



# Good News

## Reflections on the gospel of Mark

*for*

## Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church Winter 2012

*This winter and spring, we will be looking at the Gospel of St. Mark each Sunday in worship. In particular, we will focus both on some longer texts, as we try to see individual texts within their larger context. As we read through, we will give particular attention to those texts that do not appear in the lectionary, and are consequently not often heard in church.*

*This study guide is intended as a companion on our journey through Mark. Because we will end up reading particular chapters during certain days in our liturgical calendar (such as reading about the resurrection on Easter Sunday), our Sunday texts will not always fall in line with the daily readings suggested. Nonetheless, journeying through Mark together this way can, I hope, help us to have a better sense of the entire gospel as a narrative, and give us a basis for conversation with one another, perhaps as a Sunday school topic, a*

*Wednesday night discussion, or even around the family dinner table. So with that in mind, on to the gospel...*

*It is the general consensus of scholarly opinion that Mark was the first gospel written – likely in the late 60's A.D., some thirty or forty years after Jesus' death.*

*This was a turbulent time for the Christians. Rome burned in 64 AD, and the Emperor Nero was blamed. To shift the anger to someone else, Nero himself blamed the Christians, which resulted in severe persecution of the Christians in Rome. In Israel/Palestine, meanwhile, the Jewish Revolt was happening, resulting in a brief period of independence followed by the Roman invasion, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 AD.*

*Mark's gospel is much more than what we might think of as "historical reporting." This is not an eye-witness account; it is not intended to be read as we might read a history textbook. Rather, it is a story of the gospel of Jesus Christ, an attempt to describe what the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus mean. It is an attempt to present the teaching and significance of Jesus to a first-century audience. And most importantly, it is a vision of a new world – the Kingdom of God, Jesus calls it – that is so profound and radical that it remains a barely-tasted dream, even today.*

*In Sunday worship and daily study you are invited to read and reflect on Mark's testimony, and to enter into this vision of the Kingdom of God. Enter in – and find out what was, and remains, so compelling about this man from Nazareth, Jesus.*

*As you begin this study, if it is possible for you, sit down, grab a beverage, and read the Gospel of Mark all the way through. Read it like a story-book. If you like, read it aloud with your family, and talk about it! Notice what you feel. Notice what questions rise up in you, notice where you feel challenged, comforted, attracted or repelled. And then – having some sense of the whole story – you will be able to see some of these shorter sections in the context of the greater whole.*

## ***How to use this study guide***

*Well... of course, you're free to use this any way you want! But here are a few suggestions:*

- *Set aside a regular time each day to study. Even finding a particular place helps – then the habits will help you to remember and focus.*
- *Take time for a brief prayer asking God to help you see, hear, notice, think...*
- *Read the passage through – if possible, three times through – until you are quite familiar with it.*
- *Think for yourself: what do you notice about this passage? Do you have any questions? How do you feel? Is there some part of this passage that particularly speaks to you, that connects with your experience?*
- *Then have a look at the notes and questions in the guide.*
- *Always feel free to have some conversations with others about what you're reading and thinking!*
- *Jot down some notes if you like – it helps with memory!*
- *Conclude with prayer...*

*Oh, and don't worry if you don't have answers to all the questions! Many of them are meant to be pondered for quite a while, talked about...*

### **January 9**

### **Mark 1: 1-20**

*“Gospel” means “good news.” “Repentance” does not mean being sorry, but rather it refers to a change in direction, a turning around.*

John's “job” is to prepare the way for the Lord, which he does through a ritual of confession and new beginning. The Old Testament references are Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Who prepared you to hear the gospel? How did that happen?

Have you experienced a new beginning in Christ? A turnaround in your life? Or... would you like to?

What do you think is the difference between the baptism with water and the baptism with the Holy Spirit? What might Mark be referring to?

A voice comes from heaven to say that God is “well pleased” with Jesus. And yet in the very next verse Jesus is out in the desert, being tempted by Satan. What do you make of that?

Jesus’ first words (his mission statement, perhaps?) are “The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” If you had to put that in different words, words that make sense to you, what would you say?

Do you sense that Jesus has called you to follow? Did you say “yes?” What might following Jesus involve?

**January 10**

**Mark 1: 21-28**

Notice in this passage that it is a *demon* who identifies Jesus as the “Holy One of God.” Why does Jesus silence the demon, do you think?

What, in your imagination, was the “authority” that people saw in Jesus, different from their other teachers?

Does Jesus have authority for you? In what way?

Okay...in our scientific and secular world, we don’t talk much about “demons.” What do you think Mark is getting at here, with his talk of demons? To what in your experience might Mark be referring?

**January 11**

**Mark 1: 29-45**

Jesus is portrayed as a healer. It is significant that he *touches* the leper – which, instead of making Jesus unclean, makes the leper whole. Take a moment to imagine what it might have felt like to be possessed, or to be isolated as a leper. What would healing mean to you?

Have you been healed, somehow, by God? Do you know of anyone else who has been healed by God?

Jesus is also portrayed as one who prays. What is significant, do you think, about this story of Jesus going away by himself (even when everyone else was looking for him) to pray? Would you like prayer to be that important for you? What could you do to develop your prayer life?

**January 12**

**Mark 2: 1-12**

It was commonly thought that “bad things” that happened to people happened because of some sin or unfaithfulness in that person’s life. If you were paralyzed, you must somehow deserve it.

“Son of Man” might mean a couple of things. It was a phrase that could simply mean “ordinary human, mortal.” In that sense Jesus is claiming to be basically the same as you or I. It could also refer to the Messianic figure in Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus doesn’t really make it clear – what do you think?

In this story, who do you identify with? From whose viewpoint do you see the story? Why, do you think?

Are you “paralyzed” in some way, in your life? Could Jesus’ forgiveness, or healing, set you free?

**January 13**

**Mark 2: 13-17**

Tax collectors were considered traitors to their nation. They worked for the Romans, collecting taxes that were often ruinous for poor landholders or tenant farmers, and were almost universally hated as a result.

Why do you think Jesus called Levi to be one of the Twelve?

Do you think of yourself (and church folk in general) as “healthy?” Or “sick?” Why, and what difference does it make?

**January 14**

**Mark 2: 18 – 3:6**

Jesus' disciples, by walking through someone's field and "stealing" grain, were actually not doing anything wrong. Jewish law allows hungry people to help themselves (though not to carry anything away). The problem was that they were "threshing" on the Sabbath. Similarly, healing was only allowed on the Sabbath in emergency situations (so that doctors can have a Sabbath, too).

What's the benefit of religious rules? How can they be oppressive?

In your opinion (or experience) what is the "wine" (the goal, the essence of religion) and what is the "wineskin" (the temporary and changeable forms of religion)? Can you think of any examples of "new wine" at Timber Ridge?

**Sunday, January 15**

**Mark 8: 22-9:1**

*(Add your notes or questions from Sunday's worship here...)*

**January 16**

**Mark 3: 7 - 19**

Imagine the situation – Jesus' ministry appears to be so successful that crowds are becoming a problem. How does Jesus respond? What is the significance of Jesus "sharing" his ministry (cf. Exodus 18: 13-27)?

It appears that Simon "the Cananaean" and possibly also Judas Iscariot were likely Zealots – members of a violent

revolutionary group. Matthew is often identified as a tax collector. What do you think of Jesus' choice of his inner circle? Do you feel "called" by Jesus? In what way?

**January 17**

**Mark 3: 20-35**

This is an example of a "sandwich" story, common in Mark. One story begins (vss. 20-21), but then another story is inserted into the middle of the first (vss. 22-30) before the first story concludes (vss. 31-35).

Do you see a connection between these two stories?

In what way are Jesus' parables (vss. 23-27) good news?

Family was extremely important in the ancient world. Jesus' words (vss. 33-35) would likely have seemed quite shocking to his own family. What do you think he is trying to say?

**January 18**

**Mark 4: 1-20**

In this passage, the parable is understood to be a way of *obscuring* the truth – a form of speech requiring special interpretation. Then Jesus interprets it as if it were an allegory – a story in which each part signifies something in "real" life. Most scholars actually think that Jesus taught in parables – stories – in order to *engage* his audience and make his teaching more accessible – and that a parable is most truly understood when we do *not* allegorize it.

Try reading the parable – as many as ten times – without the interpretation (only vss. 3-9). In Jesus' day, a sixty or hundredfold return on planted grain would have been an unheard-of, ludicrously fabulous bumper crop. What does the story mean to you?

Looking at the allegorical interpretation, how many kinds of soil could describe you?

Where is the good news in this parable?

**January 19**

**Mark 4: 21 - 34**

Which of these parables “catches your eye?” How does it connect with your own life and experience?

Have you experienced a blessing of God that grows – seemingly without effort on your part, or the part of the church – until it’s time for a blessing to be harvested?

Have you experienced something blessed that has grown from a tiny beginning to become something important?

**January 20**

**Mark 4: 35 – 5: 20**

The boat ride takes Jesus and his followers from the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee to the Gentile side. This might cause some “storms” of controversy!

The name of the demon of untameable strength is “Legion.” It is difficult to imagine any of Mark’s earliest hearers could think of anything else but a Roman legion, the largest unit of the Roman army. According to some, the local Roman legion even had a pig as one of the symbols on its standard.

Read the passage again, in light of the above suggestions. What do you think Mark’s original hearers – people living in Roman occupied Palestine – might have heard in these stories?

Is there a current situation that these stories might meaningfully address?

**January 21**

**Mark 5: 21 - 43**

Here we have another “sandwich story.” The stories here are both healing stories, and both about the healing of females. One was a girl from a prominent family, just before her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, at which she would have become an “adult.” The

other is a woman who would have been considered outcast – ritually unclean because of her hemorrhage.

What connection(s) can you see between these two stories? Why do you think Mark has “sandwiched” them?

What meaning do you find in the story if you imagine yourself in Jairus’ place? What about if you imagine yourself in the place of the unclean woman?

We sometimes call the church the “body of Christ.” Do you know of an occasion where someone has (in a manner of speaking) touched the hem of the church’s garment and been healed?

**Sunday, January 22**

**Mark 11: 12-25**

*(Add your notes or questions from Sunday’s worship here...)*

**January 23**

**Mark 6: 1-13**

Why do you think the “hometown crowd” would take offense at Jesus? Is there some spiritual reality to which you might be resistant, for the same reason?

Vss. 7-13 are actually quite important verses in terms of the strategy of Jesus’ ministry.

- What did Jesus send his followers out to do?
- How did he equip them?
- How did he restrict them?

- Why do you think he sent them out in pairs?

How do you think Jesus' strategy is lived out in our church? In what way is our ministry like his, or the disciples'?

### January 24

**Mark 6: 14 - 29**

Kind of a sordid story, eh? In this passage, King Herod is actually one of the sons of Herod the Great, the builder of the Temple and the harbor at Caesarea. The Herod of this story was Herod Antipas. He comes back into the story at the time of Jesus' death.

Antipas was married to the daughter of King Aretas, a Nabatean king (the Nabateans were the people who built and lived at Petra), but divorced her (the cause of a war) in order to marry Herodias, the wife of Antipas' own brother. John the Baptist was one of the few who spoke publicly about this scandal, telling everyone that it violated God's law.

Why do you think Mark has included this story in his gospel? What significance might it have?

### January 25

**Mark 6: 30 – 44**

This is a story that is told, with some variation, in all four gospels – in some, twice (see the beginning of Mark 8). It is therefore one of the most important stories in the New Testament. *Why do you think it is so important?*

The story begins with the disciples returning from their "mission trip" – see January 23. That makes this story, potentially, part of a sandwich around the story of Herod Antipas and John the Baptist.

In any case, the disciples return, but cannot debrief their experience because there are too many people around, too many demands. So they attempt to go away, but the crowds follow, and Jesus, in his compassion, teaches them.

In the story of the feeding of the 5000, notice that *no explanation is given* for the feast. The disciples simply offer what little they have to Jesus, and it is shared out, and there's more than enough for all. It may be that Mark wants us to speculate about how it happened (what do you think? Do you have a theory?) or it may be that Mark wants us to place our attention elsewhere (what is more important, do you think?).

Note the imagery around food. The disciples are so busy in verse 31 that they don't even have a chance to eat. Later, the entire story is themed around food. What do you think is the symbolic significance of food and eating?

Look particularly at v. 41. What verbs are at work here? Where else do we hear these verbs at use in the church? Do you think Mark (as well as the other gospel writers) intend us to see a connection between this meal and our shared meal in the church? What connections do you see?

Some have suggested that this story is about economics – that hoarding/competition/exploitation produces suffering and scarcity, while sharing produces abundance and well-being. What do you think? Do you think Jesus would “weigh in” on economics? Why or why not?

### **January 26**

### **Mark 6: 45 - 56**

Aiming for Bethsaida, on the north east coast of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples end up at Gennesaret, which is on the north west. This is closer to Jesus' home stomping ground, and he is well-recognized – and once again pressed into service to heal.

Note the actions of Jesus: dismissing the crowd, taking time to pray. Why do you suppose he “went out to them” walking on the water, but then seemed to be “about to pass them by?”

Imagine yourself in the place of the disciples – in the boat without Jesus, with the wind against you, struggling in the night. Have you ever felt like that?

This story, which prominently features water, follows “immediately” (one of Mark’s favorite words) after a feeding story. What other biblical stories center around water? In what practices in church is water important? Do you see any correlations between this story and your understanding of baptism?

Is Jesus “in the boat” with us at Timber Ridge? Is the wind against us?

**January 27**

**Mark 7: 1-23**

It’s difficult to find our way into the culture of the time, to know what Jesus is objecting to here – what exactly the practice of “Corban” was and how it was being abused. Nonetheless, a couple of things seem clear:

- The “washing” practices that the Pharisees observed are common in a variety of religions. They are symbolic actions, physical reminders of spiritual realities. By washing our hands, we remember the importance of purifying our hearts and minds and lives. While any religious practice can become an empty habit, most find this sort of thing to be quite helpful. Why don’t Jesus’ disciples do these things? What significance might that have?
- Jesus argues that the forms and habits of religion (the “traditions”) have trumped the heart and the ethics of the faith. In what way might that apply to us?
- Jesus further argues that “ethical cleanliness” is more important than ritual cleanliness. What do you think? Do you think that things like food rules (like “kosher”

or “hallal”) have a place in religious practice? And if ethical uncleanness comes from “within,” how do we become clean?

**January 28**

**Mark 7: 24-37**

We’ve spoken about this story in church before. By referring to this Greek woman (a woman of another race and religion) as a “dog” Jesus is employing a racial slur, common in those days but definitely insulting. The woman replies with wit, without “rising to the bait” of Jesus’ insult. This is the first definite instance of Jesus ministering to a Gentile – the other possible instance so far in Mark is the healing of the demon-possessed man in the Gentile area of Galilee in the early part of chapter 5.

What do you make of this story? Does Jesus learn a lesson from this Gentile woman? What do you think we, as readers, are meant to learn?

The next story of healing, the deaf mute, also occurs in Gentile territory. Why would Jesus open this man’s ears and speech, and then command him not to tell anyone?

**Sunday, January 29**

**Mark 11: 27-33**

*(Add your notes or questions from Sunday’s worship here...)*

**January 30**

**Mark 8: 1-21**

This story of the feeding of the four thousand is very similar to the feeding of the five thousand, but it seems to happen in Gentile territory. What do you think is the significance of this?

In the boat following the event, Jesus grills his disciples about the two “feeding” stories. He pays particular attention to the number of baskets of leftovers. “12” is often associated with the 12 tribes of Israel, while “7” is seen as a number perfection or completion or totality.

What do you think Jesus is trying to get the disciples to understand?

**January 31**

**Mark 8: 22 - 26**

This is a very short – but in some ways very confusing – passage today. This is the one instance where it seems Jesus has to “try” twice to perform a healing.

“Sight” in the gospels often has several layers of meaning. It does certainly refer to our ability to see, physically! But to “see” also often refers to understanding – and Jesus is constantly working with his own disciples, even, towards an understanding of what he is trying to teach. The story just before ends with Jesus pressing his disciples: “do you still not understand?”

In your experience, does understanding dawn suddenly? Or does it happen gradually, in stages?

Look at the passages just before, and just after, this one. Do you think the context of this story sheds light on its meaning for you?

**February 1**

**Mark 8:27 – 9:1**

This is likely the “hinge” passage in the Gospel of Mark. From this moment on, Jesus moves towards the Cross. Many

commentators point to this passage as the heart and essence of the gospel, the interpretive key.

It is perhaps worth noting that “Christ” (or Messiah) simply means “anointed one.” That would have been the title of the kings of Israel and Judah, the descendants of David. The most dominant expectation of the Christ (though certainly not the only one) was that he would be a warrior king like David, one who would restore the national monarchy and bring the people back to freedom and faithfulness and restore a new “golden age.”

When Peter calls Jesus the “Christ” – the Messiah, the anointed one – do you think he’s right? If so, why does Jesus tell him to keep quiet about it?

It is hardly surprising that Peter rebukes Jesus when he talks about suffering, rejection, and death. Why do you think this path was necessary for Jesus?

In verse 34, Jesus clearly calls all of us who would follow him to “deny [ourselves], take up [our] cross and follow [Him.]” In the time of Jesus and Mark, the cross was not a symbol for some personal challenge or suffering – it was the punishment for opposing Rome. What in particular do you think Jesus is calling you to do, here? What does “losing your life” in order to find it mean, for you in particular? What might it mean for Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church?

## **February 2**

## **Mark 9:2 - 13**

There are many symbolic features of this story. It occurs on a mountain, with clouds and divine voices (cf. the Israelites experience at Sinai). It involves Moses (symbol of the Law) and Elijah (symbol of the Prophets). The words of the divine voice recall the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:11).

In the transfiguration, Jesus' clothes become bright white (whiter than Tide white!). This might be a mark of divinity, but the normal interpretation of white clothes is that they symbolize martyrdom (Revelation 7: 13-14) – faithfulness in the midst of suffering.

Do you think we still have a tendency, like Peter, to stay on the mountaintop and build altars, rather than listen to what Jesus is teaching?

What do you think “rising from the dead” means?

What do you think this story is trying to show us?

**February 3**

**Mark 9: 14 - 32**

This is often a favorite story (it is for me) because the father of the boy is so easy to identify with – “I believe; help my unbelief!” How does Jesus relate to this conflicted man? How do you think God relates to you in our belief and doubt?

The surprise in this story, for the disciples, is not that Jesus CAN drive out the demon, but that they can NOT. Jesus says that “this kind can come out only by prayer.” What do you think he means by that? How does “prayer” confer spiritual power? Do you have experience of that?

**February 4**

**Mark 9: 33-50**

This passage is a collection of “teaching moments.” This is one of the places that seems to clearly indicate that Jesus teaches in, at times, a very colorful style. For instance, I seriously doubt that Jesus wants us to literally pluck out our eyes or cut off our hands or feet.

So...what are these teachings about, then? And how do they relate to your life?

**Sunday, February 5**

**Mark 12: 1-17**

*(Add your notes or questions from Sunday's worship here...)*

**February 6**

**Mark 10: 1-31**

We have just read a passage where Jesus tells people to cut off their hands and feet, and pluck out their eyes. Perhaps most of us would agree that Jesus doesn't mean for us to take that advice literally. Now we hear Jesus teaching about divorce, children, and wealth. Do you think these teachings are literal? Or are they in the same spirit as the previous passage?

With respect to marriage and divorce, do you think our hearts are any less "hard" than in Moses' day? What is Jesus trying to say about marriage?

Children in Jesus' day (as in ours?) were often excluded from "important" things. What is Jesus trying to teach here?

Notice that the rich man went away "sad" when he chose his wealth over following Jesus. Note also the very real economic chaos that would result if we all sold everything we owned in order to follow Jesus! What do you suppose Jesus is trying to teach here?

**February 7**

**Mark 10: 32 - 45**

Jesus once again predicts his death and resurrection, and then has a discussion with two of his lead disciples, about leadership and status. In the Kingdom of God, what does

leadership look like? Is that how we “do” leadership in our church? In the business world? In our politics?

**February 8**

**Mark 10: 46 - 52**

This is the last story before Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, and the events of the last week of his life. In some ways, it provides a summary of the gospel to this point. Bartimaeus uses the traditional Messianic title for Jesus (Son of David), and when asked what he wants from Jesus, asks to “see” (with all the symbolic meanings of that word). In order to see Jesus, he “throws aside” his cloak (the tool of his begging trade – he would have spread his cloak in front of him to collect coins) and when healed, follows Jesus along the “way” (the Way was the original label for the path of Christianity).

In what way are you “calling out for Jesus?” If Jesus called you, and stood in front of you, and asked “what do you want me to do for you?” -- for what would you ask?

Are you prepared to cast aside your security and follow Jesus on the Way?

**February 9**

**Mark 11: 1-33**

There is a lot happening in this passage. A few things to note:

- The “triumphal entry” of Jesus coming into Jerusalem on a donkey is a symbolic enactment of Zechariah 9:9-10. It is both a Messianic statement and a parody of the Roman military processions (in which the King would arrive on a war horse).
- The businesses in the Temple were not necessarily corrupt. They were, in fact, necessary to the Temple worship! By calling the temple a “den of robbers” he is not saying that this is where the robbery occurs! He is saying this is where robbers go to feel safe.

- Note the political maneuvering of both Jesus and his opponents. Jesus does not do his prophetic action in the Temple when it is late (and few people are present) – he does it in a crowd. His opponents are similarly sensitive to the responses and feelings of the crowd.

Often people suggest that the church should “stay out of politics.” The actions of Mark 11 seem quite political – are they? What is Jesus trying to say or do here?

**February 10**

**Mark 12: 1 - 17**

The parable of the tenants is a complex one. The crowds might very well have identified with the tenants – it was common in Jesus’ day for small farmers to lose their land, and to be oppressed by the high rents and high taxes required by Rome. The Temple authorities (who were appointed by Rome) were among the wealthy landowners who would have collected the ruinous rents and taxes. But the tenants in the parable are (at least to our eyes) violent and criminal.

What conversation does this parable want to start? How is it told “against” the chief priests and Temple authorities?

Similarly, the story about paying taxes to Caesar is also complex. It seems to beg the question; what *does* belong to Caesar, and what *does* belong to God? How would you answer those questions?

**February 11**

**Mark 12: 18 - 44**

Again, we have a collection of Jesus’ teaching, on what seems like a variety of subjects.

What (if anything) unifies these passages, and connects them with their context in this last week of Jesus’ life?

Which of these passages stands out for you as important? Why?

**Sunday, February 12**

**Mark 12: 18-37**

*(Add your notes or questions from Sunday's worship here...)*

**February 13**

**Mark 13: 1-37**

This chapter is what scholars call the “little apocalypse.” Apocalyptic literature is a highly symbolic form of literature that deals with “end times.” Think Daniel in the Old Testament, and Revelation in the New.

Personally I find it hard to believe that God would ask a Biblical writer to “take dictation” and write down a pile of strange and disturbing stuff that was meant, not for the original readers, but for an unknown people far in the future. Therefore (in company with the vast majority of mainline scholars) I don't understand this sort of literature as some kind of prediction of the future ending of the world.

What makes much more sense is that this kind of literature simply puts current events (at the time of writing) into a kind of cosmic context – to show the larger and spiritual significance of current events. It would be like someone writing about the current economic woes, or global climate change, as an “end of the world” kind of thing. It identifies these issues as matters of extreme importance, and makes allegiances and choices crystal clear.

One scholar I particularly respect (Ched Myers) suggests that Mark was probably written in Palestine at the time of the

Jewish Revolt – just before 70 AD when the Roman legions under Titus besieged and later destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple. The leaders of this revolt had messianic aspirations (or had those aspirations applied to them by others) that Mark labels as false. The Christians, supporting neither the armed revolt nor the oppressive Romans, are left with everyone hating them.

Does this make some better sense of the passage for you? What do you find here? What questions arise for you?

**February 14**

**Mark 14: 1-11**

For Valentine’s Day, an odd and intimate interlude...The woman’s presence at table with the men would have been itself unusual (though Jesus’ company was often shared with women, it seems). But the pouring of perfumed ointment on Jesus’ head was a very intimate, sensual act. Remember, this is the Middle East! This is a sufficiently objectionable moment that it inspires Judas, apparently, to betray Jesus.

Ironically, while Jesus proclaims that this story would be told in perpetuity in memory of this woman...her name is not recorded! In memory of whom? Of “her.”

In some ways, this generous act is evidence that this female disciple of Jesus is the one who actually “gets it” in terms of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

What do you make of this story? Which side would you take in the argument that followed? Why?

**February 15**

**Mark 14: 12 - 42**

Last supper, denials and betrayals...In one sense, this is a litany of the failure of Jesus’ followers. How does Jesus respond to the weakness and failings of his closest friends?

The “blood of the covenant” is a phrase also used in Zechariah 9:9-11, referenced in the Triumphal Entry. Does that help make sense of the last supper imagery? What do you think Jesus is driving at here?

At a critical point in his life, Jesus turns to prayer. What does he pray? Does his prayer help you in times of deep distress and decision?

### **February 16**

**Mark 14:43 – 15:15**

In this section, Jesus is arrested and tried. In this one case, please be careful of your translations! Particularly in 15:2, Jesus answers much more clearly in some translations (like the NIV or even the Message) than he does in the original Greek (in which his response is very ambiguous).

The Sanhedrin was the official ruling council of Temple Judaism, and would have been composed of the High Priest and others. This was a group heavily influenced by Rome – for instance, Rome actually appointed the High Priest! So it is likely a mistake to think of this as a “Jewish” group as distinct from the Romans. While the Sanhedrin would have been local, both it and Pilate were part of the Roman establishment.

“Barabbas” in Hebrew or Aramaic means “son of the father.” He was a terrorist/freedom fighter, a symbol of the violent revolt against Rome. Is this a bit of theater on Mark’s part, to have the crowd choose the violent “son of the father” over the self-giving, non-violent, dying and rising “son of the father?”

Why do you think Jesus does not resist, argue, struggle against his captors?

### **February 17**

**Mark 15: 16 - 47**

This passage details the death and burial of Jesus. From the cross he quotes Psalm 22 (My God, my God, why have you

abandoned me?). At the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain of the temple is torn and a Roman centurion proclaims Jesus to be a "son of God." The "curtain of the Temple" was probably that covering over the Holy of Holies into which only the high priest could enter, and that only once per year.

Given the structure of this gospel, this is probably the climactic moment of the gospel.

Why, do you think, is it Jesus' *death* that is most important to Mark? Why does his *death* convince the Centurion that this is a son of God?

### **February 18**

### **Mark 16: 1-8**

The resurrection scene in Mark is short and kind of disturbing. Most Bibles now will end the gospel at verse 8, with 9-20 relegated to a footnote. This is because, while most Bibles had the longer ending, two ancient manuscripts were discovered not long ago. One of these is called "Codex Sinaiticus" because it belongs to the St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai. These early manuscripts end Mark at verse 8. We actually now have some sense of the history – early copyists, being disturbed at the ending, preferred to add a section that essentially summarizes the resurrection stories from the other gospels. Read the footnote carefully and you'll probably see the references! Later copyists simply copied the early additions into the body of the text.

Read the text again, stopping at verse 8. What do you think is the emotional effect of stopping the gospel here? What does the abrupt ending make you think of?

To recall what the disciples were wondering about on the way down from the mount of transfiguration...what does "rising from the dead" mean?

### **Sunday, February 19**

### **Mark 9: 2-13**

*(Add your notes or questions from Sunday's worship here...)*

**Schedule of Mark sermon texts for Winter 2012**

**Mark 3: 7-19** (8 January 2012)

**Mark 8: 22 – 9:1** (15 January 2012)

**Mark 11: 12-25** (22 January 2012)

**Mark 11: 27-33** (29 January 2012)

**Mark 12: 1-17** (5 February 2012)

**Mark 12: 18-37** (12 February 2012)

**Mark 9: 2-13** (19 February 2012)

**Mark 1: 9-15** (26 February 2012)

**Mark 13: (1-8), 9-13** (4 March 2012)

**Mark 14: 1-11** (11 March 2012)

**Mark 14: 32-42** (1 April 2012)

**Mark 8: 1-21** (10 June 2012)

\* This Mark study guide and preaching series were the topic of my clergy group (The Heretics) gathering in October 2011. Much of this guide and many of the ideas in the sermons that will be shared over the next several months were part of our work together, and I am indebted to the Rev. Drs. Matt Fry, Robert Lowry, Dave Holmes, Wain Wesberry, and David Bender for their scholarship and insight.