

HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR

AN INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE GOOD NEWS OF SAINT MARK

Meditation on the Gospel of Mark – Spring Session 2006

Note to reader: The following thoughts are a somewhat haphazard attempt to pull together the culmination of several years of reading, and thinking, and teaching about the Gospel of Mark and was prepared especially for the participants in the Paradox Bible Study. The reader will find much here that will be difficult to follow because (1) it is still a work in progress and (2) it is difficult to express thoughts clearly and simply when they are still somewhat in process of being formed. I beg the reader's forbearance and patience and truly hope that for those diligent enough to plow through it, there will be ample reward and challenge to have made it worthwhile.

I have written two brief, but somewhat terse essays this year on aspects of the Gospel of Mark prior to the Miracles of the Loaves and have reprinted them here in Appendices B and C below. I have also included an earlier meditation on the opening verses and theme of Mark which I wrote in 2003, reproduced here in Appendix A below.

The first of those written this year, contained below in Appendix B, dealt with the teaching methods of the author Mark, whom we argue and believe, as did the early church fathers, to be the same John Mark mentioned by St. Paul in his letters, as well as in the Acts of the Apostles. He is a man with two names, a Hebrew one and a Latin one, and he was a man living in two cultures, that of Jerusalem, with its dominant Jewish culture and religion, and that of Asia minor, where Greek philosophy reigned. He was probably a young neighbour of St. Peter and his mother in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, in the remote northern province of Galilee, separated in many ways from the traditional cultural and religious centre of Judahism¹. It was in such a clash of cultures and in this his home province that the opening scenes of his Gospel take place.

Scenes indeed, for Mark has chosen the form of a Hellenistic or Greek drama to present his "good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God." Just as his two names portend, John Mark will present to his readers the timeless truth of the Old Testament in a form recognized by the whole world (at least the whole world that Mark knew of). Thus Mark begins his Gospel with a classic Greek drama opening scene, known as a Prologue, in which we find a character named John the Baptist baptizing thousands in the Jordan River, a scene which explodes with Old Testament symbolism (such as Elijah healing the leperous non-Jew Naaman in the Jordan [2 Kings 5:10-13], and Joshua leading the Israelites out of the Wilderness through the parted Jordan into the

¹ See Atkinson, Surpassing Wonder, for the distinction between Judahism (the religion of the Temple) and Judaism (post-Temple, or Rabbinic Judaism).

Promised Land [Joshua 3:1-17], to name just a very few), as well as rife with a sense of rebellion against the Temple religion (where Jewish conversion baptisms had to take place).

In this great international (and as we'll see, cosmological) drama, in addition to the Main Character Jesus and to the "chorus", which are the various echoing crowds that gather at key moments to boo or cheer, and two types of "spiritual" beings, Mark will march three different basic types of human personalities on the stage. There are those characters who will never know, such as the "Pharisees", "Saducees", "Herodians", and the like². The second group of characters to enter the stage are those who know already or know instinctively, such as Levi Bar Alpheus (there's another guy with a bi-lingual name!), the tax collector who leaves his shop to follow Jesus the instant he is called, or the woman who touches his garment, or Blind Bar-Timaeus (another one!), who is simply waiting on the side of the road for Jesus. The third group to walk on are the Disciples, who do not know, but who will come to know. Know what? The Kingdom of God. Perhaps the verb "know" is not quite the word to use, but it is implied in the Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, which means "someone who seeks to know."

However, Mark's drama speaks not so much of knowing, but of seeing and hearing. Mark's Gospel is characterized by a great immediacy of action and sensation. To know the Kingdom, therefore, is not an intellectual exercise, but rather is in the immediate and sensual sort of knowing of seeing and hearing. Every character who enters the stage in this drama will be challenged and judged by their ability to see and hear the Kingdom.

In my second essay this year (contained below in Appendix C), I examined the nature of this Kingdom.

² I can never fail to warn the reader not to understand these persons historically or as representatives of the Jews as a nation, past or present. Mark's friend Paul clearly identified himself as a Pharisee and was proud of it.

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In a very small nutshell, it is “all that was, all that is, and all that is to come”.³ I propose that Mark’s use of the work “Kingdom” refers to a “unifying principle” which seeks to solve the paradox presented, for example, in Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*.⁴ This paradox, or unsolvable riddle is the problem of how there can be one and many, how can things have permanence in a universe in which everything is in motion, how can there be an Immovable Creator and Transient Creatures. The Kingdom is Being. Being, the Sufficient Reason for every question which asks why is this or from where is this. Being, without which every thing can only refer to other things, and thus without which everything is only relative, and the possibility of meaning and truth and justice as we understand it is utterly impossible. This Kingdom is not the rulership of a thing over things or a man over men. This Kingdom becomes visible to us and operates through, as Mark has Jesus demonstrate in his Mighty Works, the *dynamis*, that is, the potency of things, rather than through their independent static or actual power (through which things only develop and/or maintain their separateness from and relativity to other things). At this point, if you haven’t read Appendix C, you may want to do so now.

It would appear that Mark is following traditional reasoning of Aristototle (which was maintained by the Medieval scholastics, and remains central to Church theology today) in which Being is purely Actual and individual beings, which are always coming and going and are otherwise in constant flux, are virtually pure Potentiality. For Mark and his drama, this Being is revealing itself in a very particular way in a very particular person at a very particular moment in time, which can be perceived by “those who have ears and those who have eyes”. For Aristotle, Being, as far as we can characterize it, revealed itself as the Good (Greek *Agathon*). How does Mark’s gospel characterize Being? By means of parables.

The Parables of the Kingdom in Mark chapter 4 are all to do with seeds and light.⁵ Our soil

³ The Mandukya Upanishad begins by stating that the characteristics of the sound of AUM are “all that was, all that is, and all that is to be.” It is interesting that for the writer of this Upanishad, Being (or Brahma) is also something that is “heard”.

⁴ Is there any connection between this Dialogue and Mark’s naming a faithful blindman the “son of Timaeus”?

⁵ The great Quaker mystic George Fox made much use of the seed and light metaphors.

preparation, our plowing, our harrowing, our scattering, our watering, our weeding, and our harvesting all contribute to the propagation and growth of the seed, but do nothing to explain how or why the hidden seed starts to grow. And while modern biological science can tell us much about how, even it can tell us nothing about the why. That is the question for the Queen of the Sciences, metaphysics, and her daughter, Theology.

So far goes the argument up to the two Miracles of the Loaves. God is a King who has a Kingdom, i.e. Being participates in and reveals itself in the relationship between beings. How this King does this remains a mystery, like the hidden growth of a seed. However, we want to know more about this King and this hidden Kingdom.

The Two Feedings

Regardless of the popularity and the benefits of the other Gospels, it is generally agreed that Mark was first, and that Matthew and Luke were certainly later and either used Mark or Mark’s Source Document as their foundation. Certainly these other two “Synoptic” Gospels are built on the same platform, which contains the seed work for the Sermon on the Mount, the Our Father, the Great Commission, and so forth, which are found in much fuller and *perhaps* more acceptable forms in the other two. For example, the ruling on divorce which allows no exception in Mark, is allowed in Matthew in the case of adultery.

The Gospel of John, while it seems to stand so far apart, almost seems like an Apologetic⁶ work in response to the theological and philosophical questions raised in Mark. For a long time considered to be a much newer work, scholars now accept that it may have arisen much earlier, and undoubtedly before Luke.

As further evidence, it is interesting to note that Mark has virtually no element not contained in the other Gospels, except for the Miracle of the Loaves, of which Mark has two and the rest only one.

A careful inductive reading of these two events in Mark reveals that the first feeding occurs in Jewish territory and the latter in Gentile.

A similar examination of the numbers of things in the two events reveals corresponding symbols. And since Jesus Himself very pointedly asks His disciples (and by extension, the Reader) what these numbers

⁶ An apologetic is a writing which attempts to explain a belief system.

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stand for (Mark 8:15-21), we are duly cautioned not to take this as a mere academic exercise.

Here, in its simplest form, is a break-out:

First Feeding

- ◆ 5 loaves = 5 Books of Moses (the Torah, or books of the law), the law given to the Chosen People.
- ◆ 2 fishes = the cosmic division of the peoples of the world into Jewish and non-Jewish segments.
- ◆ 12 baskets = the message of the One God to be carried by the Twelve Tribes of Israel

Second Feeding

- ◆ 4 loaves = the four winds, the four corners of the earth, in short, the whole world.
- ◆ Several (many) fishes = many peoples shall come and worship in Jerusalem (see Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, quoted in Mark 11:17)
- ◆ 7 baskets = representing the Olam⁷, the Eternal, eternity and perfection.

To put it simply, Mark's two Feedings dramatize that Jesus has come to tell those who will hear and see about the Kingdom, a Kingdom whose foundation was laid in Genesis and the other books of the Law and which has since been promulgated and interpreted by and through The Chosen People of God and their prophets, and has now become Present in the Person of Jesus (see Mark 2:1-3:6). This Kingdom is now for the whole world, and for whosoever has ears to hear and eyes to see it. It's raining Manna everywhere!

Following these Feedings on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His Disciples travel north to Caesarea Philippi, and Mount Hermon, which according to Deuteronomy 3:8, (see Psalm 133) is the northern boundary of the Promised Land. Here Jesus asks His Disciples who people say He is, and receives the answer, generally speaking, that He is another great prophet. When pressed as to what they think themselves, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus then astonishes them all by predicting His immanent trial and execution. Peter's answer, contained in slightly different form in all four Gospels

⁷ Hebrew word meaning eternity of both space and time, sometimes translated as "eternity" and sometimes as "the universe" since we have no single word in English for both concepts. Of course, modern physics has informed us that the Hebrews got it right, since space and time are inseparably linked in one continuum.

(Matthew 16:13-16, Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:20, and John 6:66-68), marks the turning point in all four. From this point on, Jesus will stop leading His disciples around in circles in the Galilee (and rowing back and forth across the Sea of Galilee). Now He will turn His face, first transfigured, towards the holy city of Jerusalem.

Jesus first invites three select Disciples up the Mountain for a special, exclusive teaching, which we traditionally refer to as the Transfiguration.⁸ In this rather melodramatic scene, Jesus appears to take the Mantle of Moses and Elijah, the two Great Prophets. Not just share it. Take it. Not much doubt here about the interpretation. However, since those called to witness it don't seem to get it, we are also left wondering what the point is. Those present continue to see Jesus as another great prophet, and nothing more. However, the disappearance of Moses and Elijah can only signify the claim that (1) Jesus is co-equal with the two greatest prophets of Temple Judaism and (2) one only needs to understand Jesus to understand the whole of the Law and Prophecy.

This is followed by three predictions of His trial and execution, and three rejections by the Disciples who are trailing along behind Him on His way to Jerusalem (quite a dramatic and graphical description, I think) at some distance. As they walk, they argue among themselves who is going to get what job in this "kingdom" that the Master keeps talking about, once He raises an army and tosses Herod and Pilate and all his Roman legions out. In the Greek language this is a bit more dramatic, because all the various words in the English text for road and way are all the same Greek word *hodos*. They are *on* the **WAY**.

At the conclusion of these frustrating prophecies, they come across Blind Bar-Timaeus, another one of those strange characters who has a bi-lingual name (Bar = Aramaic for "son" and Timaeus is a Greek proper name meaning "honorable" – and the title of one of Plato's Dialogues⁹), sitting *beside* the **Way**.

⁸ The Greek word used for "transfiguration" is *metamorphosis*, which literally means to change form or to "trans-form". It is the same word used by St. Mark's good friend St. Paul in his letter to the Romans (12:2), "Be transformed (*metamorphosis*) by the renewing of your mind."

⁹ Interestingly (or maybe not interestingly), the Timaeus of Plato has ebbed and flowed in its popularity and importance to subsequent ages, and may have been in ascendancy at the time of St. Mark. If there is a connection between Bar-Timaeus and this

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Like the blind man who appeared after the mysterious Feedings, the Bar-Timaeus healing seems to indicate that “seeing” the Kingdom requires a special kind of vision, perhaps like Superman’s X-ray vision.¹⁰ Bar-Timaeus addresses Jesus as the “Son of David”, a theme greatly emphasized in Matthew’s Gospel. Oh, yeah, He’s not only Moses and Elijah, but did we tell you, He’s King David as well?

But how can we blame the Disciples who can now identify Jesus as the Messiah, the One who has come into the world, for not understanding why Jesus doesn’t immediately restore the Kingdom of David, or, for that matter, Eden itself? However, the Way is forward. Whatever went wrong in Genesis 2 and 3 in the Garden will not be fixed by a mere return to the past or by removing freedom with more controlling power (*kratos*).

The closing Act of this drama takes place in Jerusalem itself. These various scenes draw heavily on imagery from the later prophets such as Daniel and Amos, and especially Zechariah. This could take many pages of commentary, but I will leave this for another time. Suffice it to focus on Mark 12:13-40. The basic theme of chapters 11, 12, and 13 may be entitled, The Landlord Returns (11), The Tenants Are Evicted (12), and The House Is Torn Down (13). In these three chapters, the teaching is that the Landlord has returned in the person of Jesus, and He is evicting the Temple tenants and the Temple religion is being done away with, which contains a lot of historical truth, even if you don’t believe the Landlord is Jesus, since scholars believe that this Gospel in the form we have it is from around the year 70 C.E., the year the Temple was in fact destroyed, and, as you know, there has been no Temple religion since then.

In the midst of all these End of Time predictions, the Saducees come to Jesus and try to argue with him about life after death. While the drama indicates that their question was meant to trap Jesus (since the Saducees were generally said not to believe in life after death), it is actually not a bad question, and got a good discussion going in class. Brother Hugh said that he believed that not only would he meet his mother in heaven, but she would probably still tell him to take his elbows off the table.

Dialogue, a starting point of consideration may be contained in the quotes from the Dialogue that I’ve cited in Appendix E below.

¹⁰ But without all the nasty, illegal possibilities you were all thinking about.

Of course, Jesus’ answer is profound and mysterious. He says we do not understand the *dynamis* (Power, Mighty Work) of God, who is God of the living and the dead. He cites another time and place where God entered the world in the form of a finite being, in this case a Burning Bush, telling Moses that not only is He the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but He is Being Itself (“I am the one who is”, or “I am that I am”). It may be interesting to note that in this passage from Exodus 3, it does not say what kind of Bush it is. However, Jewish tradition holds that it was a thorn bush, to indicate how God suffered for His people. Thus was the Bush portrayed in Cecil B. DeMille’s movie. God covered with thorns. Hmm.....

This powerful and revealing passage is followed by the Summary of the Law and the Prophets. Love God, and Love Your Neighbour. To the Scribe who confirmed this teaching, Jesus says, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” The Kingdom of God is not neutral. It has ethical content and rules for citizenship. It is not the slow unveiling of Being into Time in ways too mysterious for us to contemplate. It is about relationships, relationships that are timeless in nature, relationships that transcend death, relationships that reveal the Kingdom in the Great Paradox of justice and forgiveness. It is found in the Great Paradox of the Omniscient and Eternal Creator of the past, present *and* future, the same One to whom we pray for exceptions to His Plan, for forgiveness when we break His rules. He is bigger than the Torah. The whole world cannot contain Him, and yet He is in relationship with each of us. And what can better express this relationship but the Sermon on the Mount and the Our Father of St. Matthew’s Gospel, the seeds of which are found in Mark 11:23-26:

Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”

In Mark’s dramatization of Jesus’ death by execution and his subsequent resurrection, the Eternal and Immutable God has freely entered and freely exited the confines of space and time. Greek drama was of two sorts. If it had a tragic ending, it was a Tragedy. If the outcome was positive, then it was a Comedy. Clearly, what seemed a tragedy for everyone

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that Friday, turned into a Comedy on Sunday. At that moment, if we believe it, the world became, once and for all, a redeemed world.

What remains mysterious to us is that while in the Resurrection we witness the breaking forth of God in and out of space and time, God has not fully revealed Himself or become fully manifest. The world remains broken: we are still broken.

But ever since that moment ("Prepared for us from the foundation of the world" as St. Paul puts it [Romans 11:25, 16:25-26, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1:4, 3:8-11]), in the lives of the saints such as Mother Theresa, or in a changed heart, or a sober alcoholic, a recovered drug addict, a promise kept to one's own hurt, when the unloveable is loved, where the Gospel is preached, here and there and everywhere the Kingdom breaks forth.

Ed Alexander

Appendix A

Meditation on Mark 1 – The Temptation in the Wilderness

In session two, we managed to cover forty years in about forty minutes, so we can hardly claim to have more than "scratched the surface" of this crucial "journey" from Egypt to the Promised Land. I use the word "crucial" to suggest that any understanding of the movement of any Gospel, and in particular the one before us attributed to Peter and Paul's disciple John Mark, is dependent upon understanding the lessons of the Exodus.

However superficial our examination was, I imagine that one cannot help above all else being struck by the seemingly incorrigible blindness and stupidity of the Israelites. How could they not get it? The parting of the Red Sea, the miraculous production of water out of rocks, the dropping of bread and quails out of the sky, snake bites cured, pillars of cloud – why, just one of those miracles would convince us irrevocably forever! Wouldn't it?

But would we be? I think an honest inspection of our own behavior might betray a response to God's promises, guidance, and intercession in our lives that is uncomfortably more like that of the Israelites, if perhaps not quite as dramatic.

I would suggest, rather, that Exodus, and Mark by extension, is all about Education. Living as I do with one, I can certainly appreciate the crucial and important role that teachers play in our present civilization. Why else would we give them such

outrageous salaries, three months' holidays and a thirty hour work week!¹¹

Parallels

How else are we to understand the opening prologue of Mark? From this we learn that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God". If this is were a mystery novel, the author sure has "blown" the suspense, as we learn right at the outset "whodunnit", quite contrary to the style of, say, an Agatha Christie. However, I think it was Mary Goldsberry who suggested that this may be more like a Colombo style mystery, where the crime is committed at the outset, and the balance of the hour is dedicated to the education of the players as they all squirm to escape the role assigned to them by the author.

As a result, I have come to the opinion that by evoking the parallels of the Exodus, Mark intends for us to call to mind what the Psalmist calls the Temptation in the Wilderness¹², and the accompanying "education" of the Israelites in God's Plan for them.

How else are we to understand the profound darkness which envelopes all the players at the outset of Mark's Gospel in the face of all of the brilliant and dazzling demonstrations of Jesus?

It is my conviction that the proper purpose in the reading of Scripture is to allow God to educate us, to bring us out of our darkness. Thus, as Mark uses the parallel of the Exodus to educate, so we also should not remain only readers of this Gospel, but join in with the players on the stage of this drama and consider the parallels with our own dark beginnings on this journey prepared for us by the Author, examine honestly where we are on the Way, and explore just how much more glorious and light the travelling could become, if, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, we begin to recognize just who our Companion is.

Ed Alexander January 31, 2003

Appendix B

This morning, I heard someone refer to this day as International Atheist Day – "The **fool** hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

¹¹ No, I'm not serious.

¹² "Harden not your heart, as in the Provocation, and as in the day of the Temptation in the Wilderness." Psalm 95:8 (quoted also in Hebrews 3:8)

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We were at the monthly Bluegrass Gospel session down at the New Credit Indian Reserve. There certainly is always a lot of energy at this Baptist style gathering. The evening before, I experienced another sort of energy when I went with two friends to the Stations of the Cross at Our Lady of Lourdes RC Church on Hamilton Mountain, where I met my old friend Fr Mike King for the first time in probably fifteen years. Mike had studied Hebrew with me many years ago when he was a Voluntary Service Worker at Welcome Inn, a local Mennonite mission church in Hamilton. There is incredible energy building everywhere as we approach Holy Week.

Meanwhile, in class, in the first four weeks of Lent, we've covered only the first two chapters of Mark's Good News. However, the wise builder knows to lay a firm and well-plumbed foundation.¹³

First, we examined the Scriptural evidence regarding the authorship of this book, which many early church fathers attribute to John Mark, the traveling companion of Paul, Peter and Barnabus, and one of Peter's "homies" from Capernaum and whose mother hosted perhaps the first "house church" in that town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Willard Swartley, on whose study on Mark we model this course, proposes that Mark was the "story teller" who was called upon at evangelistic missions to tell the stories of Jesus before Paul or one of the other evangelists would preach. This mirrors the practice maintained to this day in most churches of reading the Gospel just prior to the preaching of the Word. Swartley's theory proposes that Mark or a disciple of his was called upon to record these stories, which in their present form are generally agreed to date from very close to the year 70 A.D., the year the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

We also discussed the form of this book, which is clearly not set out as a biography (hence no birth account), but appears more in the form of a Greek drama. This makes sense for many reasons. First of all, the book was meant not so much for theological arguing (apologetics), but more as "propaganda" or "promotion". Because

¹³ "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it." 1 Corinthians 3:9-10

of this, the author would want to put it in a common and popular medium. Interestingly, dozens of modern day film makers have followed this lead and have turned the Gospels into cinema, including the wildly popular but equally controversial Mel Gibson film, *The Passion of Christ*. In Mark's day, practically every village between Spain and India had an amphitheatre, which were used for the presentation of stage plays as well as the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 19:29-31). Hence also the dramatic opening of this Gospel, with a real classical Greek "prologue" announcing what the play is all about, and then the dramatic presentation of John the Baptist baptizing thousands of repentant sinners in the Jordan River (as opposed to the ritual baptism of Jewish converts practiced at that time at the Temple).

Every play program has a Cast of Characters, and so does Mark. A cursory examination of this Gospel reveals perhaps seven categories of persons, including The Crowd, which fills the interesting role of the chorus in a classical Greek drama. These personages always just supply neutral commentary on the action, such as "being astounded" at Jesus' miracles, "shouting hosanna" when he enters Jerusalem, and then "crucify Him" a few days later.

There are two classes of "spirits", both evil and good, about which we'll learn more in lessons ahead.

Then there are the Outcasts. These include persons labeled sinners, tax collectors, and foreigners of various ilk, and are characterized by inexplicable, instantaneous, and positive response to Jesus, such as Levi the tax collector who on command "immediately" follows Jesus, apparently not bothering to close up his shop or phone his wife telling her that he'll be late...continuing the same vein of silliness, we might even speculate how she would respond if her husband showed up for supper with this itinerant preacher without warning her!

There are also the more ambiguous "family and friends." Once again, more about these later.

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There remain two more categories, to which the careful reader of this Gospel will want to pay very special attention.

First, there's the "Pharisees", which for the purpose of this drama also includes the Sadducees, Scribes, and Herodians. Historically, there are significant differences between these groups, but Mark seems content to let these distinctions blur and unites them in their consistent misunderstanding of who Jesus is (according at least to Mark). I say this because there is a tendency in some commentaries to demonstrate that somehow Jesus does not break the various laws of which he is accused, and that the Pharisees are "too legalistic" or "too strict" or "inhumane". On the one hand, we know that this view is at best a gross over-characterization of attitudes at the time, especially since the "Pharisees" were generally known to be far more flexible in their interpretation of the law than the "Sadducees."

In our most recent classes, we examined the segment between 2:1 and 3:6, which is a "scene" in the play in five parts in which Jesus does certain things, followed by a reaction from the "Pharisee" crowd, followed in turn by a response to the accusation by Jesus.

One by one, Jesus is accused of (1) usurping the role of God to forgive sins, (2) associating with shunned persons, (3) not fasting when others deem it appropriate, (4) gleaning on the Sabbath, and (5) healing on the Sabbath, to which Jesus responds accordingly, (1) he is the Son of Man (a clear reference to the Messiah from the Book of Daniel), (2) he has come to call sinners and will restore them, (3) he is the Bridegroom, no doubt a reference to Isaiah chapters 61 and 62¹⁴, and (4) He (the Son of

¹⁴ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a **bridegroom** decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Isaiah 61:10 and For as a young man marries a virgin [O Jerusalem], so shall your sons marry you; and as the **bridegroom** rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:5 Isaiah 61 is also quoted in Matthew and Luke, when Jesus enters the synagogue to teach: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,

Man) is also the "Lord of the Sabbath". In this last reference, no doubt can remain in the minds of his accusers. Even Isaiah 58 remonstrates all of Israel to keep the Sabbath and not follow their own devices. The reminders to keep the Sabbath are almost beyond counting in Leviticus. Surely no mortal can claim exemption from this edict. In the fifth encounter, the Pharisee crowd no longer asks "Why" as they did four times previously, they only become "watchers". While we are enjoined from any sort work on the Sabbath¹⁵, the work of healing takes on a very ominous tone here: clearly healing continues on the Sabbath, a broken leg does not cease to knit, and cut does not fail to seal itself – this is the work of the Lord, the Lord of the Sabbath! If you were not clear about Jesus' message hidden in His responses, it should be very apparent that this is *not* a conflict about some of the finer points of Jewish law. Jesus has declared Himself God, and if he is not, he is clearly guilty of blasphemy. Jesus is now on trial for His life, but in the minds of the "Pharisees", the gavel has fallen, the judgment is sealed.

Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified." And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner *Shall be* your plowmen and your vinedressers.

¹⁵ Exodus 15:32-36 spells out the punishment for Sabbath breaking: Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

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I spoke in an earlier message about how the Greek drama is more like Columbo than Agatha Christie. In these five confrontations in this “scene”, the crime has now been committed in full view. And unless Mark can convince us otherwise, the path to judgment is clear.

Enter the Disciples. It is in Jesus’ struggle with the education of His Disciples that the battle for our own hearts and minds will take place. In the Greek language (used by Mark), the word for disciple is *mathetes*, which means one who seeks to know. Our word mathematics comes from the same root and means, roughly, “the way in which things are known”, i.e. through measurements. In our next two (or more) coming sessions, we will take up this teaching in the next two “scenes”, one which teaches about the Kingdom through parables, and the next which teaches about Jesus’ claim through Mighty Works.

In my way of thinking, I would prefer to label the “Pharisee” crowd as the “Unteachables” and the “Disciples” as the “Teachables,” since the historical names tend to cloud what I feel is the real message of Mark.

One of our present day Disciples, also named Mark, asked why Jesus is so indirect in His declaration of Divinity. Why doesn’t he just come out and say, “I’m God”? Well, suppose He did? What would this tell us about God? What new information would we have? In fact, I think Mark (St. Mark that is) does a much better job of it. Look at Jesus’ responses again. When he says that He is the “Son of Man” He declares that God is capable of indwelling and identifying with a real mortal being¹⁶. When He says that he has “come

¹⁶ Viz. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 1:15-27 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the

to call sinners”, He not only declares the proper relationship between Holy God and alienated man, but more importantly, that he will intervene in history, in real time, in the restoration of His creation. When He declares Himself to be the Bridegroom, He makes clear that He is capable of the most intimate, covenantal of relationships. That in Him is the union of the Infinite and the finite and the Timeless and the timely. Indeed, if you come to know what Jesus says here, you have understood much of Mark’s message.

Ed Alexander
April 1, 2006

Appendix C

Before setting out for class last Thursday evening I debated bringing my guitar along – I really didn’t expect that there would be more than one or two in attendance. It was Maundy Thursday, and many churches had special services, which took away one member from us. As well, Sandra was on her annual trip to stay at the Convent of the Sisters of St. John the Divine, and others had equivocated about being able to make it.

However, a verse came to mind from the Gospel of Mark, which caused me to throw the instrument¹⁷ into the van, namely 14:26, which concludes the Last Supper in Mark’s account:

blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

¹⁷ The Greek word for harp is “kitar”, from which we get our word “guitar”. If you don’t like guitar music,

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And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

That this detail only occurs in this Gospel will not surprise the attentive student. Once again, Mark gives that special detail which reveals his intimate relationship with those who were there. Earlier he mentions the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, and later gives the blind man a name in 10:46.

In the case of this detail about the Supper, there may be more intended with its recording here. It brings to mind other passages when hymn singing was the order of the day. For example, when Paul and Silas start singing in prison in Acts 16, as well as Jonah, who sings a psalm from the Belly of the Fish. These comparisons may be very apt, as these are *also* events in which there was to be a divinely assisted break-out following the concert. In this connection, please note that the previous verse in Mark reads:

Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Which brings me back to the question of last week: "What is the Kingdom of God, and when and where does it take place?"

While this last passage seems to indicate that the Kingdom is a place to which Jesus will go when he dies, we get an entirely different feel for it in the Parables of Mark 4. I suspect that when asked, the majority of people, both Christian and non-Christian, will tell you that the Kingdom is something that takes place in the future, most likely the place to which you go to when you die, or a Kingdom to be established at some later time in history when Jesus comes back.

However, these Parables portray the Kingdom as something that is like a seed, which is spread, which grows in some places, but not in others, but in any event secretly, but always, eventually to be revealed. These illustrations give us the sense of a very present, but hidden Kingdom,

don't feel too bad about it – apparently it's all banjos in hell.

hidden in the world, and hidden in us. This should bring to mind the basic lesson laid out by the Narrator at the very beginning of this Gospel (1:14-15):

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.

Therefore, in this Gospel, the Kingdom is certainly something present at hand, as well as something to come. But how is this?

After the preaching of the Parables, Mark's next scene in 5:1 – 6:6 has to do with what most translations render as "miracles." However, this is probably misleading for most people. If your translation says "mighty works" this is a much better rendering of the word and will give you a much better idea of the meaning of original Greek **δυναμις** [*dynamis*]. From this word are derived or related the English words "dynamic", "dynamo", and "dynamite." A further illustration of the true meaning is that when the New Testament was translated into Latin, the Latin word they used was "potis" from which we get our English words, potent, potential, potency and so forth. In Greek, the word often juxtaposed with *dynamis* was *kratos*, from which are derived the English words "democracy" (rule of the people) and "theocracy" (rule of God), and to which are related the English words craft and crafty (two very practical kinds of power, no?). *Dynamis*, therefore, means a sort of "potential" power, like the fire in a steam boiler, while *kratos* means a more static sort of force, like the strength in the wing of a large airplane, a strength which "rules" and holds everything in place. Evidently, the mighty works or miracles of this Gospel are not the works of a ruler but of a creator.

To give a relevant example of the use of the two Greek words, in Colossians 1:9-11, Paul writes:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His

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will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

strengthened with all might (εν παση δυναμει δυναμουμενοι [En pase dynamei dynamoumenoi]), *according to His glorious power* (κατα το κρατος της δοξης αυτου [kata to kratos tes doxes autou]), *for all patience and longsuffering with joy.*

More literally translated this is: "In all power empowering according to the strength of his glory." Or perhaps even better, "Producing dynamic energy from out of his glorious ruling might."

Thus in Mark 6:1-2, we have this statement following the healing events of chapter 5:

Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works [dynamis] are performed by His hands!"¹⁸

Following the lesson of the Parables, Mark reports the first of many trips on the Sea of Galilee. There is a storm and Jesus calms it.

And He said to them, Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith? They became very much afraid and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him? 5:40-41

Perhaps you are still not clear about the difference between miracles and mighty works.

¹⁸ και εξηλθεν εκειθεν και ερχεται εις την πατριδα αυτου και ακολουθουσιν αυτω οι μαθηται αυτου και γενομενου σαββατου ηρξατο διδασκειν εν τη συναγωγη και οι πολλοι ακουοντες εξεπλησσοντο λεγοντες ποθεν τουτω ταυτα και τις η σοφια η δοθεισα τουτω και αι δυναμεις τοιαυται δια των χειρων αυτου γινομεναι.

Are not miracles just exceptions to the laws of nature? Clearly the Jesus of Mark's drama is not just someone who has the power to break God's laws, whether they be moral (Sabbath-breaking) or physical (raising the dead). He is identifying himself as the *dynamic* force which comes from the divine power (kratos), the life principle underlying reality. In doing these "mighty works", Jesus demonstrates to "those who have ears" that the Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnibenevolent, Transcendent and Eternal Creator is also the very Immanent Father.

Of course, "those who have ears" are really just those who have faith, who have the ability to see this hidden Kingdom in the midst of this broken world, who see the world as resurrected and healed. Howso? Is this just wishful thinking or escapism? Clearly this moves far beyond the issue of mere "faith healing", in which we imagine that we can manipulate God by some mental act of will. No, it is far more the ability to believe that (as per Colossians 1:11 above) our patient longsuffering results in joy, because the Creation *is* redeemed. While its redeemed nature remains hidden for now, evidence of it is given through God's *dynamis*, which seems to break through now and again. The *dynamis* is also in the seed growing secretly.

We finished off each class this last week by reading portions from the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 11, some which follows:

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.....

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God....

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¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.....

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them....

³² And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth. ³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided

something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Thursday night, as it turned out there were five of us, and, as usual, the singing was really great! Diane even made us sing a hymn before we, too, went out.....

Ed Alexander

April 15, 2006

Appendix D

The “Teacher Student dialogue” from Willard Swartley's book, which argues the various numbers employed in the two feedings.

Teacher Now for the numbers: what might *twelve* symbolize? What might five symbolize? Surely you know, at least many of you, what twelve symbolizes in the Old Testament?

Students The number of the tribes of Israel. And, indeed, we also learned that Jesus did choose (or make, create) *twelve* disciples (apostles), creating a new Israel to carry forward his mission (Mark 3:13-19). So twelve represents the people of God.

Teacher The *whole* people of God? Don't forget we have a second feeding, and the number seven! But for now, let's stick to the first feeding. *What about five?* Does it have symbolic significance?

Students I don't know, five and seven, of course, make twelve, but....

Teacher But think, put on your Old Testament glasses. What was the foundation upon which Israel, God's people, based its faith and hope?

Students The five books of Moses? The Pentateuch?

Teacher Right, you are. The Pentateuch, known as the Torah, formed the foundation for Israel's life, beliefs, and hopes. The community was to be built upon Torah. Torah was bread and life, the foundation of their being.

Students But twelve and five have significance primarily in the Jewish context....

Teacher Indeed so, and they occur in only the first feeding—on the west side of the sea—in Jewish territory. What are the numbers in the second feeding?

Students Seven and four.

Teacher And on which side of the sea?

Students The east side, apparently.

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Teacher So what might be the significance of the seven loaves and the seven baskets left over? Does seven occur elsewhere in the Bible?

Students The seven days of creation and the seven churches in Revelation.

Teacher Yes, and creation, of course, refers to creation of the whole world. Adam and Eve head up *all* humanity, not just in Israel. Further, the seven churches were located where?

Students Asia Minor, where the population *was* predominantly Gentile.

Teacher So seven, the number of perfection, or better, the universal number, points us to the Gentiles—hence the bread for *all* people. But what about four? This is tricky because invariably students will say....

Students Ah, yes, the four Gospels, the foundation of the new Israel, the church of Jesus Christ, including *Jews and Gentiles*.

Teacher But, when Mark wrote, the four Gospels weren't written yet, so...?

Appendix E Quotations from Plato's *Timaeus*

These passages are from B. Jowett's translation, and are included without commentary as a potentially fruitful area of discussion.

Timaeus: First, then, in my judgment, we must make a distinction and ask, What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is. Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created. The work of the creator, whenever he looks to the unchangeable and fashions the form and nature of his work after an unchangeable pattern, must necessarily be made fair and perfect; but when he looks to the created only, and uses a created pattern, it is not fair or perfect. Was the heaven then or the world, whether called by this or by any other more appropriate name – assuming the name, I am asking a question which has to be asked at the beginning of an enquiry about anything – was the world, I say, always in existence and without beginning? Or created, and had it a beginning? Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore sensible; and all

Students I goofed.

Teacher However, Irenaeus, a second-century church father, says that in the divine providence the four Gospels became the Scripture of the church—no more and no less—and why?

Students One for each season of the year?

Teacher No, no... Irenaeus says, *one Gospel for each of the four corners of the earth*. The four Gospels symbolize the universality of the Christian gospel.

Students So you're suggesting that the seven and the four mark the feeding east of the sea as a feeding for the Gentiles and the five/twelve feeding west of the sea is for the Jews.

Teacher Yes, and don't forget that east of the sea is Gentile territory. But, even more specifically, I suggest that both feedings together disclose who Jesus is, since, when the Messiah comes, he not only restores the manna of Moses, but he extends God's blessings to (through) Israel to the whole world. "All the nations shall... come..." (Isaiah 2:2c) and "all shall know me" (Jeremiah 31 :34b)

sensible things are apprehended by opinion and sense and are in a process of creation and created. Now that which is created must, as we affirm, of necessity be created by a cause. But the father and maker of all this universe is past finding out; and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible. And there is still a question to be asked about him: Which of the patterns had the artificer in view when he made the world, - the pattern of the unchangeable, or of that which is created? If the world be indeed fair and the artificer good, it is manifest that he must have looked to that which is eternal; but if what cannot be said without blasphemy is true, then to the created pattern. Every one will see that he must have looked to the eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes.

.....

This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world, as we shall do well in believing on the testimony of wise men: God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable. Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not a rest, but moving in an irregular and isorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other.

.....

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For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he [the father and creator] constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence; for we say the he 'was,' he 'is,' he 'will be,' but the truth is that 'is' alone is properly attributed to him, and that 'was' and 'will be' are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovable the same cannot become older or younger by time, not ever did or has become, or hereafter will be older or younger, not is subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause.

.....

Jowett has the following comment in his Introduction to the Timaeus: "Moreover in the Hebrew Scriptures the creation of the world is described, even more explicitly than in the Timaeus, not as a single act, but as a work or process which occupied six days. There is a chaos in both, and it would be untrue to say that the Greek, any more than the Hebrew had any definite belief in the eternal existence of matter. The beginning of things vanished into the distance. The real creation began, not with matter, but with ideas."

.....

And added from the Timaeus, especially for the greatest scholar of Plato alive that I have ever known, our own Vicki Frappollo, the following passage:

Timaeus: Now when they should be implanted in bodies by necessity, and be always gaining or losing some part of their bodily substance, then in the first place it would be necessary that they should all have in them one and the same faculty of sensation, arising out of irresistible impressions; in the second place, they must have love, in which pleasure and pain mingle; also fear and anger, and the feelings which are akin or opposite to them; if they conquered these they would live righteously, and if they were conquered by them, unrighteously. He who lived well during his appointed time was to return and dwell in his native star, and there he would have a blessed and congenial existence. But if he failed in attaining this, at the second birth he would pass into a woman, and, if, when in that state of being, he did not desist from evil, he would continually be changed into some brute who resembled him in the evil nature which he had acquired, and would not cease from his toils and transformations until he followed the revolution of the same and the like within him.....

To which passage Vicki replied:

Yes, I love what you did in the Timeaus section (and, since I am not [a former colleague of yours], I will not freak out at the fact that you dedicated to me what might be seen to be one of Plato's few misogynistic passages....): rather, I find in that very passage evidence for my interpretation of Plato's ontology -- as well as the ontology of Genesis -- viz., the Timeaus metaphysic relies upon a Theory of Forms that Plato ultimately does not hold (as evidenced by the argument of the Parmenides); a metaphysic which holds ideas to be contrasted with matter (or matter's ontological source), chaos, etc., and that it is this static, lifeless realm which is Pure Being and is ultimately the only real thing. Now, given the fact that Order, Form, Spirit, Mind, immateriality, etc., have universally been symbolically associated with the Male Principle, and Matter, Chaos, Nature, Change, particularity, etc. with the Female Principle, both the Timeaus remark about coming back in the next life as a woman, and the expunging/demotion of the Feminine from Deity in Judeo-Christian tradition should come as no surprise. I always maintain that (1) Plato ultimately proposes quite a different ontology and (2) The Genesis account begins in a paradoxical showing, rather than a statement of the Godliness of Order and the Ungodliness of that which is ordered. You know the rest, of course, without my having to mount my soapbox. But, in addition, let me now say that it is this ontological issue which makes me bristle at feminist attempts to be revisionist about sexist God-language without revealing (or even understanding) the ontology underlying the Scriptural ediface.... If we understand God as traditionally conceived, Only spirit is real, and God is Male. If we seen the true ontological picture, and the true ontology at work in Genesis, then we are entitled to say that God is truly beyond and inclusive of male and female. To say so upon the usual mistaken metaphysic is both nonsense and a logician's nightmare. Funny, same argument works for Plato and Holy Scripture