**The Gospel of Mark (Leicester Diocese November 2020)**

Introduction to the Theology of Mark for Preachers and Readers

**The Narrative Shape of Mark**

Mark expresses theology through narrative (John Goldingay’s four approaches of the gospels)

Mark sees the identity of Jesus as an ‘open secret’. It is both hidden and revealed at the same time.

Mark has: A clear introduction

A deliberate structure

A sense of authenticity

A narrative focus

A Christological theme

A sense of irony

An enigmatic conclusion

**Mark 1-8.26** **The Way of the Lord**

Location: Galilee

Crowds, miracles and proclamation of the Kingdom

**Mark 8.27-16 The Way of the Cross.**

Location: the Journey to Jerusalem

Discipleship radicalised 8.34-38 (cf 8.34-10.50 the ‘discipleship’ section)

Three passion predictions (8.34-38; 9.30-32; 10.35-40)

**The Theological Interests of Mark**

**A - Christology as an ‘Open Secret’**

Some Christological statements are more or less explicit:

1.1-3: The ‘Prologue’

8.27-30: Peter’s Confession

10.45: The Purpose of Christ’s Death as Ransom

11.1-11: The Triumphal Entry

12.1-12: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

14.61-62: The Trial Claim – see over

15.39: The Centurion’s Affirmation

Others are embedded in the Narrative:

Who is the Kyrios? (1.2-3//Is 40.3, 9)

Who can forgive sins? (2.7//Ex 34.34.6-7, Is 43.25)

Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him? (4.35-41//Ps 107:23-32)\*

Who is the shepherd of Israel? (6.34//Ez 34.11-15)\*

Who walks on the sea? (6.45-52//Job 9.4-11)\*

Who comes looking for figs? (11.12-14//Jer 8.13)

Mark 14:61-64

But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "**I am**; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and "coming with the clouds of heaven.' " Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death.

Daniel 7:13-14

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

**B - The Secrecy/Revelation motif in Mark - Wrede, the ‘Messianic Secret’ and beyond.**

(eg 1.34, 43-45; 3.12; 5.43; 7.36; 8.26,30; 9.9)

Mark 1.34: He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would

not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Mark 5:43: He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to

eat.

Mark 9:9: As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had

seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Historical: Wrede – Markan device to insert the secret messianic identity of Jesus into his sources.

Theological: Mark uses the theme of the enigmatic Christ to both conceal and reveal Jesus’ true identity

See also the theme of hiddenness and revelation in the parable discourse (Mk 4.1-20)

**C - The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man**

Different understandings of the Kingdom:

Radical eschatology (Weiss/Schweitzer)

Inaugurated eschatology (Dodd; Moule)

Already/Not yet eschatology (Jeremias; Ladd)

The ‘Son of Man’ as Aramaic commonplace and apocalyptic Danielic figure (Dan 7.9-14)

Son of Man linked to the Kingdom (Mk 8.38; 13.24-27; 14.62)

**D: Disciples and Discipleship**

The willingness of disciples 1.16‑20; 3.13‑19; 4.11 34; 7.14‑23; 9.39; 14.12‑31

The ignorance of disciples 8.32; 9.32; 10.35-41

The failure of disciples 14.10‑11, 50, 66-72

Note the definition of discipleship: 3.14-5 and its reorientation: widening and narrowing (8.34-35)

The discipleship section contains:

A call to discipleship (8.34-38 cf.9.42-50)

Hard teaching (divorce 10.1-12; riches 10.17-31)

Two models of response to Jesus (rejection 10.22 and following 10.52)

**E Minor Themes: Galilee:** The gentiles: The gospel ‘euangelion’: Harsh treatment of Jewish leaders

**Techniques to notice**

**A: Intercalation**

Mark 5.21–43 The women with a haemorrhage and Jairus’ daughter

Mark 3.20–35 A house divided

Mark 4.1–20 A parable about response, and responding to parables

Mark 6.7–30 The mission of the disciples and the fate of mission

Mark 11.12–25 Unfruitful tree, unfruitful temple

Mark 14.1–11 Scheming about Jesus, devotion of Jesus

Mark 14.53–72 Peter’s denial, Jesus’ affirmation

**B: Parables as stories within the story**

Mark 4 Parable of the sower

Mark 12 Parable of the vineyard

**C: The role of Scripture**

‘For Mark the Old Testament Scriptures are like a bank of floodlights, shining out of the past to illuminate Jesus and to show how God works through him. The gospel story is part of Israel’s story, making sense of the past and bringing the long history of God’s dealings with his people to a decisive turning point. God is on the move, and is leading his people home.’ (Proctor, p 16)

**D: On the way: Jesus as traveller**

Perrin: themes of movement, Messiah and mission

Crosses the Galilee four times (4.35–41; 5.18–21; 6.45–53; 8.13–21).

Once he leaves Galilee proper and follows a great arc around its edge (7.24, 31).

Halfway through the gospel he goes north to Caesarea Philippi (8.27), before taking the long road south to Jerusalem and crucifixion

Sea voyages all linked to mission.

The phrase ‘on the way’ comes seven times over (8.27; 9.33f; 10.17, 32, 52; 11.8; the English translation varies from ‘road’ to ‘journey,’ but the Greek word is the same).

**E: Women in Mark**

Sisters as well as brothers hear and do the will of God (3.35)

A woman’s touch brings healing (5.27, 34)

A persistent mother demonstrates faith (7.24–30)

Ruling on divorce gives more security than was sometimes the case (10.2–12)

A faithful widow gives all she has (12.41f)

A woman at Bethany lavishes worship on Jesus (14.3f)

Women at the cross and tomb (chs 15, 16)

**Worked example**

Mark 5.21–43 Jairus’ daughter and the woman with an issue of blood