

understand Jesus, and - as the Gospel approaches its climax - the opposition of the religious authorities increases and finally brings about his crucifixion.

**The Importance of Faith:** Very often, in Mark's Gospel it is the outsiders who show greater faith in Jesus. The demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum recognises Jesus as "*the Holy One of God*" (Mk 1:21-28). Jesus cures him and "*all were amazed.*" The Syrophenician Woman was a pagan/Gentile, but she had faith in Jesus' power and authority (Mk 7:24-30), as had the Roman centurion at the foot of the cross (Mk 15:39).

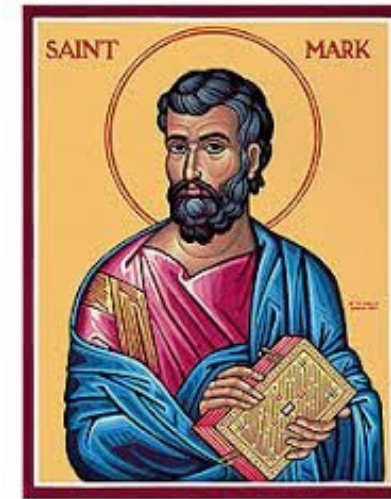
**The Importance of Service.** In Mk 9:33-37 the disciples were discussing among themselves which one "was the greatest?" Jesus replies "*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all*" (Mk 9:35). And, Jesus repeats that phrase adding that he did not "*come to be served but to serve*" (Mk 10:45), and "*to give/spend his life for others.*"

### ***The Transfiguration - A Lens for understanding Mark's Gospel***

Mark 9:1-7 gives us an account of the Transfiguration where:

- 1) Jesus is shown as glorified (a foretaste of his victorious resurrection).
- 2) God proclaims him as his "Beloved Son,"
- 3) God pleads with his followers to "Listen to him [Jesus]" because he speaks and lives God's Will.

In summary, Mark's message to us is clear: Christ's followers are to understand and live God's Will. Christ says: "*Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother*" (Mk 3:31-35) and, even though they may experience opposition, a glorious resurrection awaits. Mark's Gospel is, therefore, a Gospel of Great Hope!



## Workshop for Ministers of the Word

# IV

## An Introduction to Mark's Gospel

Year B

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Mark's Gospel was written shortly after 70 A.D. It was written for a church community, (possibly in Jerusalem), experiencing opposition to the Gospel – even persecution. It asks two principal questions:

- 1) *Who is Jesus?*
- 2) *What is our challenge as followers of Jesus?*

### *Who is Jesus?*

Mark tells us who Jesus is by using Old Testament titles.

***Suffering Servant of God:*** For Mark, Jesus fulfils the OT image of the 'Suffering Servant of God' found in Isaiah chapters 40 – 65. At his baptism the Spirit came on him as upon the Servant (Mk 1:10; Isa 61:1). In Mk 10:45 a cluster of allusions to the Suffering Servant of Isa 52:13 – 53:12 occur: he 'serves' (Isaiah 52:13), he is treated with 'contempt' (Mk 9:12; cf. Isa 53:3), he 'gives/spends his life' (Isaiah 53:10, 12), for 'the many/all' (Isaiah 53:11f.).

***Son of Man:*** Daniel 7: 13f., tells of the coming of a heavenly but human figure ('son of man'). He would be a man of integrity and courage, he would suffer, even die for others. He would be victorious over all his enemies and he would 'rule over Israel and the nations' but his victory/vision would only be recognised after his death and resurrection. Risen, he would be presented to God to receive honour and authority (Mk 13: 26; 14: 62). These prophecies are also found in the Book of Isaiah, chs. 40-65.

***Jesus, the Messiah/Christ, the Anointed One:*** 'Christos' (Greek) is 'Messiah' (Hebrew) and both words mean "[God's] Anointed One." In Mark's view, the coming of Christ was foretold in Isaiah 35:4-6; this "coming" Christ is the "anointed one of God" as foretold in Isaiah 61:1f. Furthermore, Isaiah said that the Christ/Messiah would be sent from God "to bring the good news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of God's favour..." These

prophecies are fulfilled by Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel.

***Son of God:*** Mark 1:1 states that this is "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus, the Son of God." "Beloved Son of God," was the title God gave Jesus at his baptism (Mk 1:9-11) and at the Transfiguration (Mk 9:7). The climax comes in chapter 14 when Jesus is questioned by the high priest. They find many (false) witnesses but their stories don't agree – and they are dismissed. The chief priest then asks Jesus: "Are you the Messiah/Christ, the Son of the Blessed One/God?" Jesus (Mk 14: 61-62) says simply "I am." The high priest says: "You have heard the blasphemy" (i.e. Jesus has claimed to be God) – and "they all condemned him" (Mk 14: 64). And, as Jesus dies on the cross, the Roman centurion says "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15:39).

In summary, as God's Anointed Servant, Jesus brings the 'Good News' to "the afflicted." Crucially, he is recognised for who he really is by God himself (Mk 1:9-11; 9:7). However, he is misunderstood by many others (e.g. Mk 6:1-6), rejected, and finally crucified. But God raised him from the dead in a glorious resurrection, showing that he has lived God's Plan/Will faithfully. In effect Mark says: Look to the Book of Evidence!

### *What is our challenge as followers of Jesus?*

***The Importance of Understanding:*** In Mark's Gospel, the disciples don't fully understand his teaching, or who he really is. When Jesus walked on the waters, "they thought he was a ghost" (Mk 6:49). On three separate occasions Jesus predicts his "death and resurrection" (Mk 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). But the disciples can't accept his predictions of a suffering Messiah. Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, but Jesus turned to Peter, saying: "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as humans do" (Mk 8:33). Mark recounts Judas' betrayal (Mk 14:10-11) and Peter's denial of Jesus (Mk 14:54, 66-72). So, the crowd, his neighbours at Nazareth, even his closest disciples fail to