He wants to know who people say he is, but when he asks about who *they* think he is, Peter answered "You are the Christ." Jesus again repeats his orders that they don't tell anyone. This can feel confusing for us because he's covering up something that we declare as the first thing we often say about him. He doesn't want to be identified as the Messiah. As the Son of God. However, when we have to ask why it makes us think deeper about the issue itself. Maybe he knew that his ministry would be

interrupted too soon if he got a reputation. Maybe he thought that people wouldn't pay attention to what he taught but would be absorbed by the rumors. But it often seems as if his focus is on his teachings and not on himself.

Now, one of the things about the brevity of Mark is that it often leaves us questions that leaves us to be the ones struggling with the answers. For me, this is one of the beautiful things about Mark's Gospel account. It doesn't answer every question, it just presents itself as it is. One of these is the way Mark depicts the crucifixion. Each Gospel author tells a different story. Mark seems to focus in on the suffering and the humanity of Christ in this moment. There's a desperation and an abandonment. "My God, my God, why have you left me?" That's it. No speeches, no flourishes, no words to anyone really. The last thing Mark records Jesus saying before the crucifixion is the sole answer to Pilate, "that's what you say." Then, we get nothing until those words of despair on the cross itself. That's difficult. Honestly, it's almost made more difficult by Mark's original ending. Most critical works have the original ending of Mark at the end of verse 8 in chapter 16. The women go to the tomb. They find it empty. A messenger in a white robe tells them not to fear because Jesus has been raised. They should go tell the others. But they flee in terror and "said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." End of the book. Done, right there, no more story. At least not here. Now, one might think "how can that be the end? How can you finish there?" I think the point is that Mark has been fairly straight forward. We have now been given the last information we need. Jesus said he'd live again, and he did. Maybe Mark let it end there so that others would pick up the story from there.

The way I see it, Mark tells the story of Jesus' ministry. It begins with him getting baptized and proclaiming the good news. We get his teachings. We see the crucifixion. We get the resurrection. It ends with his prediction about him rising coming to pass. For Mark, that act of rising is the last part of Jesus earthly ministry, and that makes it the last thing that he needs to mention. Because you now have an account of Jesus ministry from the start, to the finish, with his words being proved to be true as the final act. Mark is all about the mission and the ministry. The focus is less on believing in Christ to be all the things he's proclaimed to be, but in demonstrating that his message proves who he is. It's a fairly interesting portrayal. It is almost the reverse of John, where John is all about who Jesus is. But Mark is all about what Jesus taught. The resurrection is important because Jesus said it would happen.

So what do we make of Mark's brief, sometimes feeling rushed, account? As the earliest account, I think it captures some of the early focus on just making sure people got the message. Mark isn't concerned with the birth. Mark wants to focus on the message. This is what Jesus taught, that's what you need to know. For Mark, Jesus actions speak for themselves and his right teachings prove who he is more than anyone else proclaiming it. Much of Mark goes into Matthew and Luke. One theory is that they both had Mark as source material, and I'll touch on that when I get to them. But Mark can be overshadowed by the other two Gospel accounts because they often have more detail. The stories get fuller. There's more narrative. For me, Mark feels like one of those retreats where you "get back to basics" so to speak. Mark is very much a sandwich of ideas. He starts with "The beginning of the good news

about Jesus Christ, God's Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah." And "After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, 'Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!'" Mark ends with "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." Mark encapsulates Christ's ministry in a unique way, as we start with the prophecy of Isaiah being fulfilled and end on the prophecy Jesus gave about himself.

I think if we let Mark stand on his own, if we don't combine all the other accounts with Mark, but let Mark be the book it was written as, we get a very special picture of Jesus. The crucifixion in Mark is a desperation we can relate to. When we speak of Christ being fully human and fully divine, we are often heavy on the divine and light on the human. Mark gives us something relatable. Human emotions are on full display as Jesus cries out through the pain and the suffering. A man abandoned by his friends, his followers, and he's executed in a terrible way, so he cries out. I don't think that detracts from the story at all. If we are to see Christ as fully human, we have to expect fully human emotions that come with it.

So I encourage you to read Mark by itself. Read Mark's Gospel as a book unto itself about the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God. Hear those stories without connecting them to all the others but hear them the way Mark intended. Straight forward and to the point. Hearing what Mark says to let Mark say "this is the Jesus I know. This is the story as I know it." It helps to give us a new understanding as we read each Gospel as their own story, start to finish by itself. No matter how much we gain from having all 4 accounts together, it is still important to be able to read Mark as Mark was written. Not part of a collection. Not sandwiched between Matthew and Luke, but Mark was written to be *the* story of Jesus Christ. It was his way of sharing the good news. It is important that we let Mark's truth shine forth, and that we understand that each Gospel author has a story that they tell and a way that they tell it as a book by itself. So read Mark for Mark, and hear those words by themselves, speaking of Christ the way Mark spoke. See what Mark is saying still to you today about a relatable Christ. See how the Gospels can be opened when you take each one and let the author speak to their own experience with Jesus Christ with their own voice standing alone. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now that we may be ministers of the good news wherever we go. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Rev Charliam Renner | Bishop Frank Beard | Our Conference | Our Healthcare Workers |
| John & Angie Veach | Diane Washburn | Bill Calvert | Eric Veach |
| Cathy Devall | Brock McMorris | Ed & Verna Titus | Hayden Kanizer |
| Henry Catey | Jake Kiser | Laura Eubank Allison | Nancy Sowers |
| Dave Yaw | Aaron Carrell | Cindy Cisney | Patti Corder & Crew |
| Joyce Sly | Nancy Hoke | John Millsap | Larry Sidwell |
| Don Wells | Tricia Adkins | Ty Bradley | Ronnie & Elaine Carlen |
| Pat Nebel | Don Stewart | Earlene Shupe | Brenda Hurt |
| Sharon Button | Anne Winkler Heinrichs | Family of Jerry Jackson | Family of Tom Jester |
| Corine Howard's daughter | Marcia | Family of Mike Dooley | Family of John Veach |
| Robert Fryman | Susan Shoot | Lamar Family | Family of Dean Swim |
| Richard Durham | Kathy Hanks | Nora Werner & Family | Wayne & Charlotte Carrell |
| Gary & Mary Winterrowd | Lois Woolever | Mary White | Nick Nichols |
| Family of Novella Claiborn | | | |
| Greg Williams | Eloise Buffenmeyer | Martha Roberts | Charlie & Charlotte Baxter |
| Paul Schulte | Lyle Whitley | Tammy Fischer and Children | |

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.

7/12/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We have entered Phase 4 of the IGRC plan. With that, we will begin in person worship today. Before I get to what is required as we return to in person worship, I feel I need to lead with a word of caution. We will only remain in Phase 4 as long as the Illinois Department of Public Health keeps our region in that phase. However, there are signs already that areas in our region may be seeing an influx of cases. If that happens, we may have to return to Phase 3. If that happens, we will need to return to online worship. My best advice is to continue to practice social distancing and be safe out there.

Prayers for our schools would be greatly appreciated, as schools across the country are figuring out how to safely begin soon.

So, onto the things we need to know about returning to worship. We will need to practice social distancing. People will need to be seated six feet apart and *everyone* in attendance must wear a mask at all times. There cannot be any exception for mask wearing while in the building, unless you are either alone or far enough up front. There will not be congregational singing yet, and the conference is recommending not having *any* live music at this time. There are also no responsive texts or communal prayers at this time. We also cannot pass anything between people. No shaking hands, passing the plate, hugs, etc. I will need to inspect the churches to make sure that everything is ready, including having seating marked. This will look a little different, but I am confident we can do it. There is also a special note that for those who are older, have a respiratory illness or injury, or have a compromised immune system, you are strongly encouraged to check with a health professional on if you should be out. I will continue to provide printed materials for anyone who wants them and am at least planning on having the sermon audio continue to be posted. I have decided to try to keep doing video for the time being. If you have any questions at all, please contact me! I'll do what I can to help.

There are copies of the Upper Room available in Greenup in the box and at Cottonwood. You can also find the current issue online. The new Sunday school quarterly is also in the box for whoever is interested.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! A printed copy of the service including the weekly sermon will be available online and in print. The sermon audio will be uploaded weekly as well. If you'd like to be updated when it is available, it is on Spotify, Google Play, and iTunes. I will also post updates to the church Facebook pages every week. If anyone you know is not getting a copy and would like one mailed, please let me know. I am trying to get them mailed out weekly.

Also, in this time we are still working to keep the bills paid, our missions supported, our apportionments met, and our outreach working. As such, we do need your continued financial support as part of the church. Offerings may be sent to your local treasurer or to the PO Box listed below. I can also arrange to pick them up if I am delivering anything to you. I am personally grateful for all your continued support in this difficult time. I cannot stress enough that the church is still active and we are still together.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus. If you do go out, please follow all distancing guidelines, and if you can, cover your face. Please let others know, and together we will all see this through safely. This is a very real and very serious pandemic. Please do not share false information about it. It only works to undermine the people doing the dangerous work of trying to keep us all safe. If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them or direct you to a source that can.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920